An auto-ethnographic account of interactional practices in adoptive family relationships.

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This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma.

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Abstract

This autoethnographic narrative explores the temporal, situated nature of interactions between myself as an adoptee with my adult adopted children as well as those between myself and my birth father and mother. Epiphanies experienced are further synthesised with evidence from 10 female adoptee/adopted mother participant's in confirming kinship affinities. Selecting and blending analytic and evocative autoethnographic approaches is valuable for two reasons. Firstly, the processes of reflexive self-introspection, self-observation and dialogue with participants has resulted in expanding my understanding of how complex adoptive/birth kinship affinities ebb and flow. As a result, there is a critical connection between recognising, analysing and responding to kinship affinities and personal growth. Lying at the intersection of the self and other this study contributes to deepening insights around the gendered nature of fixed, sensory, negotiated and ethereal kinship affinities. So, informing our understanding of relationships in families generally and between adoptive parents and adoptees specifically.

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Definitions and useful terminology used in this study

Adoption; to take on the legal responsibilities as parent of (a child that is not one's biological child), The Free Dictionary (2016).

Autoethnography – as used in this study, see section 2.3.1. p. 33.

Kinship; ‘An individual’s social relationship to others as established by blood (consanguinity), marriage (affinity), adoption, or fictive ties’, Open Education Sociology Dictionary (2017).

Neglect; refers to the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs and is the most common form of child abuse (NSPCC; National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children website, 2018). There are four basic types of neglect according to Horwath (2007); physical, educational, emotional and medical.

CMR - Complete Member Researcher (Anderson 2006)

DfE – Department for Education

DoH – Department of Health

HoL – House of Lords

Chapter 1. Introduction, Context and Aim

Autoethnography is especially suited to doing family research where existing research is limited, because it offers insider, everyday accounts (Adams and Manning 2015).

Consequently, exploring the value of autoethnography is timely and particularly meaningful to this study in analysing the value of adoptee and adoptive parent practices embedded and interwoven through mundane places, spaces and time. In this way the everyday is connected to 'senses, bodies, feelings and their whole being' in order to illuminate the nature of what it means to adoptive family interactions and relationships more broadly (Ellis 2004, p.48). What is more because interactions are embedded in the everyday this study has considerable influence in being relevant not only to adoptive families but to reconstituted families, and so has the capability to create 'emancipatory thoughts and actions' (Hall and Holdsworth 2016 p. 286). Herein lies the capacity for this work to be more accessible to non-academic audiences (Adams and Manning 2015, p. 350).

Concurrently I aim to explore two significant threads from literature reviewed in Chapter 2, both important in taking adoption research forward. According to Palacios and Brodzinsky (2010);

> 'adoption research would benefit from paying more attention to relationships within the adoption kinship group, especially the way in which these relationships change over time and those factors related to change' (2010, p. 278).

Essentially paying more attention to inter-personal and intergenerational relationships within the adoption kinship group necessitates a position of research from within families and so dictates the need for autoethnographic research. So, the contribution of this study will be to increase knowledge and understanding of adoptive family relationships and how these change over time.

1.1. Context – intergenerational adoption.

Background to my story

I hold the distinctive position of inhabiting multiple identities, unusually but not uniquely, I am an adopted woman who has adopted children. I was adopted at the age of 6 weeks in 1962 through a confidential, closed or secret adoption system. In 1991 my husband and I adopted a boy (Jamie then aged 23 months) and a girl (Jane, age 12 months). Jamie and Jane are full siblings but had never lived together before August 1991.

Chronologically and briefly, my noteworthy life events comprised, attending school/sixth form, getting a job (1981), the death of Dad (1983), getting married (1988), adopting 2 children (1991), going to University (1995), becoming a Secondary School History teacher (1998) and latterly a University lecturer (2008). In 2006, I seemed to lose the boundaries of my family when Mum died, this was to impact my decision to leave my husband in 2007. In 2008 I began living with my new partner. In the same year my adopted daughter became a teenage mother to her son, Ethan, which meant that I could be a grandmother through adoption. In 2009, at the age of 47, I embarked on a search for my birth father and mother, who I

met individually that year. The relationship between myself and my birth father began and ended in 2009. Whereas my relationship with my birth mother has been intermittent in the years since then.

Events in this study involve interactions between myself, my son and daughter as adoptees and those between myself and my birth parents.

Table 1.1. – Pseudonyms of family characters in this study

Jane	Adopted daughter
Anne	Friend
Jamie	Adopted son
Tom	Jane's partner
Ethan	Jane and Tom's son
David	ex-husband, Jamie and Jane's Dad, Ethan's Grandad
Ralph	Birth father
Jean	Birth mother
Gary	Jean's husband (deceased 2014/5)
William	Partner
Owen	Jane's 2nd son
Sam	Half-brother (Ralph's son)

Actual names of family characters in this study:

Mum/Mother	Adoptive mother (deceased 2006)
Dad/Father	Adoptive father (deceased 1983)

The spiralling of extraordinary events after Mum died (2006), is significant to my decision to begin the timeline then. I reflect that the events around this time caused me to lose the 'boundaries, the edges that make our families complete' (Yngvesson 2003, p. 24).

Fig 2; timeline of adoptive family events forming self-reflective records.

October 2006	* Mum dies (Grandma of Jamie & Jane who are 17 & 16 at this time).
September 2007	* I leave David and move into Mum's house. Jane moves in with me and we decorate the house together.
Dec 2007	Jane (17) leaves my home, returns to live with her Dad.
July 2008	Ethan is born, Jane and Tom's son. Jane moves in with Tom soon after.
January 2009	* I visit the marital home, Jane who has returned to live there takes a phone call from Anne (a friend), who will not speak to me. Jane (18) leaves to meet Anne. Christmas cards have been exchanged between Jane, Ethan and David. I did not receive cards. (Became epiphany 1)
January 2009	I emailed Ralph he responded the next day.
February 2009	* Tom, Jamie, Jane and 6th month old Ethan call at my home to ask for the adoption documents. A conversation ensues at the door, a passer-by walking his dog crosses the road to ask if he can be of assistance. (Became epiphany 3 part 1.)
February 2009	* I met Ralph at his home (I would meet Ralph three times in 2009) (conflated events Jan-Feb became epiphany 2)
April 2009	Met Sam my half-brother (Ralph is his father)
July 2009	Jane and Tom have been living together for 2 months, Jane leaves Tom and moves back to live with her Dad.
September 2009	Met Jean at her home, with her son, my half-brother.
December 2009	Jean and Gary invited me for Christmas at their home (became epiphany 4).
July 2010	A month after my *Decree Nisi* David, Jamie (21) and Jane (20) went to meet Jean (unknown to me)
February 2012	Jamie (23) and Jane's (22) Nana died (David's Mum)
March 2012	last visit to Jean for nearly 4 years
April 2012	Jane and Ethan move into a home of their own, 2 miles away from where she was brought up
August 2013	Jane's Father moves to the South of England, she moves house, back to the village where she was brought up
October 2014	Jane (24) moves house, 2 miles away from the previous house Jamie and I discuss his adoption documents (became epiphany 3 part 2)
January 2015	Owen is born (Jane's second son).
October 2015	Jean sends me a birthday card then Xmas card. (Jean's husband has died)
February 2016	Met Jean again (nearly 4 years since I've seen her)

* denotes extraordinary events (see Table 3.3, section 3.5.2.

After reflexive data analysis two of these extraordinary events became major epiphanies.

Furthermore, the 10 participants in this study are made up of 9 adoptive mothers with experience of mediated adoption and two female 1960's adoptees. These are represented in table 1.2 below.

Table 1.2 – 10 pseudonyms of participant characters in this study

	Role	Approx. age	Pseudonym	Number of children/gender and pseudonym	Epiphany 1, 2, 3 or 4.	Traced birth family
1	Adoptive mother	50's	Ruth	2 females, 2 male – Chloe, Mike & Lucas are named	E1	Knew anyway
2	Adoptee and adoptive mother	50's	Tracy	1 male - John (20's)	E 3 and 4	Yes, Tracy and John
3	Adoptive mother	50's	Lynn	1 female – Deborah (20's) 1 male – no name (20's)	E 1 and 3	Yes, Deborah
4	Adoptee	30's	Zoe	Brother	E1	Yes
5	Adoptive mother	60's	Diane	Female 22, male 26 no name given	E3	Yes, daughter did
6	Adoptive mother	40's	Mandy	1 female Natalie	E 1 and 3	Letter box contact
7	Adoptive mother	60's	Janet	Twin daughters age 20	E3	Don't know
8	Adoptive mother	50's	Lesley	1 male Josh (20's)	E 1, 2 and 3	Yes
9	Adoptee	50's	Jenny	Adoptee	E1 and 2	Yes
10	Adoptive mother	60's	Sandy	2 females now in their 20's no names given	E1	Don't know

So as a postmodern qualitative social researcher I employ a layered account writing technique. In this way my multiple female perspectives are represented as I write from several voices to inform numerous layers of consciousness (Ronai 1992; 1995, Ellis 2004). Furthermore, and importantly in relation to my multiple identities, this work purposefully uses the writing strategy of epiphanies. I concur with Joyce (see section 3.1) who states that he:

> "…. could see no advantage in or remaining locked up in each cultural cycle as in a trance or dream. He discovered the means of living simultaneously in all cultural modes quite consciously," (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967, p.120 cited in Cole, D.R. 2011, p. 57).

1.2. Significance of the Research Aims and Initial Research Questions

The aim of this research is to illuminate interactions between adoptive and birth kin through employing analytic autoethnography as a guide to reflexively studying the multifaceted nature of kinship interactions. Accordingly, this work uses the four kinds of epiphanic moment (Denzin 1989) to describe the nature of the events as outlined in the four research questions below.

Nuanced understanding of kinship affinities felt by myself and enhanced by evidence from other adoptees and adoptive mothers, moves this study away from sensationalist, atypical media stories, offering further opportunities for affirmative adoption dialogue. As this work proceeded, the nature of deepening personal reflections had the effect of challenging previously held beliefs and values. So, the veracity of relatedness is revisited throughout this study, which inevitably impacted

upon my efforts to maintain a balance in the reflexive process between researcher vulnerability and therapy. Herein lies implications for future researchers in pursuing this methodology.

I began with these four tentative research questions, which arose from observed and experienced interactions between myself and adoptive kin and myself and birth kin. These were then re-evaluated following the literature review, in Chapter 2:

1. What physical and other-worldly interactions are observed between an adoptive mother and daughter?
2. What other-worldly interactions can be experienced/observed between an adoptee and their birth parent?
3. In what ways do adoptive families discuss/negotiate and make sense of their relationships through adoption documents?
4. How do adoptees and birth parents discuss and make sense of relationships at Christmastime?

The term ‘other-worldly’ was chosen because, adoptees and people exploring their genealogy can experience unexplainable similarities of an intangible or ethereal quality. This feeling of other-worldliness may involve intangible secrets, or connections to the dead. Hence in illuminating previously intangible secrets this study seeks to support a growing understanding of adoptee other-worldly interactions. (See section 2.4.1. Theme 1; Secrecy, disclosure and ethereal aspects of kin for a full explanation).

1.3. Overview of the Study

As the study ensued, I systematically engaged in various iterations of analytic reflexivity in an endeavour to achieve a vivid sense of what is meant by adoptive family interactions. Through this process I have attempted to continually and diligently employ processes of self-observation and self-introspection alongside dialogue with others. For example, a substantial part of this process was to explore the relationship between three key literatures alongside participants' voices and my experience as a valid source of data. Engaging in this constant iterative process has I believe enhanced my ability to be reflexive by supporting my decision making of what data to retain and which to discard, therefore seeking to minimise relational ethical tensions between myself and family members. As a result, the insights and findings (Chapter 4) continually evolved, imitating features of social constructivism and the complexity of life. Many possible explanations became apparent within the layered writing rather than a decisive explanation for events.

Following this introduction, in the second chapter, an analytic autoethnography lens is used to locate adoption literature. Furthermore, and substantially, I reach beyond the adoption literature to explore the nexus of three key literatures evident throughout this thesis (see Table 2.1 and Fig 1). Namely, adoptive family communication themes as suggested by Galvin and Colaner (2014), kinship affinities (Mason 2008) and Carsten's ideas of relatedness, difference and how gender interacts with kinship (2004). Due to the iterative nature of analytic reflexivity, elements of my auto-ethnography will appear within the literature review.

Accordingly, this study seeks to address four of the six themes suggested by Galvin and Colaner (2014): secrecy versus disclosure, visible narrative presence, language and discussion of physical differences. Nevertheless, these themes alone would not address the unexplainable somewhat ethereal affinities I felt when meeting birth parents, consequently Mason's Kinship Affinities (2008) fixed, negotiated, sensory and ethereal are applied to interactions, giving an extensive multi-faceted interpretation of how kinship is felt and experienced. Thirdly, Carsten's (2004) ideas around gender were imperative in understanding how the themes of difference and relatedness intertwine to inform exploration of interactions. Analysis of how these interrelated themes link to the policy context is provided and research questions are refined.

Chapter three examines the autoethnographic conceptual framework employed in this study, advocating for the appropriate selection of this methodology and methods for data collection. Alternative and complementary forms of autoethnography, specifically analytic and evocative, are critically reviewed in light of this. Furthermore, involvement in the dual roles of researcher and researched are discussed in relation to reflexivity and temporality, recognising the reciprocal relationship between the emotions of the researcher as subject and how this is necessary to the synthesis of the research (Behar 1996). Verisimilitude of the data collection methods is critically reviewed through a range of techniques including: a timeline, kinship diagrams, reflective journal entries, textual artefacts and interview data. Ethical features are deliberately analysed separately in relation to each

individual person and group included in this thesis so that ethical mindfulness is practiced throughout.

Chapter four presents the autoethnographic narratives, integrating data analysis through application of the conceptual framework and the methodological processes. Insights and findings are framed around each of the research questions. Furthermore, I include the wider experiences of the ten participants in relation to adoptive family kinship themes (4.5.). In exemplifying how, these are different and/or similar to those in my own story in 4.1 – 4.4.

The discussion in chapter five explores the tension between autoethnography and the self. Particularly as exposing a vulnerable self and its possible use as a cathartic tool to inform insights, findings and limitations (5.1). This naturally progresses to analysis of the nature and relevance of emotional support whilst undertaking autoethnography (5.2). I then refocus the autoethnographic lens, to provide a reflexive summary of responses to the research questions, including how this might be applied to policy and practice contexts in supporting potentially vulnerable young adoptees (5.3). Lastly, a strong relationship between analytic autoethnography and the conceptual framework is indicative that this methodology has a secure and burgeoning place in contributing to our understanding of previously hidden adoptive family interactions. This is one claim to knowledge as summarised in section 5.4.

Chapter 2. Review of Relevant Literature

The aim in this chapter is threefold. Firstly, to critically review selected autoethnographic research studies within the context of related literature on adoption, predominantly from the subject fields of sociology, anthropology, psychology and education. Secondly, to critically review the scope of the literature in establishing the appropriateness of analytic autoethnography as a research methodology in exploring adoptive family interactions. Intersecting with this thirdly, I explain how I use my autoethnographic data as a lens to discuss the literature.

To aid understanding through organisation of ideas and themes this chapter is divided into six sections. Firstly, to set the scene, I establish the history of adoption including what is currently known about the topic of adoption and adoptive family relationships, including broad research trends (2.1). Section 2.2 offers an explanation of the literature reviewed alongside autoethnographic research studies within the context of adoption. The result suggests that there is a gap in the autoethnographic and adoption literature. Section 2.3 critically analyses the autoethnographic sources found and relate their usefulness to the five key features of analytic autoethnography (Anderson 2006). Section 2.4 critically intertwines the three key theories used consistently throughout this work with consideration of adoption related policy in Britain. This section is further thematically sub divided in order to aid critical analysis. A summary of the literature review is provided in section 2.5, illuminating vibrant thematic links between key literatures from section 2.4. Finally, in section 2.6, I return to and refine the research questions based on this literature review.

2.1. What is already known about the topic of adoption and adoptive family relationships - adoption research trends.

At the outset of this study my initial exploration of the literature was undertaken using the academic database, (Ebsco October 2014) by using the key words ‘adopted or adoptee, identity and narrative or communication’ that is without the vital term autoethnography. The following opening discussion outlines the history of adoption and the general research trends.

Over the course of history informal adoption of children genetically related or un-related to the adopter has always taken place and remained relatively fluid in nature. Adoptions have been found in all historical eras, from 1750 BC when the rules according to the Babylonian code of law were engraved on a basalt slab (Palacios and Brodzinsky 2010) and in all cultures (Volkman, 2005). Adoption is also present in mythology, for example Moses in Hebrew philosophy, Oedipus in Greek and Romulous and Remus in Roman culture. This is further emphasised by a presence of adoption in canonical literature, for example Perdita in Shakespeare’s *A Winter’s Tale* and Oliver Twist in Charles Dickens’ novel of that name.

Additionally, the concept of adoption appears five times through the word *uiJoqesiva* in the New Testament (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5, see Adoption Definition and Meaning, Bible Dictionary 2015) although the meaning given to the term then and now is somewhat different.

Adoptions taking place according to the law can be found as early as Roman times, with Augustus, the first emperor of the Roman Empire 27 BC – AD 14, being possibly the most historically renowned adoptee. Consequently, adoption practices in the Roman Empire were widespread, accepted as a means of reinforcing interfamily ties, political alliances and succession among the emperors from Augustus through the dynasty of Septimius Severus in the third century (Lindsay 2009).

Nevertheless, across the world, adoption practices remained largely informal, unregulated and secret, characteristics of the post-World War One era in Britain too. In Britain after 1920, such unregulated adoption practices resulted in increasing public interest, campaign groups and philanthropic organisations lobbied government in order to regulate adoption. This resulted in the Adoption Act 1926 the first legislation in Britain. Consequently, children who were adopted legally in the years after this legislation were of an age to be of interest to the first adoption researchers in the mid-20th century.

The first pioneering attempt to understand adoptive family life was the publication of a *Shared Fate* (Kirk 1964). Significantly, I believe Kirk's status as an adoptive father of four must have been influential, he was the first to emphasise the importance of the recognition or denial of difference. He asserted that adoptive family members who were openly communicative and empathetic, were able to successfully recognise their difference from biological families, so resulting in emotionally

healthier family relationships. Consequently, the themes of communication and difference (Galvin and Colaner 2014) remains sizeable within the adoption literature to date and is of central importance for this study. Galvin and Colaner (2014) synthesised current research on adoptive family relationships, including the key themes relating to my questions of secrecy and disclosure, physical differences and the importance of storytelling or narrating. These themes have a rich history in adoption research and so this source is of central importance to the theory which informs this study (Table 2.1).

Other earlier complimentary studies, such as those done by child welfare agencies and social workers, reinforced the burgeoning area of research on adoption. Notably, Bowlby (1951) who studied the mental health of homeless children in post-war Europe became the precursor for interest in mother child attachment patterns, resulting in a theory of attachment. Moreover, there is much to be understood between the emotional circumstances of the family and the changes in adoptees attachment patterns and parental reflective functioning (Palacios et al. 2009, in Palacios and Brodzinsky, 2010). These are the themes that are important to this research.

Three broad historical trends in adoption research (Palacios and Brodzinsky 2010) have been identified and subsequently updated by O'Leary Wiley (2017). Despite the fact that these are largely taken from the discipline of psychology and have an American predisposition, they are useful in giving an overview for the purposes of this study and for suggested directions in future research.

The first historical trend in systematic adoption research began in the late 1950's focussed on psychological risk associated with adoption. This era was to usher in a new field of developmental and family research. Unguided by formal theory, this body of research confirmed that adoptees were more likely than non–adoptees to be referred for mental health and other ongoing psychological and academic problems. The questions of how adoptees could overcome these adjustment difficulties would form the foundation of the second trend in adoption research.

The second trend was characterised by a prevalence of research around intercountry adoption and focussed on the ability of adopted children to recover from early adversity. Comparative research between children who were previously nurtured in foster homes and those like Romanian orphans who were institutionalised after the fall of Ceausescu in 1989 was a characteristic of this period.

The third period, which emerged primarily after the year 2000, is concerned with defining the neurobiological, developmental and relational factors in the experience of adoptees and adoptive families. One such thread of this period was around the influence of specific genetic markers and how these interact with the adoptees environment (Caspers et al. 2009 in Palacios and Brodzinsky 2010). Since this study has an interest in adoptee surroundings, Cadoret et al. (1995) notes that environment can overcome or improve the vulnerability suggested by genetic characteristics:

> '…..biologic background of anti-social personality disorder predicted increased aggressivity, conduct disorder and anti-social behaviour in a group of adopted adolescents only when there was adversity in the adoptive family environment' (cited in Palacios and Brodzinsky 2010, p. 277).

The emphasis on family, relational processes and particularly interaction (Rueter et al. 2009) within the present study, firmly locates it within this third group of adoption research. Notably Rueter et al. found that the level of parent child conflict was higher in families with adopted adolescents than non-adopted adolescents, with adoptees behaviour being less warm and at times more discordant. This reflects evidence that most 'adoptions disrupt during the teenage years' (DfE 2014b, p. 7). Likewise, this study is also interested in positive and rewarding interactions which increase contact and conversely problematic interactions for which the opposite is true (Grotevant, 2009, in Grotevant et al. 2013).

Taking this further O'Leary Wiley (2017), an American academic and psychologist, suggests that adoption research in the last ten years has flourished with the addition of more voices from all sections of the adoption community. Developments now include ethnic and racial identity development, gay and lesbian adoptive parenting, microaggressions, openness in communication, and, last but not least, societal trends indicate internet accessibility and the growth of social media groups will be key to future adoption research trends. The diversity of these trends also emphasises the increased visibility of adoption in the media (O'Leary Wiley 2017).

In the UK this includes the drama *Kiri* (Chanel 4) in 2018 and films such as *Oranges and Sunshine* in 2011 and *Philomena* in 2013.

The intrapersonal and interpersonal themes suggested by these three broad research trends endure in this research, yet with distinct differences of approach and methodology. As Palacios and Brodzinsky note one of the major differences 'between the earlier and more contemporary research is methodological' (2010, p. 272).

As a result, this study contributes to expanding the dialogue 'to include perspectives about living as an adoptee through the life span' and greater focus on 'qualitative research' (O'Leary Wiley 2017, p. 993) using the relatively new and underrepresented lens of autoethnography.

I have found no other study that has instigated the same approach as this one. Consequently, as a complete member of the group I am researching I will examine interactions between myself as an adult adoptee and members of my adoptive and birth kin. In authoring this work I will also be contributing to the societal trend, and an important research theme, of increased openness in adoptive family relationships. What is more, the trend is that openness is being accelerated by the effects of social media (Howard, 2012, Siegel and Smith, 2012 in Grotevant et al. 2013). This thread of research has been influential in responding to the normalisation of communication between adoptive and birth kin and its integration is increasingly seen as essential to policy and practice (Jones, C. 2013).

> ‘Openness places demands not just on adoptive parents but on all members of the adoption triad to forge new ways of doing adoptive kinship. Questions remain, however, about the role of policy in promoting, regulating and supporting openness in adoption….’ (Jones, C. 2013, p.90-1)

My insider researcher view will contribute to this.

I reiterate the aims of this study are to explore two substantial threads from the literature introduced here, both important in taking adoption research forward:

> ‘adoption research would benefit from paying more attention to relationships within the adoption kinship group, especially the way in which these relationships change over time and those factors related to change’ (Palacios 2010, p 278).

I am not focussing on attachment per se, yet this study is interested in the dynamics of transgenerational relationships over time, as suggested above.

Interestingly Palacios also notes:

> ‘The study of adopted persons as parents could be one of the ultimate tests of adoption as a successful social intervention, in their transgenerational transmission of attachment’ (Ibid, p. 279).

I did not become an adoptive parent to ensure adoption as a successful social intervention, but for us to become a family, together. So, as an adoptee and adoptive parent, I emphasise the flaws in this argument, namely that

transgenerational transmission of attachment is dependent upon what kind of parents adoptees become, biological or adoptive or both. Furthermore, the social and environmental influences for each individual adoptee and their parents are momentous, as a result the unwritten and unspoken in Palacios's statement needs unravelling.

Taking this idea further, when adoptees create inter-personal relationships with birth relatives this then has implications for adoptive family relationships. For example, intergenerational relationships could be created between three generations, the children of adoptees, adoptees and birth parents. If an adoptee creates relationships with birth parents as adults then the relationship between the adoptive parent and the adoptee will inevitably transform. I suggest that these concerns are valuable areas for future study not only for the anticipated impact on harmonious adoptive family relationships but because they are ripe for contributing to theoretical understanding of adoptive kinship interactions.

2.2. Literature Reviewed - Autoethnography and adoption

The focus of this study lies in exploring adoptive family interactions through the use of autoethnography as a research method. In searching for relevant academic literature using the key words "autoethnography" and "adoption" (using Ebsco; Academic Search Complete; British Educational Index; Jstor; Social science index; ERIC; Google Scholar and for thesis records ProQuest) I confirmed either an

autoethnography performed by an adoptee or an adopter or hopefully both, before accessing. After focussing on literature published within the disciplines of sociology, anthropology and education and published from English speaking countries within the last eight years, my initial search resulted in 5 titles. Retrieval of citations within recurrent searches meant that the original 5 articles became 8 articles by April 2018.

Of these the majority were written by academics with a clear link to adoption. For example, Ballard and Ballard (2011) an adoptee and his partner who were in the process of adopting a child, Pearson (2010) a Korean hard of hearing adoptee, and two studies by an adoptive mother, Wall (2008; 2011). Narrative is the preferred form to some extent in four of the eight autoethnographies, specifically; Harris (2016), Malhotra (2013), Menon (2017), Schwartz and Schwartz (2018). Expectedly, the eight autoethnographic sources revealed an overrepresentation of female adoptees/adoptive mothers. Significantly, only one of these (Ballard et al. 2011) was written by an adoptee and adoptive parent, importantly reflecting my cultural position as a Complete Member Researcher (Anderson 2006). Therefore, I intend to add to this gap in the autoethnographic and adoption literature through practically and theoretically illuminating everyday interactional practices in adoptive kinship.

2.3. Analytic Autoethnography

In analysing the usefulness of the 8 sources to this study I mapped their characteristics against the five key features of Analytic Autoethnography as suggested by Anderson (2006, p. 374). I will use these to systematically set out my position in embracing an autoethnographic approach whilst also using my

autoethnographic data as a lens in seeking to discuss and connect themes from the literature reviewed.

Anderson's 5 key themes in autoethnography are:

1. Complete Member Researcher (CMR)
2. Analytic reflexivity
3. Narrative visibility
4. Dialogue with informants
5. Commitment to theoretical analysis

I will elaborate on the relevance of each as they blend and weave with the themes from the 8 autoethnographic and adoption sources of literature.

2.3.1. Complete member Researcher (CMR)

The first and most pertinent feature of autoethnography is that the researcher is a complete member of the social world under study (Anderson 2006).

Ellis' et al. (2011) definition of autoethnography emphasises how the personal is used to research the political, in this way this methodology practices social and cultural inclusivity:

> 'Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experiences (auto)

> in order to understand cultural experiences (ethno). This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially just and socially conscious act. The researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method autoethnography is both process and product' (Ellis et al., 2011, p.1).

The distinctions between two types of CMR were first coined by Patricia and Peter Adler (1987, p. 67-84), 'covert' and 'opportunistic' CMRs. Covert CMRs are individuals who begin by researching aspects of a cultural group and as part of the data collection process find themselves drawn into the group so that complete immersion and member status is the eventual result. So 'through the entangling of biographies we take a place in their moral worlds and vice versa' (Carsten, Day and Stafford 2018, p. 11).

The opportunistic group on the other hand are accidentally part of a group either through a result of employment, illness, lifestyle or any experiences derived without prior planning by the person. This would include my life experience of being an adopted daughter, adoptive mother and a birth daughter. The authors of all 8 sources in the literature review are also seen as opportunistic CMRs, another reason for their selection. Nevertheless, being an opportunistic CMR seems to be almost synonymous with being an academic in this context; all authors are affiliated to a University apart from one who is an independent scholar (Malhotra 2013).

In this way my complete member researcher status is confirmed as being the most common form of CMR in Analytic Autoethnography (Anderson 2006). Adler and Adler (1987, p. 67) note “CMRs come closest of all . . . to approximating the emotional stance of the people they study.” Hence a second significant reason for selecting the 8 sources in the literature review is because the authors are female (apart from one co-author) adoptees or adoptive mothers, CMR characteristics that I possess.

So as an adoptee who is also an adoptive parent my first criteria was to locate sources written by someone with my characteristics. I found none with all my characteristics, i.e. female, adoptee and adoptive mother, but one that came close. This is a co-constructed Autoethnography of reflexive storytelling in becoming adoptive parents, written by Ballard and Ballard (2011). One of the authors being an international adoptee and adoptive father. Yet Ballard’s status as a male, international adoptee makes his experience somewhat dissimilar to mine. A further three sources were written by female adoptees (Pearson, 2010, Harris 2016, Malhotra 2013), and an additional two by adoptive mothers (Wall, 2008, 2011; Menon 2017). So, the CMR’s in the reviewed literature have similarities with my experience but have all chosen to investigate diverse aspects.

Pearson writes powerfully and self-reflectively of the relationship between oppression, disability and being a Korean adoptee. Likewise, Harris (2016) self-reflectively uses song lyrics to untangle the nature of idealized love and the nostalgia of fixity for adoptees. Whereas Malhotra (2013), an intercountry adoptee, narrates

her search for meaning by exploring the people and places associated with her pre-adoption story in India. What's more, a recent co-written autoethnography focusses on a transformational learning experience of a transracial adoptive adult mother and daughter (Schwartz and Schwartz 2018).

'Still, being a complete member does not imply a panoptical or non-problematic positionality' (Anderson 2010, p.363). One key problem, for example, is that autoethnographers dual role of documenting and theorising as opposed to persistently participating with the group under study, can be difficult to balance. Wall (2008) an adoptive mother of an international child, demonstrates the complexity of this dual role as she shares her concerns of representation, objectivity, data quality, legitimacy, balance and ethics in the writing of her autoethnographic account. So, autoethnographers may be at a disadvantage in not being able to completely live 'in the moment' (Anderson 2006, p. 380). Thoughts of consciously observing conversations, the construction of sentences and the pitch or tone of voice could all take on meanings to an autoethnographer that may be less significant to others in the cultural group. In this way capturing data for an autoethnographer can be problematic, yet it could also be seen as the superiority of the CMR perspective too. Indeed, Van Maanen (1988) appreciates it is essential to understand the thought processes, beliefs, values and interactions of the studied group when writing any form of ethnography.

Ballard et al. illustrates:

> 'My wife will tear up recalling the moment. The girls' expressions will convey their own tears and feelings as they remember when they first saw their little

> brother. I will be silent as I also recall the moment when I saw my son carried around a corner into a hot room on a hot day in a faraway country'.(2011, p.79).

Autoethnographers such as Ballard will feel and know because of their status which fragments of interactions are important for the study of international adoption as well as those which are fundamentally important in telling and retelling the story to his son.

Being a CMR can be seen as a benefit to the study of adoptive family interactions because, as a legitimate participant, I can interpret multiple and contradictory practical, first order constructs (Schutz 1962) occurring between participants. For an autoethnographer the major difficulty would be in the various interpretations of these first order constructs between members of the social group under study. Likewise questioning and developing practical interpretations could result in a weakening or consolidation of these constructs. Consequently, being a CMR could be seen as beneficial in that I am there, in context participating as a member of that social group as well as observing as a researcher, in the performers interactions. Conversely my own role as one of the performers (first order construct) may be detrimental in encouraging thinking around the more intangible, challenging second-order constructs (Schutz 1962) that I would be involved in analysing as a researcher. In imagining the synthesis of the tangible with the intangible I show my willingness 'to play with epistemology and ways of knowing' in engaging with inter-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary research (Mason 2011, p.16).

Hence, to be an effective CMR I would have to be articulate in both first and second order constructs. In this way being a CMR could be considered only a partial advantage for observing the interactions of adoptive families because membership of the group is influenced by specific role expectations. However, in this respect and as a CMR, I am both an adopted daughter, an adoptive mother, and a birth daughter, consequently as a participant observer in 3 different yet intersecting roles I will be able to examine interactions of adoptive/birth families through different yet intersecting lenses. In this way I have the benefit of a triadic perspective: as a female adoptee, adoptive mother and birth daughter, but also a dyadic perspective: as an adoptee and adoptive parent as well as an adoptee and birth child.

As a result, my developing understanding as a member and a researcher, is not created out of isolated discovery but from engaged dialogue evident through analytic reflexivity. It is with this in mind that I note none of the CMR from the literature review have written about their experience from this triadic perspective. Hence a gap within the published literature can be identified. The knowledge contained within this study is needed in order to support adoptees and adoptive parents in understanding the nature of interactions in 'living as an adoptee through the life span' (O'Leary Wiley 2017, p. 993).

2.3.2. Analytic Reflexivity

Analytic reflexivity expresses researchers' awareness of the essential connection to the research situation and their effects upon it. Being analytically reflexive involves

examining actions and insights between myself and others, in order to better understand myself and the culture in which I live. This is achieved through self-conscious introspection, Rodriguez and Ryave (2002) define this as *interactive introspection*. Wall (2011) epitomises this perfectly when she deeply reflexively demonstrates her awareness of a reciprocal influence between her writing, her context and her performers. Likewise, the storytelling 'dance' presented by Ballard (2011) requires engagement, presence, paying attention and responsiveness.

Reflexivity for evocative or analytic autoethnographers is focussed inward, but not in a confessional way. For example, Harris (2016) frames her autoethnographic data by providing a personal reflexive view of herself in her family context as she recounts how she and her brother played 'families'. Yet not only is the reflexivity focussed within personal experience and sense making, Harris also forms part of the representational process herself by performing the lyrics, mode, and stylistics of Barbra Streisand's famous song 'The Way We '*weren't*''. In this way Harris (2016) and Ballard (2011) become engaged in and part of the story they are telling, so perspective taking is required, as is consideration of the co-creation of the text, including who tells what part and how much.

In the same way, initially I will analytically and evocatively develop cultural meanings of adoptive family conversations, actions and texts. By blending some of these cultural practices where appropriate with lyrics written by my birth father I will analyse the reciprocal influence of this autoethnography as another part of the representational process.

As an autoethnographic CMR I have more of a stake in the beliefs, values and actions of other performers than a more detached participant observer. Therefore, I would argue I have a greater opportunity to transform my own beliefs, not only as a researcher but as a member of my kinship groups - evidence confirming my deep commitment to theoretical analysis (Anderson's fifth point). Indeed, Schwartz and Schwartz (2018) find that:

> '…..disclosure to ourselves and others is a way into transformation. Disclosure is intimately connected to reflexivity, critical thinking, and may open the door to challenges to hegemonic thinking'. (Schwartz et al. 2018, p. 54)

The impact of autoethnography on the researcher's self involves reciprocal informativity. Attractive though this is, it is not enough for the researcher to engage in reflexive social and self-analysis. Autoethnography requires that the researcher be visible, active and reflexively engaged in the text. This is what Anderson suggests is the third feature of Analytic Autoethnography.

2.3.3. Narrative Visibility of the Researcher's Self

The traditional ethnographer can be seen as omniscient yet largely invisible in their texts. Even though ethnographers may emphasise logging feelings in observational field notes, these feelings often may not make it into print, perhaps largely because

of the emphasis on others rather than self (Chang 2016). Hence a common criticism of conventional ethnography acknowledges a 'crisis in representation' (Denzin, 2003; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Holman Jones, 2005) whereby lived experience cannot be directly or fully captured or represented in a text (Denzin, 2014). If ethnographers are considered invisible in their texts conversely autoethnographers are considered highly visible social actors within their texts. The 8 autoethnographies written by adoptees and adopted parents in the literature review demonstrate the *narrative visibility of the researcher self* (Anderson 2006). Indicating that difficulties in representing and capturing adoptees and adoptive parents lived experience demands individual explicit engagement and demonstration of this engagement with the social world under study.

Ballard (2011), Harris (2016) and Malhotra (2013) all relate specific experiences in their highly visible narratives, also confirming narrative as a central theme for adoption research (Galvin & Colaner 2014). For Harris, this is engagement with music, the use of a journal, conversations, photographic evidence and memories to demonstrate her feelings, experiences and interactions. Ballard and Malhotra articulate narrative relational insights between themselves and others through conversation and interactions, as I will do. It is through this dynamic data the reader can understand the observed social world.

A significant aspect of undertaking autoethnography is the development of analytic insights through epiphanies, which, to borrow a phrase from Malhotra, 'significantly change the thought process' of the research (Malhotra, 2013, p. 5). Narrative

visibility does not mean excessive exposure for its own sake, exposure of the self should be central to the argument and ‘take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise go’ (Behar 1996, p.14).

In examining subjective experience as an intrinsic part of the research (Davies 1999) I analyse changes in my beliefs and relationships over time and the course of my study. I aim to paint a fluid rather than static picture of adoptive family interactions by lucidly revealing myself as a member and a researcher at the core of these issues. Self-absorption is seen to be a major challenge in incorporating subjective experience into autoethnography (Geertz 1998). Yet Anderson (2006) suggests that autoethnographers can avoid self-absorption by *engaging in dialogue with informants beyond the self,* the fourth feature of analytic autoethnography.

2.3.4. Dialogue with Informants beyond Self.

As an adopted person I can appreciate the importance of telling and retelling my beginnings in life, as Ballard et al. (2011) also recounts. The request by Ballard’s daughters (who are not adopted) to “Daddy, tell us again how you were adopted” becomes a story of their ‘narrative inheritance’ (Goodall 2005). In the same way, when I was a child my adoptive Mum always retold my story. Back then I listened to and co-created Mum’s story, as the Ballard’s (2011) have done with their children and mother and daughter Joni and Rebecca Schwartz (2018) co-constructed their narrative. I used to check Mum’s words against the words I heard the previous time,

had any changed? What was different? How does this difference make me feel? Did she pause at the same places? Did her pauses mean anything, to me or her? Was she missing anything out? Accordingly, I took the role of a visible actor in relating and belonging. For me these thoughts now emphasise the importance of adoptive mothers in narrating identity formation of their adoptive children (Von Korff et al. 2010).

Similarities between the autoethnographies from the literature review and my study become apparent in the way that dialogue with others is presented. Like Ballard and Schwartz, I present fragments of dialogue between myself and family members, yet in a different way, as I choose to place these within text boxes to differentiate spoken interactions from analysis. One of the strengths of autoethnography is the inventive and diverse types of textual presentations (Rappert 2010). Likewise, I also present dialogue from participants outside of my family in text boxes throughout the analysis in chapter 4. The addition of other female adoptee and adoptive mother participant voices from outside of my family is in distinct contrast to the autoethnographies of Ballard and Schwartz. This was done to juxtapose family conversations or reflections with those of participants outside my family to exemplify and critique my analysis.

Of vital importance is the everyday nature of these events. They are not premeditated “let’s sit down and I’ll tell you a story” type of familial events, but stories retold in different voices, in different terms in different ways, but still confirming what it means to be a family.

The dialogue I shared with Mum has a vivid presence in my memory, it resonates, its momentum reaches to the present and beyond into the future. Perhaps, I hope the dialogue I shared with my son about his adoption story will also resonate into his future? In this way my one-to-ones with Mum and my son in the past mean that the future becomes partially written, our dialogically constructed stories becoming the narrative inheritance to another generation of family storytellers (Ballard 2011). Consequently, in the same way I use dialogue to conjure 'sensory and emotional experiences' (Polanco, 2011, p. 44 in Malhotra 2013, p. 4) of adoptive family interactions in anticipation that these will inform a potential future story for adoptees, researchers and policy makers.

2.3.5. Commitment to Theoretical Analysis

The representation of a first-person narrative experience through observation is according to Denzin (2014) a theory driven activity. Yet for analytical autoethnographers such as Anderson (2006) this level of commitment to theoretical analysis is insufficient since it does not utilise empirical evidence with the intention of enhancing theoretical understanding of an aspect of society. Consequently, this brings into question the individual stance of an autoethnographer and the purpose for their writing.

Evocative autoethnographers such as St. Pierre and Holman Jones, devotedly write well-crafted literary prose, in seeking to challenge the world by blurring the boundaries between social science and literature. Indeed, I have also attempted to incorporate writing from the heart in seeking to challenge traditional perspectives of adoptive parenting in the hope that this writing will move readers to ethical and moral action (Pelias 2004). Nevertheless, as a member of the academic community and in being an adoptee and adoptive parent I also see evaluating, interpreting and analysing experience against criteria as part of my responsibility in providing an explanation of how adoptive family cultural life is experienced.

So, in developing theoretical analysis, and similarly to Pearson (2010), I firstly look through my own adoptee and adoptive mother lens to scrutinise intersectional and intertwining features of my multiple selves. Interconnecting features are a characteristic of a practising theoretical analysis as for example Schwartz et al. (2018) were able to connect issues of race and adult learning. Likewise, in this study I seek to analyse how kinship affinities intersect with adoptive family research themes and gender in changing contexts so that ‘we can learn previously unspoken, unknown things about culture and communication from it’ (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006, p. 192).

2.3.6. Summary of the literature reviewed and theoretical direction.

As can be seen from the 8 sources of autoethnographic and adoption literature reviewed, the theme of *narrating* is strongly represented. Unsurprisingly, narrating is also a highly visible adoption research theme according to Galvin and Colaner (2014).

Therefore, as reiterated earlier (section 2.2.), there is a gap in the autoethnographic and adoption literature which does not encompass the everyday familial sensory interactions that I sought to practically and theoretically explain. I knew that the senses including voice, touch and smell would be important to explaining these interactions. I also knew that my experiences were somewhat intangible, secretive or ethereal. So, with the guidance from my supervisor, I began a general sweep through the literature using the key words *family, kinship and sensory* in attempting to fill this gap.

I found immediate resonance with Mason's (2008) four dimensions of kinship affinity; fixed, negotiated, ethereal and sensory in the article '*Tangible affinities and the real-life fascination of kinship'*. Particularly central for me in explaining obscure emotions was how sensory instances seemed to produce an ethereal or other-worldly temporal harmony between kin. Mason asserts kinship affinities:

> '… are dimensions where kinship is engaged with, defined, known and expressed. Collectively, these are referred to as 'tangible' affinities, not

> because they are all literally tangible but because of their resonance in lived experience and their vivid and palpable (or almost palpable) character' (p. 29).

The idea of resonance in lived experience as Mason asserts of an *almost palpable* quality was attractive. As a participant observer or more accurately through the observation of participation, I aim to capture, these almost palpable interactions, further justification for Autoethnography as my research design (Chang 2016; Tedlock 1991).

Moreover, it is the interplay between the tangible and intangible (Mason 2009) sensory experience that fascinates me about adoptive family relationships. These sensory experiences are therefore twofold, those involving tangible; i.e. visible, audible and physical interactions and those involving intangible i.e. ethereal, spiritual or imaginative interactions.

Firstly, *fixed* affinities are those which are 'regarded as or feel fixed' (Mason 2008, p.33) and can be created through biological or social processes, emphasising the importance of relationality. For example, these can be described through the interplay of the anthropological concepts of what is given and what is made (Carsten 2004). Importantly, the *given* nature of fixity of kin should not be conflated with the biological but can be seen through aspects such as resemblances and people's layers of electivity in their perception of these.

Secondly, *negotiated* affinities intersect closely with fixed affinities in that people negotiate practices of care, support and moral responsibility to different degrees in specific familial relationships.

Thirdly, *ethereal* affinities or those which are seen as mysterious, spiritual and considered 'beyond (rational) explanation' (Mason 2008, p. 37) are not easy to define yet are inherently fascinating. These could appear as ephemeral bursts of visual and sensory connections experienced between and beyond persons, it is what they are thought to explain and represent that is intriguing, consequently the creative literary fields of multi-dimensional existentialism are considered a source for such affinities.

Fourthly and finally 'physical, bodily, material and especially *sensory* affinities' are fundamental in the analysis of relationality and inter-physicality in families (Mason 2008, p. 40). The influential sociological theorisation of the body and embodiment is also relevant here (Crossley 2001). Consequently, I will explore sensory connections between people. As Strathern notes 'kinship is where westerners think of connections between bodies themselves (2005, p. 26).

Consequently, after identifying the importance of Galvin and Colaner's (2014) adoptive research themes (see section 1.3), Mason's kinship affinities were fundamental in understanding the nature of kinship affinities for adoptive kin (Table 2.1).

The last addition to the key theory used to inform this study (Table 2.1) was found through Mason's article which referred to the work of anthropologists of kinship, especially Carsten (2004). The inclusion of Carsten's ideas was imperative in

developing understanding around the enduring theme of *difference,* specifically through the interplay between ‘what is given’ and ‘what is made’.

So, the contribution of this study lies in its capability to define and analyse features of adoptive family interactions through the interplay of adoptive family research themes (Galvin and Colaner 2014), kinship affinities (Mason 2008) and how gender interacts with kinship (Carsten 2004). The interrelationship of the key themes in these three sources (Table 2.1 below) provided the framework for the problems I wished to illuminate and became the basis for the research questions. Here lies the potential contribution of this study in revealing and understanding obscure evocative interactions for thousands of adoptees like me.

Sections 2.4.1. - 2.4.3. below feature a critical dialogue between the key themes in the literature (see Table 2.1) and policy.

Table 2.1 - Three main sources of literature used in the conceptual framework

	Author	source	title	Key themes	
1	Galvin, K. and Colaner, C. (2014)	Chapter 12. Created Through Law and Language, Communicative Complexities of Adoptive Families	Widening the family Circle, New research on family communication	Secrecy/ disclosure	Theme 1
				Physical differences	Theme 2
				Narrating	Theme 3
2	Mason (2008)	Sociology	Tangible affinities and the real-life fascination of kinship 4 dimensions of affinity	Fixed – non-elective e.g. resemblances	Theme 2
				Ethereal	Theme 1
				Sensory relationality and inter-physicality	Theme 2
				Negotiated and created	Theme 3
3	Carsten (2004)	Cambridge University Press	After Kinship	The interplay between 'what is given' and 'what is made' – *relatedness*.	All Themes
				Physical differences i.e. biological sex differences and the interplay with gender	Theme 2

2.4. Adoptive family research themes, kinship affinities, gender and policy

This study is concerned with illuminating social interactions between relational others in my adoptive family group. Central to this understanding is the inter-relationship between the key adoptive research themes, as suggested by Galvin and Colaner (2014): secrecy and disclosure, physical differences and narrating, and the four dimensions of kinship affinity according to Mason (2008): fixed, negotiated, ethereal and sensory. In addition, I seek to understand in what ways these interrelated themes impact gendered kinship roles (Carsten 2004) such as being an adoptive mother, adopted daughter or birth daughter.

Alongside this I intentionally consider the interrelated adoption policy after 1962 (my birth) to the present day to encompass my children's adoption in 1991. As stated in the literature review the first British legislation appeared in 1926 with The Adoption of Children Act, this changed very little in the fifty years up to The Adoption Act 1976. After 1976 the only other key Act of Parliament has been The Adoption and Children Act 2002; because the social and cultural context of Britain was radically changed from just 26 years earlier this was seen as long overdue. After 2011 the care and adoption system were overhauled by the UK government, leading to an upsurge of policy decisions. This resulted in several additions to the 2002 Act and the emergence of a useful body of previously unknown evidence.

The following sections define the nature of each group of themes as defined in Table 2.1 and can be seen diagrammatically in the conceptual framework Fig 1.

Furthermore, this section will evaluate policy as it intersects with the three themes suggested by the literature in Table 2.1: secrecy, physical and sensory difference and narrating/negotiating.

Theme 1: Secrecy, disclosure and ethereal aspects of kin.

Theme 2: Physical differences, sensory and gendered aspects of kin – also includes fixity of kin and houses

Theme 3: Narrating and negotiating aspects of kin including relatedness.

2.4.1. Theme 1 - Secrecy, disclosure and ethereal aspects of kin

This study is concerned with the concepts of secrecy and disclosure in adoptive families, mainly because of the degree to which secrets could be considered to have negative aspects (Galvin and Colaner 2014). These may impact on the wellbeing of the family or on individual family members so is an important area to study in seeking to prevent adoptive family dissonance or breakdown (Pennebaker 1989, 1990; Vangelisti and Caughlin, 1997 in Afifi and Olson 2005). Prompt, ongoing and open exchanges have long been suggested to be important to developing adoptee understanding (Brodzinsky, Singer and Braff 1984) and in minimising the impact of the consequences of secrets. So, this study seeks to contribute to illuminating adoptive cultural contexts in which disclosure or openness operates in order to understand the challenges of adoptive family life (Jones, C. 2013).

I would also argue that the concept of secrecy is intertwined with the nature of ethereal or the other-worldly kinship affinities (see conceptual framework, Fig 1). For example, individuals who decide to do their genealogy and the journey of an adoptee in finding birth relatives have similarities. Both have the ability to articulate intangible or ethereal affinities. In both circumstances individuals may come upon secrets, perhaps connections to the dead, so an 'other-worldly' dimension is unlocked. Interestingly the other-world could be the literal world of historical events or the intangible world of ghosts and hauntings (Kramer 2011). So, studying how ethereal kinship affinities intertwine with secrets supports a growing understanding of adoptee interactions.

Ethereal affinities between kin are not easy to define yet are inherently fascinating, they are:

> '…seen as mysterious, magical, psychic, metaphysical, spiritual and, above all, ethereal – matters that are considered beyond (rational) explanation' (Mason 2008, p.37).

I believe I identified interactions with my birth parents and my adopted daughter which I consider ethereal in nature because they are 'charged with an almost painful intensity' (Kramer 2011, p. 389). A person might recognise interactions that are ethereal in nature because they are momentary bursts of visual and sensory connections that:

> '….exist(s) and emanate(s) from somewhere ethereal, between and beyond persons' (Mason 2008, p. 38).

Consequently, the literature in this section has significance to understanding what physical and other-worldly interactions are observed between an adoptive mother and daughter (research question one). And secondly what other-worldly interactions are experienced between an adoptee and her birth parent (research question two).

In illuminating cultural contexts in which openness and secrets operate it is important to this study to examine the literature around secrets in relation to infants who were *given* away in the 1960's, as I was, and children who were *taken* away from birth parents, as my children were in 1991, even though on both occasions our adoptions were characterised as traditional, closed and secret. The differences between how specific dynamic aspects of secrecy played out 30 years apart in different contexts are essential in analysing and interpreting the cultural or *ethno* elements of this autoethnography (Chang 2016).

Socially constructed, emotionally charged everyday language such as 'bastard' or 'illegitimate' labelled and stigmatised children born outside of marriage in 1960's Britain. Importantly for this study stigma is relational, embedded in language and is defined as a coexistence of elements: 'labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination' (Link and Phelan 2001, p. 363). Furthermore, for stigmatisation to occur not only social but economic and political power had to be applied. In this context, to eradicate any social stigma around a harmful secret my birth mother had me adopted (Goffman 1963). Concealed within a nuclear family I was oblivious to feeling any stigma.

Conversely, illegitimacy was not considered to be a social stigma in 1991, when my children were adopted; by then another kind of stigmatising agent was apparent. Namely, the possibility of children who had previously suffered neglect or abuse (DfE 2014a, p.4). There are no figures which suggest levels of neglect or abuse for children adopted in 1991, yet in 2012-13 70% of children who were adopted had previously suffered neglect or abuse (DfE 2014a, p.4), as my children had. Consequently, I suggest that children who have been taken away from birth parents, as my children were, are more likely to have family secrets concerning sensory experiences of neglect and or abuse. I propose that this places my adopted children as more susceptible to the forces of secrecy than I was.

So, in the context of adoptions in the 1960's or 1990's it is accurate to say that individuals or families are more likely to conceal a secret if they think it to be intimate or personal, for fear of individual and family repercussions (Vangelisti et al., 2001 in Afifi and Olson 2005).

In the case of my adopted children, my ex-husband and I did keep secret their birth family history concerning intergenerational sensory neglect and or abuse. This was not because we sought coercive power over them but to protect them from emotional harm. In this way it was not intended to be a secret that would be kept forever but one that we knew had disruptive qualities and potential relational consequences in the telling, and so we decided we would discuss this with them once they were mature enough to understand (Afifi and Olson 2005).

To draw an analogy from contemporary culture, Rapunzel's (in the Disney film *Tangled, 2010*) birth circumstances are also secret, nevertheless when she meets her birthmother there is a happy ever after ending. The contrast here between complex, open-ended nature of adoptive reality and fictive happy endings is stark. Yet, the resolved narrative in this fairy tale is likely to resonate with female adoptees, like my daughter, not only because of their capacity to impact feelings, and thoughts but through perpetuating mythical adverse cultural beliefs about adoption (DelRosso 2015).

All the same, we cannot talk about adoption without considering the inherently interpersonal power relations, between the holders of secrets and those from whom secrets are kept. Undeniably the hidden narrative or microfiction, around Jamie and Jane's sensory history may have impacted and magnified the effect of secrecy on them (Baden 2016).

Conversely, as adoptive parents we did share spontaneous information in their pre-school years (in what is said to be the first stage of the Family Adoption Communication Model (FAC, Wrobel et al.2003). For example, in Jamie and Jane's life story book it was written that Kelly (birth mother pseudonym) 'loved her children but was unable to look after them'. At the age of 5 this statement would mean little for my adopted children, nevertheless it would begin to take on different meaning as they matured.

In the second stage of FAC according to Wrobel et al. adoptees develop mentally and emotionally, they begin to understand the processes of biological reproduction, and so may recognise differences between themselves and their adopted kin group. In this way their curiosity may drive adoptees to approach an adoptive parent with questions. It is during this time that the deficiency in the statement your birth mother 'loved you but could not look after you' (from their life story book) would take on deeper resonances. After all, adoptive families are already sometimes stigmatized as deviant and burdened so, the addition of this history would serve to extend and deepen any existing stigma (Kressierer and Bryant, 1996 in Wegar 2000).

So, the complexity of adoptive family relationships is illustrated by the temporal nature of when the adoption took place and for what reason, namely was the child *given* or *taken* away from birth parents. Once a child is adopted, particularly in closed adoptions (such as mine and my children's) they are inserted into a social system of concealment, into a minority. This works to reduce the power of uniqueness and different expression for the child. Consequently, the inherent secrecy in adoptive families is the most significant enduring tension causing possible individual, interpersonal and familial vulnerability (Petronio 2002 in Afifi and Olson 2005).

It is also important for this study and in relation to research question two, to analyse the dynamics between secrecy, openness and feelings of otherworldliness in my interactions with my birth father. Indeed, the potential otherworldliness of the father figure (De Beauvoir 1997) resonated with the ethereal in Mason's kinship affinities

(2008). This is pertinent in my endeavour to describe and theorise the nature of otherworldly connections between kin.

So, from our very first interactions I was taken aback by my birth father's openness, his candid nature enabled me to trust him very easily and very quickly. He was also very persuasive, the way he spoke commanded respect, probably due to his successful status, so it could be said he held influential power (Afifi and Olson 2005). As an adult adoptee from a closed adoption I was ready to hear all the information I could. I listened intently as he narrated the events prior to my birth and came back for more. I realise my eagerness, my vulnerability (Parks 1995) in *hanging on every word we said* could have given him the space to potentially hold power oppressively (Afifi and Olson 2005). Within a few weeks of speaking with him he was to communicate to me that he thought my birth mother was dead. I believed this narrative at the time, and because birth fathers are omitted from the lives of their progeny this story could also have been a form of oppressive power, a plan to influence my behaviour to the desired outcome. These musings oozed an air of mystery. Conversely, after years of reflexivity and experience, given the narrative he told about my maternal grandmother (epiphany 2), I now believe that my birth father could equally have been constructing himself as 'a safe place in binary opposition to the threatening and devouring maternal figure' (Hughes 2015, p.162). By this Hughes is suggesting that masculinity represents safety whilst femininity represents partiality and eagerness. This reverses the *Primal Wound* (Verrier, 2003) narrative which suggests that the biological mother is a site of return.

Conversely, when I met my birth mother later that year she was not quite so open. I realised that this may be because she had negative secrets she might not wish to reveal, for fear of being reminded of hurtful experiences or from me judging her?

Several individuals have confirmed my story these last few years, in that my birth father, a central player, was erased from the physical scene as Jean was whisked away, by her mother, to have me, and relinquish me (Hughes 2015). So, it would seem my maternal birth grandmother held a certain amount of dominance and control in the form of coercive power (Afifi and Olson 2005) over Jean, not only in 1962 but long after her death. Furthermore, a secret so intimate had to be continually concealed, so that it would not threaten her identity (Vangelisti et al., 2001 in Afifi and Olson 2005). So, the temporal nature of multi-relational secrets continues to contribute to present day concealment of my history. As a result, the concept of secrets between adoptee and birth family members are implicitly related to the 'concepts of gender, desire, adoption, and lack' (Hughes 2015, p. 162).

I suggest that much work needs to be done on the dynamics between individual adoption circumstances and how the concepts of secrecy, disclosure and ethereal aspects of kin interact to produce successful enduring relationships. More theorising is needed in illuminating secrets around the sensory aspects of neglect and or abuse of children which leads them to be removed from birth parents, as this impacts the majority of domestically adopted children in Britain today.

2.4.2. Theme 2 - Physical differences, sensory and gendered aspects of kin – also includes fixity of kin and houses

'Physical, bodily, material and especially *sensory* affinities' are vital to the analysis of relationality and inter-physicality in families (Mason 2008, p. 40). Furthermore, I suggest a central place for kinship connections that are regarded as or feel fixed, through biology or through other social processes, because 'time and longevity are important in consolidating fixity' (Mason 2008, p. 35). Hence, a significant reason why I have placed the concept of fixed kinship in the centre of the conceptual framework and where two or more affinities converge (Fig 1). Fixed affinities dynamically interact with other dimensions of kinship and predominantly for this study those that are 'sensory, based in feeling or familiarity, and certainly in perception' (Mason 2008, p.38).

In this way sensory and visible, physical differences are central and can be challenging to adoptive family interactions (HoL 2012a, p. 274). These may manifest in observable tangible differences between the child and their adoptive parent/s such as skin colour, hair texture, body shape, height etc. Conversely differences may also be intangible, which may include intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural (Family Law Act, 1996). For example, the first national study of children adopted from care showed that this group had lower achievement than non-adopted children but have higher achievement than looked after children (i.e. children in Local Authority care, DfE 2014, p.4).

So, this study seeks to contribute to examining the nature of sensory, gendered adoptive family interactions as:

> '….we need better understandings of the ways in which class, gender and the like are themselves sensory' (Mason and Davies 2009, p. 601).

To enable a structured analysis of physical, sensory and gendered aspects of adoptive kinship interactions this section will be divided into three:

a) Physical bodily differences/sensory bodily interactions

b) Gender differences and biological sex differences

c) Sensory differences in house relationships

a) Physical bodily differences

Interactions between innumerable combinations of differences in appearances, physical and intellectual abilities, personalities and ethnic and cultural orientations are seen as contributing to the complexity of adoptive family relationships (Dunbar and Grotevant, 2004). As an adopted child, I didn't place much emphasis on my physical likeness to others, even though I was dissimilar to both my parents in that they had brown hair and dark eyes whereas I have fair hair and blue eyes. Perhaps I was unconcerned because I felt a fixity of kin, embedded in shared memories, understandings, experience of bodily practices and coded hierarchical values. For example, I was always acclaimed to resemble my adopted Dad (Mason 2008). Furthermore, I electively wanted to belong in this resemblance.

What's more, initially as children Jamie and Jane's physical differences, such as hair, eye and skin colour were negligible from my ex-husband and myself. All the same we were not aware that the physical likeness, or the good *match* between our adopted children and us, meant that our adoptive family 'might well be invisible' (DelRosso 2015, p. 521). In other words, our adoptive family status was constructed 'as if' we were a biological family, which to outsiders, may have meant our status as an adoptive family was downplayed or overlooked. Of course, conceptually a 'perfect match' between adopters and adoptees is meaningless, yet it could also be said that as a family of four we had other opportunities in 'coming together' (HoL 2012, p. 274). For example, my heritage as an adoptee and my ex-husband's status as being raised in a one parent extended family indicated the potential physical and sensory aspects of our coming together' in 'narratives of resemblance' (Howell & Marre 2006, p. 306).

So initially, as children, a significant difference between myself and my children's adoption experience was that my physical characteristics were tangibly dissimilar to my parents, so my adoptive status was physically visible, whereas it could be said that my children's adoptive status was invisible.

Nevertheless, if opportunities exist for a coming together then the reverse is also possible. This study is interested in identifying some of the circumstances under which present and future embodied differences may be emphasised.

Records of adoptees who might have suffered physical abuse or neglect in the 1960's, when I was adopted, do not exist. In 1968, 92% of adoptions were of so-called illegitimate children (HoL 2012-13b) like me in 1962. Consequently, given my own background of being placed with my adoptive family at the age of 6 weeks, I would suggest minimal opportunity for sensory disadvantage.

In contrast, by 1991 the adoptive landscape had changed dramatically. My children were placed for adoption at the age of 12 and 23 months, when the total number of adoptions were 7,170 with 12% being under the age of one (ONS, Adoptions by date of entry in the Adopted Children Register: sex and age at adoption, 1974–2010). What is also known in relation to their sensory experiences is that they experienced physical and emotional neglect (see p. 7 for definition). There are no available figures for children adopted in the 1990's who may have been subject to sensory disadvantage, however to reiterate what has been stated earlier (p. 53), in 2012-13, 70% of adoptees were considered to be at a sensory disadvantage (DfE 2014a, p.4). As well as this there was a maternal and paternal history of Special Educational Needs (SEN). Again, no figures exist for levels of SEN in 1990's adoptees. Yet evidence from 2013 suggests that 68% of looked after children were found to have Special Educational Needs (SEN) and their emotional and behavioural health was often a cause for concern (DfE 2013). Together these embodied differences were likely to compound their sensory disadvantage.

Therefore, despite our 'coming together' as adoptees there are significant sensory and physical differences between myself as an adoptee in the 1960's and my

children in the 1990's. These include the average time period for a child entering care to entering adoption, 2 years and 7 months (DfE 2014a), neglect, abuse and a higher possibility of SEN. For my children, the journey from care in 1989/90, and adoptive placement in 1991 was not complete until they were legally adopted in 1996. Even though the support from the social services during this 5-year administrative delay was invaluable, I feel the psychological and emotional effects created a further challenge to our adoptive parenting. Indeed, adopted children who 'experienced delays in decision making… were more likely to experience disruption' (DfE 2014b, p. 6).

Jamie and Jane are genetically full brother and sister, yet they lived in separate foster homes until they moved in with us in 1991. So, the everyday embodied sensory knowledge of living together as brother and sister was denied to them.

The intertwined sensory and physical differences, such as neglect, abuse and SEN so far discussed are therefore likely to impact on interactions between members of adoptive families. As such, there are 'distinct differences between parenting an adoptive child rather than a birth child' (HoL 2012–13a, p. 19).

In these ways the dynamism inherent in family life, generally, and adoptive family life, specifically, is seen to intensify embodied differences. For example, adolescence, separation, divorce, middle age and the death of a parent are all

trigger events which may stimulate adoptees to obtain birth records (Triseliotis 1973 in Carsten 2000b).

In my case two intertwined factors caused me to trace birth parents. The physical and sensory absence caused by the death of my adoptive mother was exacerbated by a lessening physical presence of my children after my separation. This had the effect of causing me to feel more vulnerable as an adoptive mother. So, in looking for birth relatives I sensed the need to comprehend how aspects of my *fixity* of kin were comprised, or in other words how my *given* and *made* characteristics interacted (Carsten 2004; Mason 2008). Indeed, I was aware that some aspects of my *given* and *made* personality or appearance may be in 'no sense chosen' (Mason 2008, p.33). I reflected I knew nothing of my birth parents physical resemblances, how they moved, how they walked, how they ate and spoke, how they laughed or how they might display anger. This prompted my curiosity, at the age of 47, to find out if I resembled anyone and became the major reason for my search (Carsten 2004, Grotevant and Von Korff 2011, Jones, C. 2013).

So, embodied differences in adoptive family interactions are subject to fluctuations or complete transformation in and through time. Other significant embodied differences are related to gender and biological sex differences, which could unrest degrees of similarity or difference in adopters' characteristics. There are a wealth of publications for adoptive children and their families in outlining the importance of developing physical and sensory interactions, one recent example is 'The Boy Who Built a Wall around Himself' (Redford 2015). Yet negligible specific research can be

located concerning physical and sensory interactions between adult adoptees and their kin. These themes are explored in the next section.

b) Gender differences and biological sex differences

Undeniably the years around marriage, and the rituals of life such as birth, marriage and death are those most characterised by striking differences in gendered relationships (Carsten 2004). In these periods small imperceptible physical, sensory and gendered differences would be made more salient because the secret markers of social, and biological difference from preceding contexts are likely to become known (Laqueur 1990). Key reasons why adoptive family interactions should be studied in more depth around the times of these events. Indeed, a contribution of this study is illustrating the challenging problem of what it means to the ongoing welfare of adoptees in noticing 'degrees of similarity and difference' across the lifecycle (H.o.L. 2012 p. 274).

A starting premise for the study of differences in gendered interactions in adoptive family relationships is that we need to be careful in distinguishing the apparently natural physical sexual differences between men and women from the cultural meanings that are attached to them. Hence, it is important to understand the differences between 'what is given' and 'what is made' (Carsten 2004) and significantly what this might mean for the connection between sex and gender.

Of mutual importance to this study is the argument that, like kinship, gender cannot be separated from 'biological facts' (Yanagisako and Collier 1987). Yanagisako et

al., feminist critique of kinship asserted that analysis of kinship and gender had taken for granted what had to be explained, significantly that men and women's bodies, sexual difference and sexual procreation should be examined and understood. Substantially, adoptive kinship - and I would say adoptive motherhood - adds a further dimension to this, because the 'biological facts' of my gender is that I am not my daughter's biological mother. A fact relevant to addressing research question one: what physical and other-worldly interactions are observed between an adoptive mother and daughter?

So, in exploring the critical study of kinship Yanagisako and Collier (1987) make two assertions. Firstly, that there is no separation between culture (the ethno in this study) and biology. Secondly, that there is no pre-cultural biology outside social construction.

Initially as an adopted female, my culture (or the ethno in this autoethnography) is that I was raised in an adoptive family culture, so it could be said that my gender was socially constructed in that I was *made* (Carsten 2004) to be an adoptive mother. Likewise, my daughter's upbringing as an adopted female in an adoptive family culture could have had the same effect in constructing her as a future adoptive mother. In this way my daughter and I have a connection, a common origin or a "relatedness" (Carsten 2000a).

Secondly, Yanagisako and Collier (1987) state that there is no pre-cultural biology outside social construction. This might suggest that because my daughter was socially constructed as an adopted female, she knew how to be an adopted female

and so an adoptive mother. Yet the social constructivist position emphasises that it is a *given* for the female sex to biologically have children, so reiterating the bio-essentialism view (Schneider 1980). This being the case, and as Jane was constructed in an adoptive family culture, it could have been very difficult for her in becoming a biological mother. Indeed:

> 'Birth re-establishes—reasserts—the persistent and unruly connection between women and their mothers, the symbolic and the semiotic, in the choric womb of possibility' (Holman Jones 2005, p.120).

So, for Jane, biological motherhood was connected to a birth mother she only knew from a photograph in her life story book. From my own perspective as an adoptee who didn't have that, I believed the visual, sensory understanding provided by a few photographs was really useful for Jane and Jamie. On the other hand, Jane hardly looked at the life story book, so maybe the photographic presence actually evoked intangible sensory (Mason 2008) connections, which may have been confusing at best and alien at worst.

Indeed, views of socially constructed and biological reductive views of kin are not sought here, this as Wilson (2016) insist is a false dichotomy. Nevertheless, some essential themes should be noted around biology and culture and between sex and gender which are significant in relation to studying adoptive kinship.

Butler (*Bodies that matter* 1993) attempts to explain the way in which the materiality of sex is materially produced:

> 'Construction not only takes place in time, but is itself a temporal process, operating through a reiteration of norms; sex is both produced and

> destabilised in the course of this reiteration. As a sedimented effect of a reiterative or ritual practice, sex acquires its naturalised effects' (1993, p.10).

As the female body performs sexual interactions throughout time perhaps we can understand how the act of referring to bodies actually helps to create them. Sex and gender are the products of historically and culturally situated discourses, central to producing their current reality (Foucault 1978).

So, the cultures in which my daughter and I were *made* have been subject to different influences in constructing our gender. Firstly, the processes of how we came to be adopted was different; secondly, our intra-familial relationships were comprised differently; and thirdly, the process of us becoming mothers was also dissimilar. For reasons of focus and space this study is mainly concerned with the first and second of these influences.

The reasons for my daughter's and my own adoption were very different and relate to how our gender could have been constructed. As a baby I was *given* away. Being relinquished freely by my birth mother meant that I was not aware of an apparent adverse or tarnished history, therefore my self-esteem as a female would not have been affected. Jane's circumstances were entirely different. Knowing that she was *taken* away from birth parents because they could not look after her may have impacted feelings of sensory detriment. Such feelings could create a need for Jane to prove her worthiness as a female, so this intangible pre-cultural marker may have been a strong reason Jane became a biological mother at the age of 17.

For me, becoming a mother through adoption was a legitimate action, not a last resort. As Baxter et al (2014) note from their study of online stories of domestic adoption, some of their participants 'had planned all along to adopt….mainly because *one of the partners* (authors italics) is…..adopted' (p. 260). Furthermore, because of my social construction as an adopted woman I knew, unlike some of Baxter et al's participants, that I would be able to love a non-biological child. Consequently, adopting a child for me was 'positioned discursively equal to biological reproduction' (Baxter et al. 2014, p. 260).

So, it seems our female gendered characteristics were *made* (Carsten 2004) differently. This can be illustrated through interpersonal interactions. As Laqueur (1990) states these can disrupt the relation between biology and culture and between sex and gender:

> 'a distinction between the body and the body as discursively constituted, between seeing and seeing as' (Laqueur 1990, p.15).

How bodies are discursively constituted is important when considering the themes of sensory gendered interactions in fairy tales as omnipresent child rearing material. For example, in the Disney film *Tangled*, once Rapunzel's biological mother is identified her adoptive or step mother is portrayed as not only having to leave but also has to degenerate. This emphasises the western view of biological kinship that adoptive motherhood is a second-best option (Dougherty 2009 in Baxter et al. 2014). The adoptive or other(ed) mother must depart, so that the true mother and daughter can reunite without impediment (DelRosso 2015).

So, when Rapunzel meets her birth mother the narrator tell us “Rapunzel was home. And she finally had a *real* family.” (DelRosso 2015, p. 529) This creates a problem particularly for young adopted females such as Jane, because the word *real* is universally used to describe the biological family. So how does a young adopted woman reconcile having two mothers? For the film makers, there is little critique of updating a much older historical narrative around adoption stigma. Therefore, the difficulty of having two mothers is resolved, in that ‘one must not be real, must not be human, must not be loving’ (Ibid, p. 528).

This would seem to resonate with my experience and that of other adoptive mothers in this study, when Jane said to me in 2009 ‘*you’re nobody’*, *you’re nothing’*, and ‘*you’re not my real mum anyway*’. As my female body had not ‘given birth’ it would seem that my body was discursively constituted as unmade. Here the evidence points to the view that Jane not only ‘saw as’ a biological mother, but it would seem that Jane’s physical interactions and ‘contemptuous’ dialogue (Bartram 2003) displayed how she wanted her body to be ‘read’ by others as a being more powerfully constituted than mine. Furthermore, married couples appropriately exclude their children from adult interactions, yet at the time of Jane’s discourse, I had left the marital home and Jane was living with her adoptive father. This dialogue therefore suggests that Jane’s adoptive father may not have excluded her from adult interactions, a factor which could encourage the development of an oedipal complex.

Hence the iteration of *real/unreal* is a demonstration of an adoption microassault (Baden 2016), namely an outward, verbal or non-verbal attack which is 'intended to hurt the target through name-calling, avoidant or exclusionary behaviour' (Baden 2016, p. 7). In this way, Jane's remarks seemed to signify her belief in the fundamental nature of biological forms of kinship (Schneider 1980). For myself, a person who chose to be an adoptive mother, I saw adoptive motherhood as equal to biological motherhood. Clearly Jane did not.

What's more, I could not only have been perceived to be a second-best adoptive mother but a separated adoptive mother, who no longer accepted the patriarchal ramifications of marriage (DelRosso 2015). Reflecting on this I now believe that my decision to divorce, or in other words my decision not to be somebody's wife, was also another reason Jane discursively named me a '*nobody*'. So, when Jane called me *Christine* rather than *Mum* this could be seen to be an example of referring to my body not as her kin but as a non-relative. A position borne out by other interactions between us.

Hence this study is interested in adoptive family interactions which involve: 'the internal relations between parts of persons as well as to their externalisation as relations between persons' (Strathern 1988, p. 185).

After all,

> '…..human bodies and the cultures in which they grow cannot be separated conceptually without seriously misconstruing the nature of each' (Errington 1990, p. 14).

A review of the literature suggests that adoptive family interpersonal relationships can be significantly understood by examining how the concepts of sex and gender are subject to shifting dynamics around adolescence, young adulthood and middle age.

To conclude this section, the interactions contained within this study have the capacity to contribute to lived adoption experience, by illuminating perceptions of physical gendered differences which may display power and control. My experience echoes Hughes's subject *Grace*, a female adoptee who met her birth father, in that to some extent my narrative reverses the 'normative gendered positions of the safe, nurturing maternal figure and shadowy, undependable biological father' (Hughes 2015, p.161). Hence this is a reason to theorise around the widely neglected birth father (Hughes 2015, Clifton 2012). This is relevant to addressing research question two.

Hence, this study seeks to extend knowledge around kinship interactions by exploring 'gendered constructions of family roles' (Colaner et al. 2014). Including 'gendered dynamics of adoptive kinship' (Hughes 2015, p. 151).

In this way, how sexual difference and gender is understood in adoptive family cultures has the capacity to unite the spheres of kinship and gender.

Hughes rightly states further questions are raised 'about the possible differences in the gendered subject positions of male and female adoptees' (Hughes 2015, p.161).

So, I suggest because females are expected to biologically reproduce in the Western hegemonic tradition, there is much to be explored around the subtle differences in sexual and gendered interactions between *given* or *taken away* adopted daughters, their adopted and birth mothers compared with adopted and birth fathers. Likewise, interactions between adopted sons with their adoptive and birth fathers versus adoptive and birth mothers. These gendered relationships are explored to a greater or lesser extent in all four research questions, so potentially contributing to the academic literature whilst also being valuable to adoptive parents, adoptees and the wider general public.

Finally, it is important to investigate houses as the place where everyday adoptive family interactions take place, the next section will do this.

c) Sensory differences in house relationships

Anthropologists recognise the significant, qualitative density of kinship relations can be effectively studied from inside homes, indeed Carsten (2004) suggests houses are worthy places to begin to examine kinship. As an adopted daughter the everyday intimacies and movements of my kin in the home we shared meant that my memories became internalised, understandings became shared, 'bodily memories' known, and hierarchical values encoded (Carsten 2018, p.105). So, by the processes of living, sharing space, place, food and nurturance it could be said that 'kinship is *made* in houses' (Carsten 2004, p. 35).

For adoptees who might be experiencing loss or uncertainty, houses lived in in childhood can provide security and stability. On leaving my husband in 2007 I

returned to live in the home I inhabited as a child, and so I also returned to harmonious memories of my past. I named my home ‘sanctuary’ (epiphany 2), aware that this place and space was a ‘haven in both a literal and metaphorical sense’ (Carsten 2004, p. 55). Moreover, adoptees who know their family history involved ownership of family land, as mine also did, are able to bestow a sense of history that enables them to ‘feel connected to the previous generations despite her lack of a shared bloodline’ (Colaner et al. 2014, p. 478) and in my case the lack of my adoptive parents’ physical presence. Furthermore, momentous occasions such as the sharing of adoption documents or life stories, are likely to happen between adoptive parents and adoptees in houses. So, attention to the site of these interactions can go some way to addressing research question three.

However, as well as being the site of harmonious memories houses can also be fragile, susceptible to disruption (Carsten 2004). So like Bourdieu (1990) who believed the house could be seen to be a series of opposites, I consider that kinship can also be unmade in houses. For example, the link between marriage or divorce and the house is consequently often physically or materially expressed. My experience echoes that divorce is an occasion where the assets held within jointly owned homes are disputed. Likewise, my absence from the disputed family home and my daughters’ presence (epiphany 1) seemed to have the effect of juxtaposing our kinship affinities. In this way I suggest the gendered interactions in the marital home could be significant in *unmaking* kinship between Jane and I. As such, literature conceptualising houses is useful to understanding interactions between an adoptive mother and daughter that took place in the contested marital home and so are important to addressing research question one.

Bourdieu understood the importance of the sequence of opposites in relation to houses: above and below, men and women, inside and outside, dark and light (*The Logic of Practice 1990*). He also noted that (in the Kabyle house) the physical structure of the house reproduced gendered divisions. Interestingly, this chimes with the first occasion I met Ralph who was outside his home, and Jean who chose to remain inside her home.

Hence in pursuing consistencies with the ideas of Bourdieu and the nature of opposites, I have become reflexively aware that Ralph recognised and demonstrated the sensory and ritualistic significance of the threshold of our meeting as 'the place where the world is reversed' (Bourdieu 1990, p. 282-3). For example, Ralph deliberately considered the way in which he was going to meet me, where he would be and how he would appear in the first moments we saw each other. As I knocked on what was the entrance to the back of the house he appeared from another door, he was metaphorically and physically in his doorway. He then walked down a few steps to be on the same level as me. I met Ralph in winter, but he later wrote about the moment we met *as I stepped out my door into bright summer day*.

Or, in other words, the threshold was 'connected with the breaking point of a life' (Bakhtin 1981, p. 248) Indeed our meeting, fell out of the normal course of the biographical. In this way Ralph's writing also recognised how *time fell away*. These moments of meeting were rhythmically mysterious in 'the decision that changes a life' (Bakhtin 1981, p. 248).

Ralph tangibly conveyed a sense of seniority in his embodiment and symbolism (Carsten 2004) by, for example, always sitting in the only arm chair in the sitting room, the said arm chair being directly opposite the TV. This was very similar to my experiences with my adoptive father. Whether aware of this or not Ralph also reproduced meaning in his seniority by moving quite deliberately within his house, a personification of confidence and prestige, the aura of a man who was assured of his persona and achievements. I came to know almost immediately that in Ralph's house the studio and lounge were particularly seen as political spaces, where discussions took place. Conversely, there was a lack of tangible experience of the domestic spaces in the house. For example, traditions around food and celebrations are so powerful because they are 'enacted in sensory, palpable and embodied registers' and in specific places, consequently they have importance to this study (Mason and Muir 2013, p. 27). This literature therefore resonates with research question four, where kinship interactions took place around Christmastime.

In this way, memories of the interactions of the first time I met Ralph and Jean are intense in both tangible and intangible ways (Mason 2009). Not least because learning social distinctions within the house is clearly not just domestically significant, it has an inherently political and economic importance. Furthermore, and importantly for this study, the naturalisation of hierarchy usually felt in familiar kinship relationships is distorted in adoptive family reunions. So, when adoptees first step into a home belonging to a member of their birth family they are also stepping into a culture which may be politically, economically and socially different, where the naturalisation of hierarchy may be unfamiliar. So, I suggest house culture is

important to exploring adoptive kinship interactions in that it is one-way domestic kinship is connected to the world outside the house.

Although much work remains to be done on cross cultural interactions between adoptive and birth family relationships, the sensory connections that seemed to become important were related to generational roles, gender and age (Carsten 2004) and houses as inevitable sites of wider historical processes.

To conclude, I suggest adoptive kinship can be valuably examined through houses as significant places of kinship interactions. Hughes (2015) has explored the links between gendered dynamics of adoptive kinship and opened a space for theorising the neglected birth father. This study echoes these themes and seeks to develop recognition of how inter-physical and intergenerational interactions between adoptive and birth family members are practiced and replicated in houses.

2.4.3. Theme 3 - Narrating and negotiating aspects of kin, including relatedness

A third challenge to adoptive family relationships is narrating, creating and negotiating relationships that are just beginning, as well as those which are already established. Indeed, in the disciplines of sociology and anthropology

'…. practices of negotiation and creativity are crucial in kinship' (Mason 2008, p. 36).

Time and collective situated interactions between intergenerational kin are also key to understanding how negotiations intersect with the feeling of fixity in adoptive

kinship. In addition, as previous sections demonstrate, adoptive kinship interactions are further impacted by differences in gender, sexuality, physical differences and secrecy.

Historically speaking, social anthropology conceptualised adoption as 'fictive kinship' (Schneider 1984). As Jones notes, 'the term 'fictive' has a range of meanings including fictitious, pretend and sham as well as fashioned or made' (Jones, C. 2013, p. 89, Mason 2008). Therefore, suggesting that adoptive kinship is inauthentic.

As adoption is not based in biological kinning it has been said to be discourse-dependent (Galvin, 2006). If as Hecht et al. (2005) asserts communication constitutes our identity, then social interaction changes and contains an individual's sense of self. Consequently, a sense of self is both relational and discursive (Hecht et al. 2005). So, in the absence of genetic kinship, adoptees create and sustain affinity with their adoptive family through shared traits, understandings and practices (Colaner et al. 2014), as well as arguably through dialogue and reciprocity (Levi-Strauss 1949[69] in Carsten 2004). However, a reliance on communication, negotiation and dialogue should not deny the influence of inherited biological traits of adoptees. In this way I would agree with Carsten (2004) that kinship can be understood in the 'nexus around what is given and what is made' Carsten (2004). This is especially true of adoptive kinship in attempting to make sense of interactions between kin.

So, relatedness means engaging in a ‘complex process of interweaving social and biological idioms of being related’ (Carsten 2000a, p. 16). For example, practicing relatedness for myself and my daughter as adoptees would mean interweaving our social kinning, as mother and daughter as well as interweaving our unknown, different biological heritage. As adoptees the social relatedness between Jane, I and our inter-generational relationships was created by time and experiences. Notably, I was able to negotiate known aspects of my birth with my adoptive kin. Likewise, David, I and Jane’s Grandmothers were able to negotiate known aspects of Jane’s (and Jamie’s) birth kinship (from their adoption documents) with their adoptive relatedness. However significantly, as adoptees, and as adoptive mother and daughter, Jane and I would be at a distinct disadvantage in being able to negotiate the unknown, secret or ethereal aspects of our differently comprised birth affinities. Yet Jane was also able to practice a somewhat secret element of her biological relatedness by growing up with her biological brother (Jamie). For myself, growing up as an only child, my anonymous biological origin meant that in becoming an adoptive mother I was ‘less concerned with biology as a basis for meaningful relatedness’ (Howell and Marre 2006, p. 300). Furthermore, in placing a value on social relatedness as a basis for kinship, I upheld my belief as an educator that kinship was constructed through nurture. When details of biological heritage are secret, which was to a different extent the case for both Jane, I and David (coming from a one parent family), it could be argued that interweaving our different biological relatedness was unknown and unmapped and therefore perhaps more complex. On the other hand, it could be argued, for adoptive mothers (or fathers) who know their biological heritage the process of interweaving social and biological idioms of being related will possibly be less complex.

In the same way practising social relatedness, between myself and my unknown birth mother, who I met at the age of 47, may well be complex. Being biologically related does not mean that we would find interweaving our different social kinship experiences easy, the interaction of our *given* and *made* characteristics would be subject to negotiation (Carsten 2004). Furthermore, our relationship would also be dependent upon how my birth mother felt stigma in 1962 and beyond. Internalising this might have caused her to feel shame and discrimination which would prevent her being open (Scambler 2009).

To aid systematic discourse this section is further sub divided into two sections;

a) Negotiating practices of care through adoption documents

b) Significant family occasions such as Christmas

a) Negotiating practices of care through adoption documents

A significant starting point in negotiating adoptive family relationships occur around the child's life story book (Galvin and Colaner 2014). Interactions around the content, presentation and tone are substantial in relation to the impact on the child.

Jamie and Jane's life story book was written by social workers. The four pages in a red ring binder were written in child friendly, pre-school language and contained

three photographs of their birth parents. Nevertheless, because Jamie and Jane lived separately before they were adopted and because Jamie's social worker was the author of the book, this meant that Jane was tacked on, her story beginning on the last page. I suggest this diminished Jane's importance as an individual in her own right, serving almost to erase her. This supports Watson et al.'s (2015) findings in that children were constantly clear that their life story book should be of their account.

The life story book did give a short account of their birth parents' story, but from the social workers perspective in stating '*your parents loved you but were unable to look after you'*. Nevertheless, this language suggests an incapability, according to Scambler (2009) a moral deficit, which could be associated with feelings of blame. As parents we did not wish to pass on these feelings of blame to our children. In this context it is understandable that decisions are taken to regulate potentially harmful or distressing information (Colaner and Kranstuber 2010). Indeed, truthfully sharing potentially damaging information without demonising birth parents is difficult and almost impossible without a 'lack of ongoing, appropriate, adoption support from childhood into early adulthood' (HoL 2012, p. 814).

Furthermore, a lack of truth telling, together with inadequate adoption support on top of the added dimension of contact via social networking, particularly after Facebook opened in 2009 'is causing massive problems for adoptive families of all ages throughout the UK' (HoL 2012, p. 814). This is one element of the adoptee and adoption experience which has changed over the course of this study, becoming directly relevant to my family experience in 2017. In this way social media is both a

warning and an opportunity for adoption. A warning because uninitiated contact between adoptees and birth relatives could traumatise already vulnerable adoptees. And a positive opportunity as geographically separate adoptive groups and social workers can share information quickly in working together to support challenging adoptive family relationships (e.g. Twitter). Furthermore, in my recent social media experience, many successful, well balanced adoptees of my generation and younger, are sharing stories of so-called reunion failures across national boundaries. This highlights the difficulty of maintaining adoptive and birth family relationships across time, relationships and generations.

Returning to the life story book, in verbal interactions with Jamie and Jane the words written there were interpreted to mean that their birth parents couldn't feed them, change them or comfort them when they were crying etc. There was no mention of sensory deprivation, neglect or abuse.

Reflecting on this many years later, I was acutely aware that my children's life story book narrated what happened, but not why it happened. This brings into question the capability of social workers at that time to convey analysis as well as narrative (HoL evidence 2012). Unsurprisingly, life story books which analyse reasons why a child was adopted are of vital importance to the child (Watson et al. 2015). Consequently, Jamie and Jane's life story book was filtered, in effect a 'sanitised version(s) of the truth' (HoL 2012a, p 814).

The filtering by adoption professionals and by us naively as adoptive parents meant that Jamie and Jane's story was partial and 'untold' (Baynes 2008 in Watson et al.

2015). Taking into account children's maturity and needs, adoptive parents consider when and how to engage in 'discourses of preparation, modelling, and debriefing' (Suter et al. 2011, p. 242). Unfortunately, for us as parents, the added dimension of our separation meant that there was a hiatus in any planned discourse, this meant that when Jane was 18 had left home and had become a mother herself, she and Jamie (age 19) visited my home with Tom as spokesperson, demanding their adoption documents (epiphany 3). Unsurprisingly, children like Jane 'who had left home were more likely to have had difficulty talking about adoption related issues' (DfE 2014, p. 13).

I now believe that the narratives of physical resemblance, particularly between David, Jane and Jamie (when they were children) could be the grounds for feeling a sensory match. Nevertheless, this could contradict the mismatch Jane and Jamie might have felt in the partial and untold contents of their life story book. This confusion could have 'created inner conflict which manifests as challenging behaviour' (HoL 2012, p.814). In potent circumstances, where there is an incoherent story, children could begin to fantasise, and so develop 'roles such as *victim, persecutor or rescuer* which could inhibit the adopted person moving forward in their life' (Watson et al. 2015, p. 96, Simmonds, 2000). In this way, an adopted child may lose possibilities to become an active agent of their own narrative, which inevitably may have an adverse impact on mental health (Watson et al. 2015).

Accordingly, adoptive family interactions are characteristically complex and reliant upon interpersonal relationships, as numerous contributors 'negotiate and

renegotiate' their personal and relational selves across lifetimes (Galvin and Colaner 2014, p.192).

Importantly for this study, research question three seeks to illuminate interpersonal interactions between myself and my son when discussing adoption documents, supplementary to his life story book. Such conversations were potentially more difficult with my daughter because her story contained 'more examples of poor life story work that parents thought had exacerbated the child's difficulties' (DfE 2014b, p. 16).

Furthermore, the site of adoptive kinship discussions are significant, and so I suggest the anthropological literature on houses is noteworthy to this analysis. Consequently, memories of familial houses from childhood, where repetitive bodily practices such as feeding, nurturing and conversation take place, resonate in both a material and aesthetic manner, hence have an astonishing haunting power (Carsten 2004). In and through homes many of the rules of social life are routinely decided and therefore reproduce relatedness (Carsten 2000a).

b) Significant family occasions such as Christmas

I have been unable to locate sources of literature that analyse adoptive and birth family kinship at Christmastime. So, this section contains literature around the importance of Christmas customs for family relationships generally and the interpersonal features of a new relationship with my birth mother.

Significantly for most families and notably for my experience of adoptive family interactions, Christmas takes place in houses, with women as likely keepers of ritual and tradition (Rosenthal and Marshall, 1988; Friedman and Weissbrod, 2004 in Mason and Muir 2013). Notably, I live in the same house now that I lived in as a child, so as a woman I could be said to be keeping the ritual and tradition that my adoptive mum created in this place. Significantly, my memories evoke specific interpersonal, 'multidimensional, embodied, emplaced and sensory' connections (Mason and Muir 2013, p 607).

Relevant to this study are how sensory and negotiated activities such as opening presents, cooking, hugging, and kissing become significant to memories and so feelings of relatedness (Carsten 2000a). Family times 'engaged with, imbibed and remembered, through full sensory and embodied registers' (Mason and Muir 2013, p. 625). This means that even though my adoptive parents are no longer alive, the Christmas memories I have of my mother, father and grandparents as a child and those of my mother with my children 30 years later, proved to be multifaceted, intergenerational and so profoundly relational. Potentially forming an 'unbroken line of family tradition' (Gillis 1997, p. 93–4).

Hence this work is concerned with how an adoptee attempted to negotiate Christmas arrangements (research question 4) at a point of transition, not long after meeting my birth mother. Life events such as birth, marriage or in my case meeting my birth mother can trigger negotiations over embracing and forming new or revised

Christmas traditions. Conversely, such a life event could also become 'the subject of debate and negotiation because of the moral exchanges between and within generations' (Mason and Muir 2013, p. 607). Nevertheless, any moral negotiations between Jean and I were also subject to the added dimension that we did not yet have an intergenerational relationship or, because we had only known each other 3 months, an established feeling of *relatedness* (Carsten 2000a). My adoptive mother was very confident about her role as my mother, we felt very secure in our mother, daughter relationship, and therefore I was able to go into a relationship with my birth mother with negligible expectations. Even so, I found developing a relationship with my birth mother more challenging than I expected (Richardson et al 2013).

This points to an inherent opposition in addressing research question 4 in that family Christmases can be 'warm and affirming, powerfully magical and positive, but also negative, difficult, fraught, painful, exclusionary and oppressive' (Mason and Muir 2013, p. 625).

2.5. Summary of the Literature Review

Anderson's five key factors for analytical autoethnography offered a valuable structure for evaluating selected autoethnographies in the literature review. However, no studies were found that applied Anderson's five key criteria in order to understand adoptive family interactions. Which therefore led me to locate sources and themes that resonated with my experience. These were found within literature

on adoptive family themes (Galvin and Colaner 2014) and kinship (Mason 2008, Carsten 2004).

Analysis of the autoethnographies from the literature review confirm that the authors are adoptees or adoptive parents and occupy academic roles, these characteristics are synonymous with being an opportunistic CMR. This could be a concern for the continuation of this type of research in that it is potentially exclusionary for authors who hold other non-academic roles.

Nevertheless, Adler and Adler (1987) corroborate that as a female adoptee, adoptive mother and birth daughter I come closest of all to appraising the emotional stance of these three groups of CMR's, all important facets informing the contribution of this study. I acknowledge that it is not unproblematic to be a CMR who occupies three intersecting roles, nevertheless this could also be seen as a superiority of the CMR perspective in that I can practice inter-subjective reflexivity in dialogue with family members and others (Anderson 2006). I find this extremely valuable to being able to synthesise somewhat ethereal intangible aspects of my hidden birth self with my tangible adoptive self.

I agree that the literature concerning how an author achieves analytic reflexivity offers different perspectives. Suggestions include by engaging in disclosure (Schwartz 2018), self-conscious introspection (Rodriguez and Ryave 2002) and perspective taking through a narrative presence (Ballard 2011). Yet the process of how an author actually achieves these is less clear.

So, in dialogue with family members, other female adoptees and adoptive mothers I aim to complement and challenge my own narrative. This is in distinct contrast to the autoethnographies in the literature review. Furthermore, I do not dismiss concerns of the crisis of representation in that I consider this text to be a partial and temporary performance (Denzin 2003). I also acknowledge that, as a result of engaging in self-conscious introspection, features of interactions have been revealed which otherwise may have remained unseen. Herein lies the transformative power of autoethnography (Ellis et al. 2011). So as my own views have changed over time it is difficult to anticipate how this privileged frozen in time narrative may be perceived by others (Lapadat 2017).

After this review I consider the use of autoethnography as my research design to be fully justified. The originality of this research stems from linking the adoptive family research themes provided by Galvin and Colaner (2014) with kinship affinities (Mason 2008) and the anthropological concepts of what is given and what is made (Carsten 2004). These are presented within an analytic autoethnography which is informed by Anderson's (2006) five key factors and Chang's (2008) 10 strategies for data analysis.

This thesis offers new knowledge in response to the gap within the literature regarding adult adoptive family interactions that are seen to be sensory, physical, negotiated and ethereal or secretive. The new knowledge will emphasise the potential contribution of analytic autoethnography to studying adoptive family

interactions through the life span (O'Leary Wiley 2017), including adoption kinship relationships through time (Brodzinsky 2010, p. 278) and importantly from the inside.

2.6. Research Questions Refined/revised

In light of the literature review, the research questions are refined to reflect observed and experienced adoptive family interactions as seen through key theory.

The theme of physical differences was already of vital importance within the adoption literature and acknowledged as central in research question one. In phrasing this question, initially, I was aware that negotiation in adoptive families is a central theme, one which would to a greater or lesser extent impact the nature of interactions. For this reason, negotiation as a concept also needed to be added. Moreover, the general kinship literature broadened understanding of the sensory nature of family interactions, hence as a major epiphany this question was revised accordingly:

1. What fixed, sensory, negotiated, secret or ethereal interactions can be observed between an adoptive mother and adopted daughter?

In the same way, because research question two occurs around a major epiphany in adoptive family relationships all theory would be relevant and therefore was added to this question. Furthermore, after consulting the anthropology literature I became aware of the tangible importance of gendered family relationships. So revised questions, two three and four importantly place myself, as a female adoptee central to this autoethnographic account, with other significant gendered family relationships now visibly acknowledged.

2. What fixed, sensory, secret or ethereal interactions can be observed between a female adoptee and her birth father?

Research question three and four become more specific with the addition of the sensory theme.

3. What sensory and negotiated interactions can be observed between an adoptive mother and her children in relation to their adoption documents?

4. What sensory and negotiated interactions can be observed between an adoptee and her birth mother at Christmastime?

The revised research questions are used to structure and guide the data analysis in relation to systematic self-observation and self-introspection of epiphanies as presented in the next chapter (See Table 3.3 section 3.5.2.).

Chapter 3 – Methodology and Methods

The literature reviewed in chapter 2 showed that there is a paucity of autoethnographic accounts which illuminate everyday adoptive family interactions and none from a triadic perspective equivalent to my own (see 2.3.1.). Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to justify the use of autoethnography as a methodology for exploring my own first-hand experiences of kinship interactions, as an adopted daughter, an adoptive mother and a birth daughter. Autoethnography is suited to investigating social science disciplines associated with my focus such as anthropology (Behar, 1996; Reed-Danahay, 1997), sociology (Denzin, 1997, 2006) and communications (Ellis and Bochner, 1996, 2000).

This chapter is structured through nine sections. In the first section I demonstrate that autoethnographic research requires 'robust patience, deep introspection, and the ability to regularly (re)visit and (re)view your own epistemological and ontological position' (Campbell 2017, p. 13). My epistemological stance logically informs the centrality of the choice of autoethnography as my methodology in the second section. Given that, I do not see a binary distinction between evocative and analytic autoethnography, I see a continuum (Allen-Collinson 2013). Furthermore, in section 3.2.1., the five key features of analytic autoethnography (Anderson 2006) are key to affording me the ability to systematically analyse personal experience through adoption themes (Galvin and Colaner 2014), kinship affinities (Mason 2008) and anthropological concepts of what is given and what is made (Carsten 2004). In the third section, procedural, situational and relational ethical processes are systematically clarified, ensuring this research is relevant not only to specific

adoptive kinship groups, but more generally to reconstituted families and those not necessarily formed through adoption. Fourthly, the research design provides a basis for the data collection and analysis plan and is informed by eminent autoethnographers Anderson (2006), Ellis (2004) and Chang (2008). In the fifth section methods within the research design have been chosen to support my thinking and observing as an ethnographer. This includes data from personal memory, gained through observation of participation and data from self-observation and self-introspection, such as a timeline of events, kinship diagrams and excerpts of a reflexive journal. I do not rely exclusively on personal memory and recall as a data source, which also demonstrates that this writing is 'not excessively focussed on the self in isolation of others' (Chang 2016, p.54). External perspectives are represented through data from dialogue with 10 interview participants and data from email extracts. In section six, the verisimilitude of the methodology is strengthened through application of a critically self-reflective two-way conversation with themes from theory, together with systematic and knowledgeable interpretations of the data collected. In the seventh section I discuss management of data analysis through Chang's (2008) 10 strategies. In section eight I explore the types of writing styles in autoethnographies. I choose to use a multiplicity of narrative techniques such as themed excerpts of my reflexive diary. This foregrounds the literary device of epiphany and forms an important part of the layered, evocative writing as practiced by Rambo Ronai (1992, 1995) and Ellis (2004, 2018). Finally, I summarise methodological decisions in section nine.

3.1. Epistemological stance

In this section I offer the reader a sense of who I am, why I am researching this so that they know why they should believe me. My honesty is interwoven with observing the importance of artefacts, use of place, space, and texts in adoptive family culture. In other words, a 'bricolage of recorded practices of self-representation that revealed various and significant processes in the constitution of *my* (author's addition) female self' (Duckworth et al. 2016). I am unusual being an adoptee and adoptive mother but not unique. One of the ten research participants, Tracy also possess these characteristics (see Table 1.2.).

Growing up as an adopted person I have developed a strong belief that the nature of knowledge of what constitutes the different aspects of *my self* cannot fully be known through positivistic means. In the sense that, the understanding that knowledge is partial, fragmentary and interpretive is an important aspect of the circumstances, values and beliefs that have been central to my sense of self. This is intrinsically linked to my status as an adopted person. Accordingly, I am not interested in measuring observable aspects of the culture of adoptive families, preferring instead to capture specific meanings from detailed interactions. I consciously hold an experience-orientated interpretive view of the world, being hermeneutic and idiographic in stance (Goodley et al.2004). This is particularly evident as I consider my double identity, birth and adoptive. My distinctive epistemological stance stems primarily from understanding that my double identity is subject to further fragmentations. I have simultaneously played different roles, as an adopted daughter, an adoptive mother and more recently a birth daughter to a birth father and a birth mother I found at the age of 47.

Initially, as an adopted child, a significant aspect of my kinship culture involved being brought up in a Christian home. Hence the nature of an epiphany and how this relates to adoption inspires my epistemology. In Christian theology, an epiphany signifies the manifestation of a hidden message for the benefit of others, a message for their salvation. The word epiphany is derived from a Greek word *Epiphania*, meaning to show, make known, or reveal. The Oxford Dictionary (2016) defines epiphany as 'a moment of sudden and great revelation or realization'. James Joyce (1882-1941) described short prose sketches written in the first person as 'silhouettes', he never defined these as epiphanies but in his novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) it is clear that the central character, Stephen Dedalus believes that epiphanies are a sudden and momentary showing or disclosure of one's authentic inner self. 'This disclosure might manifest itself in vulgarities of speech, or gestures, or memorable phases of the mind' (James Joyce Centre 2016). Borrowing from Joyce's use of the concept, I suggest adoptees have the capacity (perhaps more than most) to recognise momentary displays of one's authentic inner self as particularly unfamiliar or secret, as I have (Galvin and Colaner 2014). Hence, I choose to use *epiphany* as a narrative event of significance as 'life is shaped by key turning point moments' (Denzin 2014, p. 12). In this work epiphanies are recognised through flashes of insight in interactions between family members. These flashes exemplify and interpret how Mason's Kinship Affinities (2008) fixed, negotiated, sensory and ethereal are felt and experienced. Furthermore, according to Denzin (2014) there are four types of epiphany which adds further layers of analysis to these moments (see Table 3.2).

Alternatively, if I had chosen not to use epiphanies in defining moments of sudden and great revelation in adoptive kinship I could use other documentary devices in a similar way. This might include *fateful moments* (Giddens 1991) which are said to occur when individuals' decisions are particularly consequential for their future lives and identity. Another form of epiphany could be considered as a *critical incidence* (Flanagan 1954). These are occurrences which positively or negatively contribute to an activity or event. Lastly, as a qualitative autoethnographic researcher, I could also have chosen to use *vignettes* as 'vivid portrayal[s]of the conduct of an event of everyday life' (Erickson 1986, p. 149 in Humphreys 2005, p. 842).

What interests me about epiphanies is the unfamiliar momentary display of an inner self, that resonates with aspects of kinship that are in no sense chosen so 'a part of kinship is non-electively there, whether we choose it or not' (Mason 2008, p. 33). Consequently, for some adoptees who choose not to meet birth parents, I suggest that momentary displays of one's authentic inner self remain secret, unfamiliar or unexplained (Galvin and Colaner 2014). Yet they are ever present and 'waiting for you' (Mason 2008, p. 34). For adoptees who do meet birth relatives, momentary displays of one's authentic inner self are likely to become tangible, as they did for me, when I began to see aspects of myself reflected in my birth parents (Ralph and Jean).

Subsequently, and especially after meeting birth relatives, I have not only become more aware of the dilemma of being between members of my adoptive and birth families (even though my adoptive parents are no longer alive) but also of the feeling of 'in-between-ness' culturally (Siddique 2011). This was not always so. I now

recognise growing up an adoptee in a Christian home with a disposition for the liberal arts and a father who was a History teacher not only helped develop feelings of belonging within my family but provided me with opportunities and the motivation to seek interpretations of the world. Such an environment and characteristics caused me to 'actively reflect on and negotiate' previously taken for granted social norms (Muller and Perry 2001, p.25). Accordingly, my empiricism is informed by pursuit of professions such as History teaching which it is said require a strong thread of virtues such as 'responsibility, creativity, openness to disconfirmatory evidence, boldness and modesty' (Levisohn 2010, p. 17). What's more, the heterogeneous cognitive activity necessary for interpreting historical narrative is also relevant to professions I have engaged in since. Accordingly, by mentoring, coaching and tutoring teachers, lecturing and, latterly, in working on this thesis my concern for guiding and developing the next generation is founded (Erikson 1950).

A further aspect of my epistemological stance is derived from notions of the nature of ethereal or other-worldly kinship affinities (Mason 2008, see section 2.4.1. for discussion of ethereal). These are particularly salient in the charged moments of first encounters with some birth kin, as when I experienced an ineffable epiphanal affinity (Mason 2018); a key reason this thesis is centred on exploring adult rather than child adoptee interactions. When an adoptee meets a birth parent for the first time, feelings of sensory-kinaesthetic attunement or discordance erupt, mind and body are fused, a multi-way dynamic flows, which can sometimes feel ethereal or mystical (Mason 2018, p. 46). As an adoptee, I see this as a temporal attunement or discordance between the real and ethereal or tangible and intangible (Mason 2011).

Further emphasis of the call I felt to tell this story (Tullis 2013). Consequently, the interactions narrated in the epiphanies contained within this thesis firstly serve as a key to revealing what was previously hidden or intangible and secondly to understanding adoptive and birth kinship affinities which are considered ethereal. Therefore, the interrelationship between adoptive notions of secrecy, potential epiphanic revelations together with experiences of other-worldly kinship affinities is ontologically significant in understanding my epistemology. I suggest this could also be the case for other adoptees and potentially adopted parents.

For adoptees and/or adoptive parents the resolution of that feeling of in-between-ness will be likely to ebb and flow throughout life. As we change, grow and encounter others this resolution becomes more or less possible because it is 'the world *between* ourselves and others that is experienced' (Tedlock 1983, p. 323, in Siddique 2011, p. 315, original author emphasis). Additionally, I can not only appreciate my feelings of in-between-ness but can check my inter-subjectivity through reflexive engagement with literature, dialogue with participants and interactions with others. In this way my reflexive engagement is not entrenched in retrospection and I am able to challenge solipsistic individual experience (Berry and Patti 2015).

To conclude, I see myself as a postmodernist researcher, with multiple identities and realities, and I would therefore ideologically resist intellectual ideas around generalisation and universal or purely objective truths. By foregrounding subjective emotional experiences, as I have done in using the literary device of an epiphany I am acting as an evocative autoethnographer. Moreover, I could also be said to be

acting as an evocative autoethnographer by taking care to incorporate dialogue from others, in aiming to show rather than tell (Ellis 2004, Ellis and Bochner 2006). Indeed, creating ‘an emotional resonance with the reader’ is one of the so-called main aims of evocative autoethnography (Anderson 2006, p. 377).

This being the case, I should epistemologically and methodologically be distancing myself ‘from realist and analytic ethnographic traditions’ (Anderson 2006).
But I am not. Like Allen-Collinson (2013) I see a continuum between evocative and analytic autoethnograpy, not a binary distinction. Consequently, in this narrative I seek to apply Anderson’s five key features of analytic autoethnography alongside theory from the conceptual framework (Fig 1). The latter provides the organisation of the layered, evocative writing in chapter 4. In doing this Anderson might say, I am a ‘methodological fence-sitter’ (2006, p. 374). Nevertheless, in pursuing a critique of common assumptions about reality in adoptive/birth families I seek to demonstrate that an interpretive evocative story can be told within socially constructed theoretical boundaries. In this way, analytic autoethnography ‘contributes to a spiralling refinement, elaboration, extension, and revision of theoretical understanding’ (Anderson 2006, p. 388). Simultaneously, evocative autoethnography contributes to conjuring an emotional resonance through ‘artfully braided evocative text’ (Tedlock, 2013, p. 358–362 cited in Le Roux 2017, p. 199).

The next section will establish how the duality and fragmented nature of my ontological position, is central to the justification of interpretive analytic autoethnography as my methodology.

3.2. Autoethnography as a methodology

In this section I justify the use of autoethnography as my methodology of choice.

Initially in defining my role as an autoethnographer I draw on Ellis who states:

> '…I am both the author and focus of the story, the one who tells and the one who experiences, the observer and the observed….I am the person at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller' (Ellis 2009, p 13).

To contextualise this autoethnographic study, firstly, I am going to explore the importance given to each element of this form of writing. For example, more or less significance can be given to *auto*- the study of the self, through personal experience, -*ethno*- how the self comprehends the cultural links, and -*graphy* the application and analysis of the research process (ReedDanahay, 1997, Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Autoethnography is very appropriate to the design of this study as I seek to define and thoroughly analyse adoptive family interactions I have participated in, as well as casting a wider critically reflexive lens on similar interactions in other adoptive families.

Auto - the study of the self, through personal experience

Firstly, by researching my perception of my own personal world I will be able to consider how other people's worlds are similar, but also, importantly, how they are different to my own (Muncey 2010). Nevertheless, personal life experiences per se are not the focus of this research (Reed-Danahay (1997). Nor is it a self-narrative

within a wider social context, combining features of life history and ethnography (Jupp 2006). The central concern is not with my identity, so neither is it a critique of my 'self and others in social context' (Spry 2001, p.710). This autoethnography is achieved firstly by introducing personal experience as an *auto* biographic insider account in the form of a short narrative, expressed through the symbolic writing device of an epiphany (Denzin 2014).

> 'Autoethnographic accounts can allow for deep and highly personal accounts about the most private of situations, in the most unreachable of places and for extended periods of time' (Adams and Manning 2015, p. 357).

Consequently, this history is unlikely to be captured in the same way and to the same complexity as other methods such as survey, interview or even traditional ethnographic research, which may be limited by time and access to people's homes. Furthermore, issues of direct long-term access for an ethnographer would become even more problematic if the focus of the study pertains to sensitive topics (Adams and Manning 2015) or significantly for adoption, those considered secret (Galvin and Colaner 2014). As a CMR (Anderson 2006) who is *both* an adoptee and adoptive parent:

> 'I want the reader to care, to feel, to empathise and to try, to try to figure out how to live from the story, and then do something'. (Ellis 2009, p. 363)

In enabling the exploration of concepts such as secrecy and so-called ethereal affinities between adoptive and birth kin, my perspective as a CMR (Anderson 2006) clearly justifies the significance given to the *auto* element of this study and so the use of autoethnography as a methodology.

Ethno - how the self comprehends cultural links

Hamilton, Smith, and Worthington (2008, p. 22) assert, 'without an easily identifiable cultural component, a study cannot be called an autoethnography'. This study has an easily identifiable cultural component: adoptive and birth family interactions as seen through embodied discourse, values, and norms. Essentially then, this autoethnography is a social critique of the changing nature of adoptive and birth family kinship over time, from me (1962) to my children (1991) and the participants (various dates). In this way I refute the criticism that autoethnography could be considered 'naval-gazing' (Sparkes 2002, p. 215), as this writing 'transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation' (Chang 2016, p. 43). Indeed, analytic engagement with adoptive family themes (Galvin and Colaner 2014) alongside experience has meant I can relate these to the wider socio-political narrative. In unearthing the familiar I seek to advance the understanding of adoptive family interactions more widely by blending the resultant reflexive narrative with carefully chosen evocative language in the form of anecdotes, metaphors, illustrations, quotations and lyrics to write a thick description (Geertz 1973). Hence, I aim to use autoethnography as an approach to research and writing to 'describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience' (Ellis et al. 2011, p. 273). Connecting cultural situations will also mean 'weaving intricate connections between life and art' (Stacey Homan-Jones 2005, p. 765). In this way, I tell a cultural story (Jones 2002) that is recognisable to others.

Graphy - the application and analysis of the research process

Thirdly and finally, I apply and analyse the research process as a part of the cultural interpretation of adoptive kinship.

In writing outward from the self and giving voice to personal experience autoethnography has been criticised as self-indulgent, naval gazing and lazy research, lacking in analysis (Delamont 2007, Roth 2009 cited in Dashper 2015). Wall (2008) disputed the label of indulgent on the basis that 'the intimate and personal nature of autoethnography can, in fact, make it one of the most challenging qualitative approaches to attempt' (Wall 2008, p. 39). Wall, as all autoethnographers, exemplify and provide insights into working through the challenges of 'representation, objectivity, data quality, legitimacy, and ethics' (Ibid.). Furthermore, evocative ethnographers may bypass the representational problem (Denzin 1997), by, for example, assuring the reader of the importance of place, space, family culture and artefacts.

In the same way, I argue that criticisms raised by Delamont (2007) and Roth (2009, cited in Dashper 2015) are inaccurate in relation to this study for several reasons. Firstly, as a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge the role emotions play in making methodological and analytical choices (Elliott 2011, in Emerald and Carpenter 2015). For myself, the reflexive emotional spark in motivating me to write this autoethnography was the shock of having my previously held convictions shaken, in E1, which could be described as 'reflexivities of discomfort' (Pillow 2003, p.188). Within a month of this I also experienced an astonishing bewildering resemblance to my birth father, some of which is recounted in E2. Both these reflexive flashes could be defined in terms of 'reflexivity as recognition of self; reflexivity as recognition of other; reflexivity as truth or reflexivity as transcendence' (Pillow, 2003, p. 181). In these moments of self-observation, I sensed an insight into a new kind of knowledge

through engagement with emotions. The effect of these reflexive sparks were analytically important for two reasons. Initially I became acutely aware of my connection to the situation, quickly ensued by an awareness of my effect on the situation. Being present in the moment activated and heightened my awareness of reflexivity being both a concept and practice (D'Cruz et al. 2007). As such, I prevent this research from becoming self-indulgent or intellectually lazy (Delamont 2007) through interactively engaging with analytic reflexivity as a process and product. Indeed, without the acute emotional stab or flash of reflexivity I experienced during kinship interactions recounted in Chapter 4 I may not have been motivated to understand events, which then steered me to theoretically represent poignant embodied learning in writing this autoethnography (Emerald and Carpenter 2015; Cylwik 2001).

Secondly, this research refutes the label 'lacking in analysis' as I show a sensitivity to power relations in the generation of knowledge, especially consequential to inequality and privilege, as possible features of E1 and E2 (Emerald and Carpenter 2015; D'Cruz et al., 2007).

Accordingly, I suggest opponents of autoethnography have inadequately labelled this methodology as indulgent perhaps because they have been unable or unwilling to recognise the potential of contextual personal embodied experience in provoking analytic reflexivity. This is conceivably because they have not experienced or felt the same things or maybe because they are unwilling to connect personal experiences to their research lives. Furthermore, this may indicate a lack of inclination to

‘privately process memory, detail, feeling, recognition, physiological response, language, cognition and tone of voice’ all necessary for self-introspection, a crucial condition for this methodology (Ellis 1991, p. 28). On the other hand, because adoptees are likely to experience a fragmented self at some point in their lives I suggest they are predisposed to practice introspection in a postmodern way. Whereas those who believe or experience something closer to the conventional idea of a positivistic unitary self, may contest this, or at least be less sympathetic to this line of research.

Nevertheless, in guarding against reflexivity, which can be seen to be solipsistic, subjective or self-absorbed, I ensure that I do not lose sight of the ‘culturally different other’ (Anderson 2006, p. 386). I have guarded against so called self-absorbed reflexivity in two ways. Firstly, I practice introspection by *engaging in dialogue with informants beyond the self* (Anderson 2006). This is achieved by means of biographic interviews with other adoptees and adopted parents and by continuous dialogue with significant members of my family. Applying analytic reflexivity (Anderson’s 2006 second feature of analytic autoethnography) in this way clearly emphasises analysis and cultural interpretation and minimises the potential problem of excessive narration (Chang 2016). Secondly, I choose to employ a layered account technique as a form of postmodern qualitative social research in which I write from more than one voice to uncover and represent several layers of consciousness (Ronai 1992; 1995). I write from more than one voice in that I represent a female adoptee, an adoptive mother and birth daughter, participants voices are also echoed in these roles. Autoethnography and layered account techniques are considered creative analytical practices (CAP) as they are seen to

feature a ‘blurred, enlarged, and altered’ narrative (Richardson and St. Pierre 2005, p. 962).

A layered account writing technique is particularly suitable for this thematic study of interactions in two generations of an adoptive family as I am able to ‘move ‘forward, backward and sideways writing through time, space, and various attitudes’ (Ronai 1997, p. 419). Accordingly, the procedural nature of research is accentuated in layered accounts as is the case for grounded theory studies, whereby ‘data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously’ (Charmaz 1983, p. 110). Yet, in contrast to grounded theory layered accounts use vignettes, presented as epiphanies in this study, together with ‘reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection’ (Ellis 1991).

All these reflexive actions build trustworthiness to dispute Delamont’s (2007) accusation that this methodology is lazy and lacking in analysis. Consequently, in practicing reflexivity I not only engage with the voices in the epiphanies, but in a two-way conversation with multiple voices between participants and literature. In this way I critically seek to expose ‘the vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations’ (Ellis 2000, p. 739). Other autoethnographers have successfully achieved a two-way conversation with literature including Wall’s (2008) *Easier Said than Done: Writing an Autoethnography* and Hudson’s (2015) *When Family Narratives Conflict: An Autoethnography of My Mother’s Secrets* who synthesises aspects of motherhood, secrecy, family stories and literature.

All the autoethnographic examples found were useful in understanding the ways other authors had applied their experiences to this methodology, which confirmed the value of undertaking this study.

Conclusion - Autoethnography as a methodology

This study seeks to increase awareness of how kinship affinities intermingle uniquely for adoptees and adoptive parents in connecting the myriad aspects of the society and culture of which they are part. In view of these reasons, I consider this study has the capability to synthesise aspects of analytic and evocative autoethnography. That is, I employ evocative writing to reveal and illuminate the unexpected, subliminal everyday interactions of adoptive families within an analytical framework. I undertake this with the fundamental intention and commitment to comprehend wider cultural adoptive family interactions through theoretical development (Anderson 2006).

In the same way I have been impelled to act, I expect on reading this study that other adoptive parents and adoptees would want to *do something* too (Ellis 2009). Herein lie creative possibilities for autoethnography in providing readers with a greater sense of how to live. By making cultural connections explicit I anticipate this study will help adoptive kin to understand their relationship to others, 'others of similarity', 'others of difference', and 'others of opposition' (Chang 2005 in Chang 2016, p. 52). In this respect, the narrative-based writing allows the material to connect more easily with diverse strata of potential readers. I also affirm that this reflexive exploration continues to contribute to my own development as a researcher, educator, and

equally my present and future interactions as an adoptive mother and birth daughter. Lastly, I anticipate that adoption professionals working with people from various backgrounds can use this narrative in practice to support others who may have experienced features of interactions recounted here.

What I offer in the next section is a conceptual framework through which adoptive and birth family interactions might be understood. Indeed, given that a person's self develops in concurrent interaction between other selves, it is pertinent to note that 'how the dual bases of relational identity converge to form adoptees sense of self is largely unknown' (Colaner et al. 2014, p. 472). As a result, this study has the capacity to reflect on a gap in our theoretical understanding.

3.2.1. Analytic Autoethnography and the Conceptual framework

Analysis of the literature proved that the adoptive family interactions that I and others have experienced could not be explained by a singular, precise conceptual framework. Accordingly, this autoethnography seeks to make meaning from life events through the lens of a combined conceptual framework. Anderson's (2006) five key features for analytic autoethnography provided the basis of this framework which was then layered with adoption related themes (Galvin and Colaner 2014) and four aspects of kinship affinity were then weaved into this framework (Mason 2008). The last but significant addition was taken from the work of Carsten (2004) in illustrating the interplay between 'what is given' (e.g. sex) and 'what is made' (gender).

Analytic Autoethnography - Anderson (2006)

The first layer of the conceptual framework fully justifies my position in adopting an autoethnographic approach and connects themes from theory. The five key features of *Analytic Autoethnography* are firstly a 'Complete Member Researcher (CMR), a member of the group they are studying', which I fulfil as an adoptee and adoptive parent (see section 2.3.1.). Secondly 'uses analytic reflexivity', thirdly has 'visible narrative presence in the text', fourthly 'engages in dialogue with informants beyond the self' and lastly is 'committed to theoretical analysis focussing on improving theoretical understanding of a broader social phenomena' (Anderson 2006 p. 374). (See table in section 3.5).

Created through Law and Language, communicative complexities of Adoptive families - Galvin and Colaner (2014)

The second layer (see first source Table 2.1) of the conceptual framework is taken from six adoptive family communication themes for which the author's suggest research is limited, these are proposed by Galvin and Colaner's (2014) *Created through Law and Language, communicative complexities of Adoptive families*. This autoethnography develops four of these six adoption themes: secrecy versus disclosure, visible narrative presence, discussion of physical differences and language. The two themes that are not used in this thesis are cultural socialisation because this is defined as pertaining to international or transracial adoption, which this work is not concerned with, and the role of the media and technology as related to the adoption process, which again is not relevant for this study. Nevertheless, I have considered the thematic importance of mediation and would suggest in relation to this autoethnography the role of media and technology could provide links to

understanding communication in so called adoptee birth parent reunions especially when adoptees experience closed family communication or avoidance (Afifi and Olson 2005; Galvin and Colaner 2014). In this study, rather than 'mediation' I choose to use the word 'negotiation' as one of Mason's four dimensions of kinship affinities (Mason 2008).

Tangible affinities and the real-life fascination of kinship – Mason (2008)

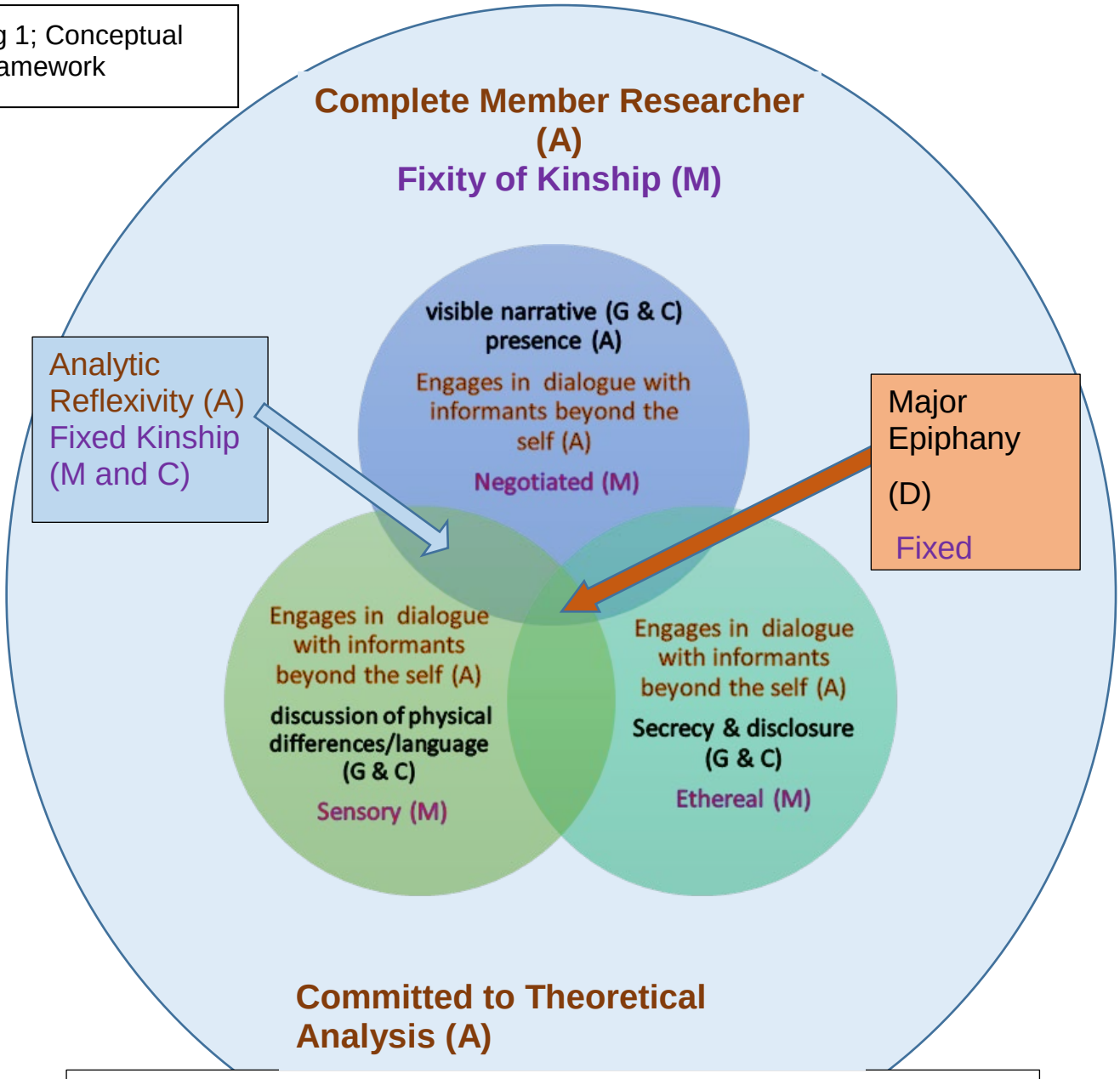
The third layer (see second source Table 2.1) of the conceptual framework I will use to illustrate my position on adoptive family interactions, is taken from Mason (2008) *Tangible Affinities and the Real-Life Fascination of Kinship*. Mason identifies four dimensions of kinship: fixed, negotiated, ethereal and sensory (see section 2.3.6. for full explanation).

After Kinship - Carsten (2004)

The fourth theoretical layer (see third source Table 2.1) of the conceptual framework I use to illustrate the interplay between 'what is given' (e.g. sex) and 'what is made' (gender).

This conceptual framework (Fig 1) provides the connections between key themes in the literature on adoption and key themes in analytic autoethnography (Anderson 2006) that allowed me to provide a perspective on adoptive family interactions, and so a clear direction for this work.

Fig 1; Conceptual Framework



Key
A – Anderson (2006) five key features of analytic autoethnography; Complete Member Researcher (CMR), uses analytic reflexivity, has visible narrative presence in the text, engages in dialogue with informants beyond the self, is committed to theoretical analysis.

M – Mason (2008), Tangible affinities – 4 dimensions of kinship: fixed, negotiated, sensory, and ethereal.

G & C – Galvin and Colaner (2014) I am using 4 of the 6 adoptive family research themes: secrecy vs disclosure, visible narrative presence, discussion of physical differences, language, (cultural socialisation and role of the media and technology is not used here).

C – Carsten (2004) Fixed, the interplay between 'what is given' (e.g. sex) and 'what is made' (Gender).

D – Denzin (2014) epiphanies: major, minor, relived and illuminative. I believe that the central intersection of the diagram above shows the place where an adopted person is most likely to experience a *major epiphany*.

3.3. Ethics

My aim within this section is to illuminate the multi-faceted relationship between the three types of ethical practices: procedural, situational and relational (Ellis 2007) as they fragment and fuse within this autoethnography. It is important to note that I do not have a homogenised ethical approach, which is identical in respect of participants as for family members. Rather, I establish a commitment to ethical considerations by systematic use of 'A Critique of Current Practice: Ten Foundational Guidelines for Autoethnographers' (Tolich 2010, see Table 4; appendices).

In the procedural ethics section (3.3.1.) I discuss the requirements of the University ethics process. Secondly, I consider my one-off research relationship with participants in section 3.3.2. 'Situational ethics - during interviews with ten participants'. This is not to say that this one-off relationship needs less ethical deliberation than with family members, but that situational ethics that deal with the subtle, random yet ethically important moments that come up in the field can be discussed within the context of our research relationship. Yet synchronously and in harmony, the ethical process through which I have collected my own family narratives apply to me as well as how I collected other contributors' stories. In this way, in section 3.3.3., I analyse how family members are subject to a more nuanced procedural and relational ethic because they are part of my life as I am part of theirs, to a greater or lesser extent. In doing this I consider each relationship, individually, in turn. As a result, by constantly questioning my ethical actions and in making these thoughts explicit in this writing, I seek to respond to the criticism that there is a

‘negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives’ (Chang 2016, p. 54). This section closes with analysis of relational ethics that have caused conflict for me, and how I have come to reconcile my dual role of researcher and researched and so act from a position of compassion and respect (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004, p. 264).

3.3.1. Procedural ethics

Ethical protocols and ethical clearance for this research was granted through Lancaster University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), (see appendices).

In preventing identification or harm to members of my adoptive and birth families together with other contributors, and in respecting the autonomy and voluntary nature of their consent, I use pseudonyms throughout this script. As I do not share a surname with any member of my adoptive family (except for my adoptive parents who are no longer alive) or my birth family, recognition that may have the potential to cause harm is minimised. Furthermore, in respect of members of my adoptive and birth family any potentially identifying locations and specific dates have been altered or omitted to protect their identity and further minimise the potential for detriment.

Clearly the UREC panel recognised ‘autoethnography can be a very challenging, even troubling, experience for the author’ (Dashper 2015, p. 511). They considered my potential vulnerability by asking, ‘how are we going to safeguard you, support you

through this research process?' Consequently, I have given thought to any support, both practical and emotional that I might need whilst conducting the research.

In experiencing personal events first hand in 2009, I was at an initial stage of reflexivity, whereby I was developing situated knowledge by reflecting in action. During this period, I was in need of most emotional support, which occurred largely through discussion with my partner and friends. However, the research had not yet begun. On beginning the autoethnographic journey in 2014, I was mindful that 'emotional states can enhance and/or hinder the ability of individuals to be reflexive' (D'Cruz et al. 2007, p. 80) - a crucial skill for autoethnographers. In revisiting *major* epiphanies (from 2009) these events did, to a certain extent, take on a *reliving* quality, which could have provoked further emotional reactions (see Table 3.2. and 3.3.). Therefore, enhancing my critically reflexive self-awareness was hermeneutically linked to dialogical approaches alongside synthesis with theory. Significant inter-personal relationships between myself, the participants, my supervisor, colleagues and my partner became invaluable. Enabling me to question and understand the process of building knowledge. At the same time, I developed practical reflexive processes to inform my 'knowledge of self in relation to social structures' (D'Cruz et al. 2007, p. 85). Experiencing and practising these two intertwined processes proved particularly supportive. Effectively lessening my vulnerability to *reliving* potentially painful memories and so minimising the need for emotional support

In this way the ethical needs of me as the researcher and the researched are also balanced with the duty of care I embrace for the contributors in this research. Furthermore, I only include data that I would be prepared to display to anyone implied in the text (Medford 2006 in Le Roux 2017).

On full discussion of the research aims, I ensured participants were not in any way misled. From their voluntary written informed consent, confidentiality is guaranteed as is the right to privacy. All measures have been taken to protect participants from harm by ensuring that they are only identified by pseudonyms, age and gender. Places or other specific identifying data is not recorded. Furthermore, the data will be stored in a secure manner for a minimum of 10 years and will be encrypted on a password protected computer, according to the provisions of the Data Protection Act and as per UREC requirements.

Yet as a qualitative autoethnographic researcher, I was aware that I would encounter ethical circumstances in both my writing choices and in practical situations that would not be seen as standard under procedures stipulated by UREC. Consequently, the next section explores the nature of situational ethics when interviewing voluntary participants in addition to illuminating my decision making around which aspects of the narrative interviews would become part of this thesis.

3.3.2. Situational ethics - interviews with ten participants

A complimentary part of this study is to interview adoptees and adopted parents who are not members of my family through adoption or blood who may have similar experiences to myself. The final ten participants were all female and included 3 adoptees (Zoe 30's, Tracy 50's and Jenny 50's), and 7 adoptive mothers, with one being both an adoptee and adopted mother (Tracy).

Originally I intended to interview between 5-8 individuals who were adopted parents of children over the age of 18 or adult adoptees who had met birth parents. I received 17 responses from the appeal for research volunteers, 9 of these fitted my criteria (I interviewed 10). Seven were discounted immediately because their characteristics did not fit the criteria, for example if they were adoptive parents of children younger than 18. I aimed to achieve a balance of 4 who were adopted parents and 4 who were adult adoptees who had met birth parents.

All ten participants are white, middle class females, their ages ranged from 32 to over 60. Therefore, situational ethics and feminist ethics are also significant in considering relational ethics or an ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). Eight lived in the North West of England two in South England/Midlands. Two participants responded to an email appeal for volunteers at my place of work, eight responded to the First4adoption website appeal (20 May 2016 and later published in the First4Adoption magazine, see appendices). I did have a prior relationship with one of the participants as we had known each other as undergraduates 20 years earlier, however we had not kept in touch so in effect it was like meeting a stranger.

The remaining 9 were all strangers to me. Furthermore, after the research was completed I planned no future interaction with them.

In the First4Adoption and the email appeal for volunteers I noted the criteria for selection which was:

1. Parents of adopted children who are in their late teens or early twenties, particularly parents of adopted daughters in their 20's.

2. Adult adoptees of any age/gender who have met their birth parent(s).

Between May and July 2016 seventeen participants responded to the appeal for volunteers, fifteen were female and two were male. Initially I talked to each of them on the phone to ensure a similarity of experiences as identified from my data and from the themes in the conceptual framework. This conversation was useful for several reasons. Firstly, it meant that from the original seventeen, I selected ten that were suitable in relation to the themes and adoptive family interactions I was seeking to illuminate. Four adoptive parents were not selected because their adopted children were younger than 20 and three did not return my telephone call. Undertaking this process meant that the ten selected for interview were all female. Secondly, the initial phone conversation was useful in that it gave me an opportunity to explain the purpose and direction of the research. During this conversation I verbally guaranteed anonymity and made an information sheet available to them (see appendices). This also provided an opportunity for the participants to seek clarification on any aspect of the research prior to them giving their voluntary informed written consent.

Undertaking this ground work enabled face to face interviews to begin on a sound footing. I did this for several reasons, firstly I anticipated giving the participants a sense of my experiences by inviting them into my world momentarily would have the effect of putting them at ease, whilst at the same time enable me to reciprocally enter into their worlds. In this way, my experiences and reasons for doing this study simultaneously supported my authenticity as an adopted person and adoptive parent whilst also maintaining my credibility as researcher and the researched in providing verisimilitude. Therefore, I perceive 'reflexivity and ethical mindfulness are interdependent concepts' (Warin 2011, p. 805). Furthermore, I deliberately made self-disclosures in an attempt to minimize my own power (Warin, Solomon and Lewis 2007). This had the effect of diffusing any power differences between us and resulted in participants' palpable willingness to openly discuss their own adoptive family interactions whilst probing me about mine.

Subsequently, semi-structured interviews took place in volunteers' homes or alternatively a mutually agreed public venue. This resulted in two being interviewed in their own homes, four in a café, one in a classroom, and three by phone because the distance and time involved for me in getting to where they lived was onerous. Practicing and negotiating interpersonal relationships compassionately and empathetically was undoubtedly easier to achieve with participants face to face than when conducting phone interviews. Nevertheless, as I regularly engage in phone conversations in my professional role I believe my ethic of care was achieved in both situations.

The duality of being ‘a researcher’ and ‘the researched’ was advantageous in this situation as there clearly existed an aura of empowerment between our sharing of stories. Nevertheless, I am aware that some of the kinship interactions I have recounted as an observation of participation have been painful for me, similarly I must consider that stories told by contributors through interviews could also be painful for them. Furthermore, in this sense, I am ‘not only a witness but also have to bear the discomfort of the others distress’ (Siddique 2012, p. 251). In seeking to overcome the dual ethical challenges of risk and benefit (Wolcott 1999) I practiced openness and transparency as a means to achieving a balance (Etherington 2007). I agree that:

> ‘When it comes to communicating ethical consciousness, it is much more effective to tell a story than to give an abstract explanation or analysis’ (Fasching and de Chant 2001, p. 148 cited in Analyzing Analytic Autoethnography: An Autopsy. Ellis and Bochner 2006, p. 439).

As a result, during every interaction with participants it was fundamental to my ethic of care that I promoted equality by retaining a position of acceptance, empathy and congruence, thereby minimising any potential feelings of distress or embarrassment for participants. In doing this I was cognisant of re-affirming issues of consent and confidentiality not as a one-off event but as ‘process consent’ throughout our discussion and at each stage of the research (Tullis 2013). In preserving a trusting relationship, I ensured continuous vigilance in understanding relational aspects of the research process from initial phone contact, interview, analysis of data and taking my writing back to participants (Warin 2011). Practising ethical mindfulness encompasses an ‘interdependent awareness of how I, as a researcher, am

influencing my research participants' perceptions and a simultaneous and interdependent awareness of how they are influencing me' (Warin 2011, p. 809). I experienced many examples of equitable dialogue between myself and participants during interviews. One example of this was when an adoptive mother, *Lesley,* asked me questions after the interview about my own perceptions of the differences between myself and my adopted children.

Likewise, I use the term from Renold et al. (2008 in Warin 2011), 'becoming participant' to illustrate the potential vulnerability of the participants because of the aforementioned risk of distress. If after our conversation participants wanted to talk further about issues which had affected them, I provided the details of the support available through the charity *After Adoption* (see participant information sheet appendices).

Hence my commitment to ethics in practice, through a way of being was beneficial, resulting in participants visibly, in some cases, being more at ease in discussing poignant family interactions. Equally, because I have experienced similar events, I was able to clearly identify any changes in interviewees' tone of voice or body language. It is accurate to say that all participants recounted elements of embodied emotional situations, between themselves and their adopted children. Moreover, these events always featured physical and sensory differences, many featured elements of secrecy, and a lack of speech or voiced dialogue in providing the narrative presence (see conceptual framework). One participant did begin to recount particular emotional events from the past, concerning her adopted daughter, which

could be seen to constitute an ‘ethically important moment’ (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). During the time *Sandy* was recounting this event I maintained open interactions and mirrored her body language, in doing this I hope I was able to empathise, equalise and diffuse any potential mild discomfort. When more space opened up in *Sandy’s* dialogue, I knew this was the right time to move on.

Consequently, I was ready and able to use affirmational language should participants become sensitive. At the conclusion of each interview none of my participants voiced a need to seek support from other agencies including the charity *After Adoption*. Conversely and to different extents, I found the participants to be resilient and appreciative. Notably, both individually and collectively, I felt there emanated a strong altruistic desire to bring aspects of adoptive family life that they thought were shrouded in secrecy to the attention of the public, policy makers, social workers and the wider adoption community. Indeed, the desire of seven of the ten participants who were adoptive mothers was that this research may be useful in supporting other adoptive parents in similar circumstances.

Before and after each interview I also communicated to each participant what would happen to their data afterwards. The evocative kinship experiences were analysed alongside my narratives with regard to sensory, negotiated or ethereal affinities (Mason 2008). This meant that I held the authority over which fragments of participants’ narrative I chose and what I wanted to say and do through this choice (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994, p. 422).

In due course the fragments of participants' narrative data that were chosen to be incorporated into the epiphanies were taken back to each person for them to check implications for themselves. Accordingly, I have ensured that each contributor is protected by the use of a pseudonym whilst additionally positioning aspects of their story within my story, therefore adding a further layer of protective anonymity for each participant. Yet I concur that decisions concerning which data I include will of course indicate that the 'personal does not exhaust or subsume all aspects of the political' (Atkinson 2006, p. 403).

3.3.3. Relational Ethics: family members

In this section I untangle the situational and relational ways I have sought to ethically consider members of my adoptive and birth kin as intimate, recognisable others in this autoethnography. This means a commitment to communicating my values and feelings so that relationships with others are valued and protected, some of which may be dormant but could be rekindled in the future. In this way I am mindful to portray others with verisimilitude. I consider being 'true to one's character and responsible for one's actions and their consequences on others' (Slattery and Rapp 2003, p. 55, cited in Ellis 2007). Moreover, through this narrative my intention is to 'develop an account of morality which is based on *adoptive mothers and adopted daughters* (women's) moral experience(s)' (italics added by author - Brennan 1999, p. 860). Essentially relational ethics are also closely associated with ethics of care and feminist ethics (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). In this way I seek to empower

adoptive mothers and adoptive daughters to remove feelings of silencing oppression, which has kept stories like this, out of the philosophical dialogue.

Tensions in relational ethics – family

My position

Factually speaking, I am simultaneously a researcher and the researched, an adoptive mother, an adopted daughter and a birth daughter. Accordingly, I came to this autoethnography with the realisation that I appear in the text as a character with multifaceted roles, which has implications for how I portray the nuances of complex experiences.

Hence decisions around which aspects of adoptive family interactions to include or omit are especially salient when I consider the intersection of my personal and professional role. For example, as a University tutor I am mindful that my students and colleagues may read this, so I wish to avoid writing which is so rich in personal disclosure and portrayal of emotion that it provokes discomfort in readers (Wall 2016). Indeed, the juncture of the personal and professional is thought provoking in that it may well represent the extent to which an autoethnography can be 'narrative, emotional, therapeutic and self-focussed as opposed to theoretical, analytical and scholarly' (Wall 2011, p. 320). Through the process of reflexive drafting and re-drafting and, discussions with my supervisor and my partner I have sought to thoughtfully guard against over disclosure (Tolich 2010). As I seek a dialogue between the personal and the professional, the perspective of the adoption community and the academic community, I am mindful to strive for a balance

between an evocative yet analytic narrative. Hence, I seek to write an autoethnography that resonates with the adoptive community as being realistic as well as empowering the academic community in their capability to engage in critical observations (Wall 2016).

My primary aim is twofold, to understand interactions between female adoptees and adoptive family members and, between female adoptees and birth family members. In analytically connecting the biographical and the social I seek to advance research which connects members of adoptive and birth families as 'champions for social justice'. (Wall 2011, p. 326). So, as a potential agent for social justice, I value 'mutual respect, dignity and connectedness' recognised as central to relational ethics (Lincoln 1995, p. 287 in Ellis 2007, p. 4). Consequently, throughout this section I seek to untangle how I diligently engage in perpetual reflexivity through an ethic of care to consider how the disclosures in this writing may impact the lives of each individual member of my family and how this might change our relational dynamic, whether we are close or estranged. Indeed, it is ethically and relationally important to me and to this thesis to give equal consideration to each member of my family, those who may be recognisable to themselves or my readers, whether close or estranged, because 'relationships exist through life even if they are left dormant' (Finch and Mason 1993, p. 169). Admittedly familial relationship dynamics are subject to continual transformation, particularly when significant events such as a marriage breakup mean prevailing ideas are thrown into turmoil. All the same, this does not mean that I wish to awaken earlier discord.

In the same way, I decided to take my story back to the interview participants I have also decided to take my story back to members of my kin to acknowledge my interpersonal bond to them and to 'initiate and maintain conversations' (Slattery and Rapp, 2003, in Ellis 2007, p. 4). In acting from my heart and mind relationally and ethically, I am acutely aware of how gaining interpretations, responses and consent from kin could be subject to our changing relationship over time, especially given the ethical complexity and at times volatile nature of (adoptive) family issues. In consequence, I practice 'reflexivity as a research tool that will enable ethical mindfulness' (Warin 2011, p. 806). I do this by taking back the sections where individual family members feature rather than show the whole of Chapter 4 to every individual. In this way I seek to minimise any potential distress in inter-personal family relationships in the event of future change. In this respect, I have come to understand that doing research with intimate, recognisable others has provoked the most profound deliberations of this thesis. Confronting me with the 'most complicated ethical issues of your research lives.' (Ellis 2007, p. 25).

One of the risks of placing the self at the centre of reflexive methodological processes is the potential harmful consequences of remembering painful family interactions. I had various forms of support should this happen. For example, I have engaged in debriefing discussions with my supervisor and a network of fellow researchers undertaking narrative and auto-ethnographic methods. I also had the opportunity to discuss elements of this study with peers at the charity *After Adoption* and with a lecturer at Lancaster University who has specific expertise in autoethnography.

Accordingly, the tensions in relational ethics which I explore in the next section are connected to my role(s) and the roles of other participants as recounted in each epiphany. In this way I am reminded that 'self-revelations always involve revelations about others' (Freadman 2004, p. 128 in in Pace 2014, p. 344). Consequently, this is not only my story but our story. The story of my family and others like us.

Tensions in relational ethics - Epiphany 1 and 3 – interactions narrated as an adoptee and adoptive mother with my adopted children

Jamie (adopted son) and I have a mutually supportive relationship, consequently talking to Jamie about my writing and taking it back to him was just another aspect of our familial dialogue. I asked him what he thought of the way I had represented him in epiphany 3 and the events recounted there. His response was nonchalant as he said "yeh that's ok…. ". He also said, "I don't blame you not giving the adoption documents to Jane at the time ….there was no respect".

On the other, hand my relationship with Jane (adopted daughter) is not quite so forthright, as our contact is much more irregular. So, as a character in epiphany 1 and 3, I had to give more thought to how, or even if, I would share my writing with her at this time. I have also experienced anxiety in the thought that taking my work back to Jane might unsettle the already fragile relationship that I'm trying to reform, in part by this writing. Over the years since the events recounted I have constantly attempted to reach Jane, unfortunately troubles in relating to others persist. She has, I feel, in the words of the songwriter Leonard Cohen;

'…..torn everyone who reached out for *her*' (author italics. *Bird on a wire* – Cohen, 1969).

I have encouraged her to seek supported help in getting to know her birth roots, in the belief that this would help her in the long term. At the end of 2017, and without support, she contacted her birth mother via Facebook. So, after engaging in the constant iterative relationship between events, considering Jane's position now and the theory I know, it is not the right time to share this writing with Jane (see 1.3). By the same processes I seek to uphold my strong moral obligation in portraying Jane compassionately. In achieving this I have employed strategies for ethical writing by omitting and varying some aspects of the interactions and dialogue, whilst still representing verisimilitude of the events, purposefully not to cause Jane any further heartache should she read this in the future (Kiesinger, 2002).

Furthermore, I am very mindful of the moral obligation I have not only to Jane but to Ethan, Jane's son, who one day may seek out this writing. Hence, I have attempted to depict events respectfully, with dignity and always with our future connectedness in mind (Lincoln 1995 in Ellis 2007). Likewise, in the production of this narrative I have attempted to challenge dominant social and sexual discourses of power which may have previously silenced adoptees and adoptive mothers (Richardson 1997 in Denshire 2014). Indeed, transformation and emancipation are possible for both the reader and the writer of an autoethnography, which indicates a possible therapeutic value in this writing (Ellis et al. 2011). In this way, I hope the thematically organised narrative will both evoke an emotional response in readers who may be part of the

adoption community, to privilege and acclaim these experiences and offer companionship and liberation, should they need it (Mairs 1993 in Ellis 2007).

I have also taken this writing back to other family members in giving them the opportunity to comment should they wish to. My partner, William, has been a continual source of emotional and practical support, for example through engaging in shared dialogue. After reading aspects of the writing where he featured he was unperturbed with the way I had presented events and did not offer any further observations. David my ex-husband, was also content to read sections where he was included, offering no further remarks. Furthermore, I have had no contact with Tom (Jane's partner from 2009) since those days. If I knew his contact details I would get in touch with him with a view to sharing this writing.

Management and tensions in relational ethics Epiphany 2 and 4 – interactions as an adoptee, adoptive mother and birth daughter with my birth parents

I can be 'daughter like' but can I be a daughter?

To unravel the interpersonal ethics further, relationally to my adoptive parents, I remain a daughter. In the same way during the time in which I met my birth parents, I know from our interactions that both Ralph and Jean (pseudonyms) perceived me as their daughter too, the same definition of a daughter can be applied to both relationships: 'a girl or woman in relation to either or both of her parents' (Oxford Dictionary (2016). Hence, I would argue that the parent child relationship for

adoptees is troubled by the realisation of the effects of having two sets of parents. On the one hand I was temporally and dialogically formed to some extent, by my parents' influence, even though both are dead now, I still feel great affinity with them, they are still my parents. On the other hand, I was biologically formed from Ralph and Jean, evidently sharing similar sensory and physical affinities (Mason 2008). Consequently, I would argue individual affinities are activated by embodied events. For me this occurrence was viscerally evident when I met Ralph and Jean, conversely for other adoptees such events might occur in burgeoning adulthood where gender roles and sexuality become more powerful actors. Either way from this realisation onwards I claim that each adoptees life is bounded by a heightened awareness of relational ethics.

As I met Ralph and Jean, I was immediately absorbed in considering what they looked like, how they spoke and what characteristics they had and of course how I might share some of these features. These immediate thoughts eventually gave way to how I would name my relationship to each of them. Therefore relationally 'the choices of names and labels for the child, parents, and birth parents have import' (Colaner 2017, p. 630).

Management of ethics concerning Ralph (pseudonym):

Initial contact between birth parents and adoptees is important in beginning to analyse interpersonal relational ethics, for example in my first email to Ralph I explained briefly where I was born and some details about my adoption and asked,

‘is it possible that you are my birth father?’ If he was my birth father this would relationally produce me as his birth daughter. Within a few email exchanges Ralph referred to me as a daughter, a ‘lost child’ (E2). On the other hand, I had grown up very happily as an adopted daughter so did not consider myself lost at all. Nevertheless, naming our relationship was relationally significant as it caused the spark which ignited my feelings of astonishment on realising that I was missed by a person I’d never known, this then impelled me to consider the anguish he might have felt all these years. In this way, the relational concerns and ethical tensions experienced are different and more salient when I write of my interactions with Ralph. Furthermore, our relationship ceased not long after our interactions (E2), making both my relationship with him and our remembered interactions frozen in time.

When considering writing ethically, ethnographers have used the strategy of replacing the name of the family member with a relationship e.g. Anne/Sister. However, this method is particularly problematic for adoptive and birth family relationships because of the ambiguity in naming these relationships to begin with. For example, I do not wish to write Ralph into this text as my *birth father*, as it serves to dehumanise him. Consequently, I have chosen to give him the pseudonym Ralph as a real character in the text for a number of reasons. Names are associated with a ‘consideration of gender, culture, and location’ as well as age, ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Allen and Wiles 2016, p.162). Consequently, I chose Ralph because it is suitable to my birth father’s age, culture and location. I don’t know if Ralph would find this name suitable or if he would prefer another name or even his given name. Undeniably if we were to discuss these issues then I could say a

particular pseudonym was “self-chosen or participant-approved” (Allen and Wiles 2016, p. 150). Indeed, when I came to write this, I was moved to reconnect with Ralph to discuss the relationally ethical dilemmas I feel.

However, I’m unable to take my writing back to Ralph because there is no opportunity for dialogue between us. It became clear that my appearance stirred up a kaleidoscope of past remembrances that Ralph had been carrying with him most of his life. Initial positive emotions eventually gave way to re-awakened memories of criticism or humiliation, as is the case for many birth fathers (Clifton 2012). These recurring feelings eventually seemed to motivate Ralph to sever our relationship. I would never wish to criticise or humiliate Ralph; hence I have not spoken to anyone apart from close family about interactions between us for nine years. In my silence I sought to protect us both. Yet I seek liberation from hegemonic ethical processes and so a way through silences which could be damaging and stultifying (Noddings 1984, Allen-Collinson 2013). Hence, this thesis is an attempt to portray selected experiences with verisimilitude and compassion without identifying or harming Ralph or indeed any of my family (Tolich 2010). Throughout the years of silence, I have very occasionally sent a postcard to him, a moment of overt contact, however these have gone without acknowledgement.

Consequently, in a situation where there is no opportunity for direct dialogue between us, I am reticent to try to initiate potentially unwanted interaction for fear that communication problems would open up a Pandora’s Box (Ellis 2007). I found Ralph to be an enigma: on one hand vulnerable, as he described himself as a very

private person, yet on the other, the way he presents his writing and work has meant that he would publicly expose aspects of his private life. Consequently, I have no desire to impact on the present silence between us turning it into deeper inhibition which I would never wish to do. I am proud of Ralph's achievements, so I wish to protect the life he has in perpetuity. If I decide not to take my work back to Ralph then one of the reasons I would give for not seeking his responses would be because I do not wish to disturb nor adversely affect his life and relationships, nor others in his world. In Ralph's last email to me he articulated his belief that our lives must remain positive and undisturbed, and in doing this we should independently make our own way in the world so as not to affect our separate futures. Clearly Ralph demonstrated in this email his consideration of relational ethics, one which I too hold dearly (Ellis, 2007; Ellis et al., 2011).

The importance of researching with an ethic of care is further emphasised after engaging with the literature concerning birth fathers' experiences and in reflecting on writing epiphany 2. From this I know that Ralph is still hurting from past events that have troubled him throughout his life, so contact with me might reawaken these hauntings (Coles 2011). For these reasons I am ethically troubled, I seek to balance and sustain my need to be considered loyal to Ralph in preserving the confidences he entrusted to me whilst also attempting to be loyal to myself in making sense of the confusing events that happened between us. In doing this I wish to communicate to Ralph through this writing that I have every desire to protect him, indeed I have not only taken the trouble to conceal his identity by using a pseudonym, but I have explored how and what to include, obscure or disguise in exemplifying how demanding these kind of decisions can be. After analysis of epiphany 2, my final

decision was to include fragments of interactions which strongly related to the themes identified in Fig 1, and also those that I would be prepared to show anyone referred to in the text (Medford 2006 in Tolich 2010). Consequently, in each context I seek to balance creating a narrative in which I can be identified and heard whilst at the same time endeavouring to minimise implicating family members. In some ways obscuring my birth relatives is less complex than obscuring my adoptive relatives, because my relationship with them has been separated by name, place and time. In these ways I attempt to hold 'relational concerns as high as research' (Ellis 2007, p. 25).

Relationally, how I presented myself at the time of each epiphany is also influential to this thesis, my relationships at that time, now and in the future. As Ellis (2007, p. 17) notes 'seldom are we completely open with people in our lives about how we see them or how we see ourselves relative to them.' Significantly for me, when I met Ralph I didn't yet know how I saw myself in relation to him, this was a period of finding out. What was clear was he had been anticipating contact from the *lost child* for years, whereas I had barely imagined he existed. At the time, I did articulate my reasons for finding him, which included wanting to know what he looked like and what sort of person he was. In other words, I was seeking my kin. Perhaps Ralph was more lucid than I when he said he was 'excited' to find himself with a 'daughter'. So relationally he was completely open, he named me as his 'daughter'.

As an adoptee I was so happy that Ralph identified me as his daughter, the importance of not being denied was profound, and accordingly this had ramifications

for how I saw myself, and consequently how I behaved in his presence. Upon first meeting him, I immediately recognised his sensitive, compassionate nature in the ways he related to me. With the benefit of reflexive engagement with the epiphanies, literature and through dialogue with others (Anderson 2006), I understand in the presence of Ralph I found myself slipping back into the daughter role I occupied as a child with Dad. As my father was a very outgoing, extrovert, gregarious man, I would often quietly listen to him, reserved, unnoticed, silenced by his big personality, another sign of my ethnographic observational sensibilities (Ellis 2004). Ralph was not like Dad, nevertheless there was another equally powerful influence at play, namely how much I was like him both physically and emotionally. Hence, I can reflect now that I may have been perceived as quiet, thoughtful and perhaps taciturn, characteristics which may or may not have concealed my inner perplexity. From this time the significant questions were, who relationally I thought I was or who was I going to be in relation to Ralph.

Intriguingly, looking back, I can perceive the conversations in which I played a balanced, equal part were more likely to take place over the phone. Not seeing Ralph, and not being in his presence helped me maintain a role I more easily took as a University lecturer. After each lengthier phone call, we became more familiar with one another, and the content of our conversations included the sharing of everyday cherished kinship knowledge.

Accordingly, I would say relational ethics is one of the most troubling and vulnerable areas for myself as an adoptee and birth daughter and, as evidence shows, from another adoptee and adoptive mother in her 50's, who holds a professional job:

I don’t like speaking to them (birth sisters), I don’t know whether it’s the north west accent or something, but I don’t like talking, I don’t feel I can interact, I don’t feel I can talk….I’ll just sit here and listen to you.

Tracy, Interview transcript.

Consequently, through the iterative autoethnographic process (see 1.3), I have come to unearth relational ethical tensions which have taught me a great deal about interpreting events, actions, feelings and the broader context of that experience (Ellis 2007). Henceforth, I argue the analysis of who, where and how relational tensions present themselves is significant to understanding all adoptee/adoptive parent/birth parent interactions.

As a man entrenched in a male world and whose familial relationships consisted of brothers and sons, and no sisters and daughters, an added layer of complexity existed concerning how my gendered position was differently comprised to Ralph’s. Indeed, I can think of occurrences in Ralph’s speech where he might have been going through what Verrier (1993) called the regressive stage, whereby the birth parent reverts to potentially earlier patterns of relating. This was certainly the case for me. I know that during my silence I was subconsciously involved in crucial identity work, so the absence of language was, in effect, a meaningful structuring presence, (Butler 1990, Woolhouse 2017). I am a lecturer and writer at a University who has just found out that her birth father is a writer, which admittedly I am a little in awe of because he is acclaimed, whereas I am not yet recognised. Instinctively I might have viewed Ralph as personifying transcendence, an embodiment of the

implicit supremacy of the mysterious father figure (De Beauvoir 1997). I can see that I left more space in our conversations, space which Ralph could have used to revert to more fundamental ways of being. In this way I am infinitely mindful that for both Ralph and I "language can never contain a whole person, so every act of writing a person's life is inevitably a violation" (Josselson 1996, p. 62).

Despite the fact that the relationship between Ralph and I of birth father and birth daughter discontinued, it was to leave me with repeated questions and reflections around relational ethical concepts. Two of the most significant interconnected and recurring questions for me are: what it might mean to be the only female descendant of a man with sons, together with my gendered position as seen through the kaleidoscope of Ralph's world.

In this way, the interactions explored in Epiphany 2 are useful in providing a window to understanding the culture and politics of the world in which Ralph and I met and how that might be at one with or at odds with aspects of my world. In conclusion, through reflexively engaging in an ethic of care I have come to know that the lenses I look through have informed my fundamental decisions, not only as a researcher, but as the person I am and 'want to be' (Ellis 2007, p.5).

Management of ethics concerning Jean (pseudonym):

It is true that the relationship between Jean and I has been subject to change. In the time that I have known her she has ended our relationship three times which seems

to indicate aspects of unresolved anger. Inevitably the first birthday card Jean sent to me she signed her name alongside 'Mum'. In this way she was thinking of herself as my mother, however I couldn't call her Mum. Mainly because she wasn't the Mum that was there for 44 years.

In this context, I found I could not voice my true feelings, for fear of hurting her. Nevertheless, as the years passed our relational dynamic grew as we began to develop a knowledge of each other's verbal and non-verbal cues. We regularly and respectfully listened thoughtfully to one another, as we routinely embedded such events as birthday celebrations into each other's lives ('doing' family). As Ellis notes, 'we openly shared more of our selves with each other, and this enabled me to feel more confident in my decisions about what was appropriate to tell' (Ellis 2007, p.19). As our rapport developed so did this study.

In this expanding relational context, I was able to discuss with Jean not only my purpose for writing this thesis but significantly the part of this study where she featured, showing her two sections of my writing (E2 and E4). Before Jean read epiphany 4, I believed she had wrongly judged my motives for not wanting to spend Christmas with her. Admittedly, potentially our first Christmas together after 47 years was a momentous occasion, so decisions either of us took then could profoundly resonate into our future, be it together or apart. After reading E4, Jean acknowledged aspects of my adoptive 'self' that not only enabled her to get to know me better but gave her a window into conversations I could not have articulated at the time. Indeed, I am only now at the point of being able to coherently express my

motives for wanting to spend Christmas at home, due to constant reflexive engagement with the epiphanies, alongside theory. She responded by saying 'do you feel better now', in this way I believe she recognised and responded in a mutually cathartic and relationally confirming way.

Moreover, I asked how she felt I had depicted her and her husband in my writing, her response was laissez-faire and unconcerned, which I took as confirmation and reassurance that I expressed these events equitably from her point of view. Interestingly Jean kept this section of writing I gave to her.

I also believed that Jean had a right to read E2, as her mother featured in this part of the narrative. This produced a different response, she asked what seemed to be a banal question and then commented light-heartedly 'you should have been a psychologist!' She seemed to be reluctant to elaborate on any particular part of the writing at the time and I didn't want to push her, so I conjectured that the writing evoked bygone feelings of her mother. This time Jean did not keep the writing, she returned it to me.

Summary of Ethics section

Ethical guidance for autoethnographers can be inconsistent, perhaps because there are numerous types and ways of doing autoethnography and so the judgement of what constitutes rigour varies (Le Roux 2017). Nevertheless, by means of Tolich's (2010) ten guidelines for autoethnographers I am confident that I have attempted at every stage to conduct this research with an ethic of care as well as an ethic of

democratic participative involvement (see Denzin, 2003; Reason, 2000). As I write, the lives of my family and to a lesser extent the lives of participants are bound together, creating manifold voices and interpretations, each weaving expanding and deepening the other (Ellis 2007). In this way, I use my distinctive position of inhabiting multiple CMR perspectives to enhance ethical mindfulness, as I cannot and would not wish to leave the adoptive community once the research process is over. As an autoethnographer I write, rewrite, create, await and 'feel its consequences', (Ellis 2007, p. 23). In the same way, I take my writing back to family members and participants in seeking to create a space for fruitful dialogue as well as attempting to keep them informed of potential decision making in omitting or including information. Furthermore, I wanted each person who read and talked about the manuscript to feel its consequences not just for themselves but for any revelation that may possibly bring harm to others. Hence my moral obligation is to establish ongoing consent.

After sharing the manuscript, participant responses demonstrated their appreciation, agreement and at times their compassion with the writing. None voiced a concern about the content, tone, expression or believed what was written here could be a problem for them now or in the future. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that 'relationships may change in the course of research' (Ellis 2007, p. 23). Consequently, it is difficult to know how family members and participants perceive this privileged tangible narrative which inevitably has the capacity for transformation through time. This is evident from Jean's response to my writing about her (deceased) mother, which inevitably brought back memories. In this way, I am

aware that this narrative has the dynamism to impact inter-personal and intergenerational relations beyond the present.

3.4. Research Design

This thesis employs several methods appropriate to autoethngraphy. These are organised in this section according to the data source in Table 3.1 below. Chang's (2008) structured approach for autoethnography and Anderson's (2006) five key features of Analytic Autoethnography provide a structure to evaluate the methodological process, as well as the various data collection and analysis methods.

The timeline of events, kinship diagrams and reflective journal (3.5.1.) are supplemented by data from self-observation and self-introspection of epiphanies (3.5.2.). Finally, interview data from the distinct perspectives of other adoptees and adoptive parents alongside social science literature to frame exploration and context (3.5.3.) adds to the verisimilitude of this study.

Table 3.1 Data Collection and Analysis Plan for this Analytic Autoethnography

Data source	Data collection and reflexivity on themed analytical autoethnography	Analysis of data to create autoethnography
3.5.1. Data from personal memory through observation of participation (Chang, 2008).	1. Timeline of events 2. Kinship diagram's 3. Reflective journal ***Visible narrative presence*** *(Anderson 3rd key feature; 2006)*	Identification of themes occurred through engaging in intertwined **analytic reflexivity** regarding each of the 3 data sources. Through moving back and forth between these sources I was able to "connect the personal to the cultural" (Ellis and Bochner 2000, p. 739). The resulting **narrative** epiphanies are crafted into layered accounts blending participants' voices, with social science literature in producing an analytical interpretive style autoethnography. *In this way I address;* ***'a commitment to theoretical analysis focussing on improving theoretical understanding of a broader social phenomena'.*** (5th Key feature; Anderson 2006, p. 374) Accordingly, analysis of the research questions are considered in relation to current social science knowledge. Insights are then developed from the narrative in relation to broader implications for adoptive family interactions and policy makers.
3.5.2. Data from self-observation and self-introspection – both systematic and interactive; self, supervisor and participants produced as an observation of participation (Chang 2008, Rodriguez and Ryave 2002).	1. Systematic Self-observation of epiphanies. ***Visible narrative presence*** *(Ibid.)* 2. Cultural identity & membership as an adoptee and adoptive parent. ***A Complete Member Researcher (CMR)*** *(Anderson 1st key feature; 2006)* 3. Discovering self through others writings. ***Use analytic reflexivity.*** *(Anderson 2nd key feature; 2006)*	
3.5.3. External perspectives/data (Chang 2008)	1. Data from interview dialogue with other adoptees and adoptive parents 2. Documentary evidence and other artefacts; e.g. email fragments 3. Social science literature to frame exploration and context. ***Engages in dialogue with informants beyond the self*** *(Anderson 4th Key feature; 2006)* ***Use analytic reflexivity.*** *(Anderson 2nd key feature; 2006)*	

3.5 Methods within the Research Design

Section 3.5.1. details how data from personal memory as an observation of participation has been produced and analysed. This includes data from a timeline, a kinship diagram and from my reflective journal. This is followed by section 3.5.2. data obtained through self-observation and self-introspection, which includes systematic self-observation and systematic self-reflection.

3.5.1. Data from personal memory produced as an observation of participation

This autoethnography consists of fragments of my own reflective journal, a timeline of life events and kinship diagrams, all produced as an observation of participation from personal memory (Tedlock, 1991).

Essentially collecting these forms of data provided the space for me to practice reflexivity in my role as researcher and researched. Likewise, in anthropology, a reflexive position is a core method for observing participation, and hence is used to turn 'the spotlight on relational aspects of the research process' (Warin 2011, p. 805).

a. Timeline (a method of chronicling the self)

In order to manage the collection of personal data and capture kinship interactions, I drew an autobiographical timeline (Fig 2) from personal memory, as recommended by Chang (2016). I began by noting facts, such as date, time, characters, location, actions, etc. and used the research questions to guide this process.

Hence, the names of characters in Table 1.1 and the timeline, Figure 2 are pseudonyms to protect the identity of individuals (BERA 2011). Unless of course the individual concerned has given their permission for their actual name to be used.

In the same vein, I use months and years as approximate dates rather than actual dates to protect recognition of events by individuals who might have been on the periphery of these happenings (BERA 2011).

b. Kinship diagram (a strategy used to visualize the self)

As this study is intimately connected to kinship interactions, an important place to start data collection is by representing my kinship culture through a diagram from personal memory.

A kinship diagram is methodologically worthy especially in enabling me to apply the notion of 'condensation and reduction' (Chang 2016) in visually representing my adoptive and birth kin connections. Nevertheless, herein lies a conundrum. As adoptees have two sets of parents, two families, I had to decide how to represent this. Paradoxically, kinship diagrams are useful in suggesting the connections between sexual categories, female and male. Yet do not give due attention to how women or how culture may be the same or different, these are issues central to research on adoption. A kinship diagram is therefore meaningless without

concurrent reflective data concerning the nature of ‘social and symbolic’ gendered relations (Melhuus & Howell 2013, p. 44).

After much deliberation I decided to draw two parallel diagrams, one to represent adoptive and the other birth family connections with the intention of stimulating recollections involving associations and encounters. Individuals are represented anonymously in order to provide them with a layer of protection (Tamas, 2011).

The adoptive kinship diagram (Fig 3) visualises the longevity of inter-personal and intergenerational connections, with 5 generations represented. Whereas the birth kinship diagram (Fig 4) visualises relationships with individuals I have met since 2009, so this diagram is flatter in structure with just 3 generations. In this way, organising and explaining kinship diagrams involves self-reflection and self-introspection, alongside cultural analysis and interpretation.

c. Personal narrative data - reflective journal

> ‘Self-reflective data result from introspection, self-analysis, and self-evaluation of who you are and what you are. Self-reflection sometimes accompanies self-observation’ (Chang 2016, p. 95).

For this reason, I purposefully keep a reflective journal to capture self-observational data around each epiphany in Chapter 4 alongside interpretive self-reflective data in relation to identified research themes from literature. It is not my aim to keep these two processes separate, but to acknowledge that each feeds the other in helping to

keep ethnographic thoughts flowing. Also, these two interrelated purposeful processes provide vigorous pauses in which I have shifted into and out of a self-reflective state and so avoided self-absorption (Anderson 2006). Extending the reflexive gaze by including evidence from the 10 participants (4.5.), has also avoided self-absorption. In seeking to connect and detach iterative introspection I inspire self-analysis, and self-evaluation.

3.5.2. Data obtained through Self-observation and self-introspection.

a. Systematic self-observation of epiphanies – observation of facts

Through submerging myself in systematic self-observation of personal memories from the timeline and kinship diagrams, I became aware of feeling betwixt and between at certain junctures. Such events were categorised by those which stimulated feelings in me of alienation, isolation, and exclusion (Van Gennep 1960; in Jones, M 2013). Some events on the timeline could be seen as cultural border crossings, for example, when I'd placed myself in the very unfamiliar situation of meeting birth parents for the first time. So initially, through systematic self-observation, I began to recognise cultural border crossings which then enabled me to select and refine extraordinary events. After data analysis some of these became known as epiphanies (see events marked with an * on Fig 2).

In showing events on a timeline I agree with Chang;

> 'By chronicling border-crossing experiences, you will be able to see how your

(*multicultural replaced with*) ***adoptive*** awareness has evolved in your lifetime. (Chang 2016, p. 74, bold added).

Hence if the concept of border crossing has resonance for me then its relevance to other adoptees and adoptive parents is reinforced in understanding the 'social barriers and inner conflicts experienced by border crossers' (Jones, M. 2013, p. 747). Furthermore, in knowing when I culturally felt like a 'fish out of water' (Chang 2016) or when I experienced moments of revelation (epiphanies) which leave permanent marks (Denzin 2014) enabled me to connect these experiences with a charged sensory experience (Mason 2008). Meaningfully recognising a boundary conceptually provides clues to inferences of similarity and difference, whilst also challenging and attuning my 'cultural "standards" of thinking, perceiving, evaluating, and behaving' (Goodenough, 1981, p. 62, see Chang 2016, p. 73).

Importantly for the development of this thesis, looking deeply at self-other interactions from the perspective of an *observation of participation* (Tedlock 1991) shifted the emphasis from remembering to the practice of writing (Ellis 2004, p. 50). Everyday conversations between myself and my adopted children, or myself and my birth parents, resulted in reproduction of the narrative that forms the data contained within the opening text boxes of Chapter 4. Circumstances under which the conversations ensued meant that different elements were foregrounded, for example E3 is written with the additional stimulus of adoption documents, whereas email excerpts are a feature of E2. Consequently, how the self-observational writing of epiphanies was produced varied, some being immediately after the event, on the

same day and some up to a month later. In this way the multi-sensory, intertwined process of self-observation stimulated self-introspection.

b. Systematic self-reflection of epiphanies or self-introspection

The initial factual writing explained in the section above then gave way to revisiting the writing in gathering introspective data on my present view. Essentially, self-introspection is advantageous to autoethnography because of its capacity to 'deal with [the] complex ambiguous and processual nature of emotional experience' (Ellis 1991, p. 23).

I achieved systematic self-introspection by privately observing my memory of each extraordinary event (see Fig 2 those marked with *) through a 'detailed mental self-examination of thoughts, thought processes, feelings and sensory experiences' (Lyons 1986, in Minowa et al. 2012, p. 484).

In this way I sought to produce introspective data beyond the descriptive. The data included how I felt, what I recognised or didn't, my physiological response, tone of voice in language spoken by characters, including unspoken language and my cognition of the event (Ellis 1991). I strived for analytic introspection 'where the subject examines what she felt, why she felt it, and whether such feeling is justified' (Ellis 1991, p. 25).

Time and time again the remembering and writing involved exercising all my senses,

my body, ‘feelings and whole being’ (Ellis 2004, p. 48) so that I could use myself to learn about the other. Chang (2016) writes about becoming aware of a racial status in encountering inequality and dissonance. In the same way, for me the process of familiarisation with epiphananial moments was twofold. Firstly, it enabled me to become conscious of my adoptive mother status through time, and so ‘accelerates the journey of *adoptive mother* (*racial*) self-consciousness’ (Chang 2016, p. 74 – author’s addition and italics). Secondly, the effect of my heightened self-consciousness, was to powerfully connect the personal to the cultural, central in producing the *ethno* aspects of this study (Ellis and Bochner 2000).

I found this process to be akin to Anderson’s depiction of deep analytic reflexivity:

> ‘.. involves an awareness of reciprocal influence between ethnographers and their settings and informants. It entails self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others through examining one’s actions and perceptions in reference to and dialogue with those of others’ (Anderson, 2006: 382).

Accordingly, performing rich systematic self-introspection (Ellis 1991) alongside analysis of how this intersected and refracted with theory enabled me to subjectively process my cultural beliefs. Engaging in this iterative process (see 1.3) meant I carefully chose which extraordinary events would be foregrounded as epiphanies in forming the narrative in Chapter 4 (Fig 2 and Table 3.2).

Interactions between myself as an adoptive mother and my adoptive daughter in Epiphany 1, immediately resonated with themes of *secrecy versus disclosure*, and

discussion of *physical differences or similarities* (Galvin and Colaner 2014) and so displayed sensory, ethereal and negotiated kinship affinities (Mason 2008). Likewise, after systematic self-introspection, interactions in epiphany 2 also demonstrated synthesis with the same themes. This meant that these two extraordinary events would be characterised by the way in which they insightfully touched every part of my life, so are chosen to appear as major epiphanies in this autoethnography (See Table 3.3).

Conversely, the first two events identified as extraordinary in Fig 2 (Mum's death in 2006 and leaving David in 2007) were not chosen because they did not have strong connections to the adoptive family themes at the time of analysis.

The second layer of analysis in selecting epiphanies to be foregrounded, in addition to conceptually defining the direction of this study, involved analysing how experiences were seen to coincide with kinship affinities, as defined by Mason: *fixed, negotiated or created, ethereal and sensory* (2008). Ethereal has a special place in this analysis in that it helped me to articulate inexplicable sensory resonances on first meeting my birth father (E2). In an ethic of care these were then subject to further analysis, as I chose specific data so as not to cause more pain to family members such as Ralph and Jane.

To conclude, through emergent analytic reflexivity I have been able to amplify specific data associated with each epiphany which served to link present events with the past and a potential future.

Table 3.2 - Key to type of epiphany:

a) The major event - which touches every fabric of a person's life (* next to the 6 considered major on timeline Fig 2)
b) The cumulative, (illuminative) or representative event signifying eruptions or reactions to experiences which have been going on for a long time
c) The minor epiphany – symbolically represents a major, problematic moment in a relationship or a person's life
d) Episodes in which meanings are given in the reliving of experiences

Table 3.3 – systematic self-introspection of epiphanies - Conceptual analysis /structural analysis

Adoptive family interaction ***Galvin and Colaner (2014)***	Type of epiphany	4 dimensions of kinship affinity (Mason 2008) engaged with, defined, known and expressed
Epiphany 1 – Cards as transactions of kinship practices. ***Secret, narrative, physical differences*** I visit the marital home, Jane takes a phone call from Anne (a friend), who will not speak to me. Jane leaves to meet Anne. Christmas cards have been exchanged between Jane, Ethan and David. I did not receive cards.	MAJOR EPIPHANY (reliving also relevant – after analytic reflexivity)	Sensory, ethereal, fixed; out of my control. After analytic reflexivity - also showing a lack of negotiation.
Epiphany 2 – Meeting Ralph ***Narrative, disclosure, physical similarities*** I emailed and met Ralph (conflated events from 2009)	MAJOR EPIPHANY (reliving also relevant – after analytic reflexivity)	Ethereal, sensory and fixed; out of my control. After analytic reflexivity - to a lesser extent negotiated.
Epiphany 3 – Adoption documents ***Narrative, secrecy.*** Tom, Jamie, Jane and 6th month old Ethan call at my home to ask for the adoption documents. A conversation ensues at the door, a passer-by walking his dog crosses the road to ask if he can be of assistance.	ILLUMINATIVE EPIPHANY Cumulative or representative	Negotiated, sensory, fixed. After analytic reflexivity – to a lesser extent ethereal.
Epiphany 4 - Negotiating Christmas with Jean ***Narrative, secrecy.*** Meeting Jean, significance of Christmas (conflated events from 2009)	MINOR EPIPHANY	Negotiated, created, fixed; out of my control. After analytic reflexivity - to a lesser extent sensory and ethereal.

3.5.3. External perspectives

When developing data collection and analysis it was important to engage in interactions with external perspectives. These included reflexive conversations with my supervisor, colleagues, my partner and interview participants. The ongoing cycle and continuous iteration (see 1.3) between data sets had the effect of deepening and refining cultural knowledge (Minowa et al. 2012). Accordingly, this section is split into three sub sections defined by Table 3.1. Firstly, interview data from dialogue with other adoptees and adoptive parents; secondly, data from documentary evidence e.g. email fragments; and lastly, social science literature to frame exploration and context.

1) Interview data from dialogue with other adoptees and adoptive parents

To satisfy Anderson's criteria *engages in dialogue with informants beyond the self* I engaged in interactive reflexive interviews with ten adopted parents or adoptees who have met birth parents (see criteria for selection 3.3.2.). Interviewing others, and indeed reliance on this data to justify insights appears contradictory to the ontological stance of autoethnography, given that this methodology was in part developed to conquer the crisis of representation (Ellis and Bochner 2006). Yet I believe data from interviews is a necessary aspect of this analytic autoethnography in regards to stimulating systematic processes and practices of interactive self-observation and introspection (Chang 2016).

Crucially, I found beginning with identifying and analysing my own cultural experience to be vital to the process of interpreting my participants cultural experiences and so being able to connect them to this writing (Mendez 2013). Initially I introduced a discussion with participant adoptees and adoptive parents around how they saw interactions with their adoptive children and/or birth parents, 'in order to draw comparisons between their perceptions and my own' (Skott-Myhre et al 2012, p. 248). Insiders in other adoptive families may hold variable values and beliefs, so I could not be sure that participants' interpretations of their familial interactions would be the same or even connect with mine. This provided me with the opportunity to self-observe and self-introspect on shared and divergent aspects of adoptive family interactions. Consequently, to question my sole viewpoint and to further develop my beliefs, I moved 'back and forth between narratives and reflections on those narratives or their content' (Goodall, 2008, p. 68 in Denshire 2014, p. 834). Vital to this process was my diligent pursuit of 'other insiders' interpretations, attitudes, and feelings as well as *my* own' (author italics was their/Anderson 2006, p. 389). Inevitably I believe, this has resulted in richer responses to the research questions.

Once the criteria for selection was achieved (see section 3.3.2.) decisions to ask participants to be involved were made in the following ways:

a. For adoptees, they will have experienced physical (Galvin and Colaner 2014) or other-worldly/ethereal (Mason 2008) interactions with adoptive parents and/or with birth parents.

b. For adoptive parents or birth parents, they will have experienced bodily (Galvin and Colaner 2014) or other-worldly/spiritual (Mason 2008) interactions with their adult adoptive progenies around significant adoptive family themes. This may include one or more of the following: elements of their child's life story which may have elements of secrecy or disclosure, significant narratives and or discussions around physical differences or similarities (Galvin and Colaner 2014).

Dialogue between myself and contributors in interviews was to be undertaken with a self-drawn timeline of life events as a stimulus for interaction. Yet after the first few interviews I found this to add little understanding to the data analysis process as well as being quite time consuming. Namely because participants were more likely to begin to recall in detail each of the events on the timeline rather than specific thematic familial interactions. Therefore, after the second interview, I discarded use of their self-drawn timeline as a stimulus, concentrating on articulating the research themes to guide discussions. Interview questions were based on themes which originated from my experiences together with the literature (see 2.4.1. - 2.4.3.). These were, theme 1: secrecy, disclosure and ethereal aspects of kin, theme 2: physical differences, sensory and gendered aspects of kin, including houses, theme 3: narrating, negotiating and relatedness (see appendices for list of thematic interview questions).

The direction of the interview conversations was focussed around the three thematic categories as they blend in Fig 1. As well as this, I knew from self-introspection that I also wished to include a bricolage of belongings and symbols which may or may

not have been related to these themes. For example, aspects around familial card giving, discussion of adoption documents and affinity with places or animals.

Towards the end of each interview and for each of the epiphanies discussed I asked the participant, if they felt able, to categorise the interactions we discussed into one or more of the four forms of epiphany (Denzin 1989): major, cumulative, minor and illuminative.

2) Data from documentary evidence - emails

As an autoethnographer, I considered the potential dichotomy of selecting information that could maintain my position of power or that could create vulnerability for my adoptive or birth relatives or myself. These reasons were paramount in my decision not to directly use my children's adoption documents as data and to select excerpts of Ralph's emails to me rather than the whole text. In this way I seek to preserve an ethic of care in acting sensitively in inter-personal relationships, no matter what the status of these relationship might be.

3) Social science literature to frame exploration and context

Through the positioning of self-observations within the context of social science knowledge, this work maintains close alignment to ethnography and therefore analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008). Dialogue from external perspectives or, according to Anderson, dialogue with informants beyond the self, is evident in several autoethnographies within the literature review, but not all. Where

the researcher is a complete member of the group in the focus of study, they seek others knowledge in different ways. For example, Robert and Sarah Ballard (2011) narrate the story of Robert Ballard's international adoption at the time of the Vietnam War. The explicit dialogue involves the Ballard's two young daughters asking questions and co-constructing the narrative, so making sense of past, present and future interactions through narrative inheritance both for their family and their readers. As an adoptee involved in very similar dialogue with my family and as a researcher of interactions in adoptive families, I strongly identified with gathering data in this dialogically engaged way (Anderson 2006).

Likewise, Pearson (2010) who also uses a critical self-reflexive process in writing *Complicating Intersectionality through the Identities of a Hard of Hearing Korean Adoptee: An Autoethnography,* involves the reader in dialogue with others (Anderson 2006) as she reports interactions between herself and a student and herself and her Father. The reader is made aware that through this self-reflexive process Pearson was able to challenge predominant depictions of international adoption, race and disability. Similarly, it is my aim to challenge predominant depictions of adoptive family interactions. For example, adoptive family interactions in the media are at times portrayed at a superficial level whereby family members are happily reunited e.g. 'long lost family' (the ITV series which began in 2011 and is now in its 6th series) so much so that the viewer may question what is missing here.

A source in which voices of informants beyond the self are less evident is written by the adoptive mother of an international adoptee in Wall (2008). Yet she formally

recognises the importance of her husband and children as collective authors of her life narrative, perhaps recognising the dialogical perspective that no person's sense of self can be limited to the point of excluding others (Bakhtin, 1981). Synchronously, she also reflects on how she represents herself as a mother and academic, including the tensions of working through appearing too defensive rather than engaging in a balanced intellectual analysis, a pressure I have also felt. She deliberates on the use of memory as objective data without the so-called legitimacy of interviews in traditional ethnographies.

In conclusion, the vital interrelationships between researcher and others from inside and outside my kinship groups, are intentionally engaged to illuminate and transform social knowledge, activating further questions as the narrative is told and re-told (see appendices: list of thematic interview questions). In this way I seek to challenge a possible overemphasis on my subjective stance through actively engaging in ethnographic reflexivity as a relational activity. For example, in exploring relationships in the wider social and cultural world of adoptive families. Therefore the 'ethnographic imperative demands dialogue with "data" or "others"' (Anderson 2006, p. 386).

3.6. Verisimilitude

Quantitative data research designs use the conventional criteria of reliability or validity to make definitive judgements about the rigour of this type of research. Conversely, in qualitative research the picture is more complex with a proliferation of notions by which researchers can demonstrate evaluation.

Ellis privileges evocative over cognitive principles for judging autoethnography, which include writing which is ‘interesting, innovative, and evocative… that nurture readers' imagination’ (Bochner, 2000, p. 268, from Tavella 2018, p.64). Due to the personal evocative data in this autoethnography I valued these principles. Yet in elucidating subliminal everyday adoptive family interactions I recognise the potential benefits in creating a formal layer of mediation to the evocative writing (Schroeder 2017).

Manifest in this decision was my choice to use five criteria proposed by Le Roux (2017) to assess the rigour of this autoethnographic research. These are subjectivity, self-reflexivity, resonance, credibility and contribution (Le Roux 2017, p. 204) (see Table 3.5 for analysis of these against Chang’s (2008) 10 strategies for data analysis and Tolich’s (2010) ethical guidelines for autoethnographers). Intrinsic in these criteria is the certainty that autoethnography necessitates being ethical and honest about the interactions identified in addition to expressing the voices of individuals involved in the interactions (Mendez 2013).

Firstly, my CMR status (Anderson 2006) in occupying simultaneous roles of adopted daughter, adoptive mother and birth daughter confirm that my self is primarily visible in evaluating significant experiences around adoptive and birth family interactions as an insider and subject (Denzin 2014). In this way my researcher subjectivity is self-consciously involved in creating the narrative which forms this research. Nevertheless, subjectivity was not employed to understand myself per se, but to understand the culture I personally inhabit which implies the necessity for self-reflexivity, Le Roux's (2017) second criteria.

In evidencing self-reflexivity, I clearly demonstrate self-awareness, self-exposure and self-conscious introspection (see 3.5.2.). For example, I implemented the critical self-reflexive process by engaging in disclosure (Schwartz 2018), self-conscious introspection (Rodriguez and Ryave 2002) and perspective taking through a narrative presence (Ballard 2011). All these processes ensure that I engage in analytic reflexivity, Anderson's (2006) second key feature of analytic autoethnography. Consequently, through self-introspection, I am intensely aware of my role and relationship to this research in its historical and cultural context. In this way analysis of my actions and insights between myself and others and how these are seen to blend and diverge, enabled an enhanced understanding of my experiences and the culture in which I live (2.3.2.).

Thirdly, I ultimately intend that readers, participants and researchers will find this text to be 'lifelike, believable and possible' (Ellis 2004 p. 124). Essentially I sought resonance through commonality in originally intertwining my experiences with participants'. In this way, dialogue with informants beyond the self, fulfilled

Anderson's (2006) fourth criteria for analytic autoethnography. After which I sought resonance with readers' experiences too. Indications from taking this writing back to participants suggest that similar confirmatory responses may be received from audiences - hereby confirming visible narrative presence, Anderson's (2006) third key feature of analytic autoethnography. I anticipate audiences will experience levels of participation, be engrossed with this experience or connect with this story on an 'intellectual and emotional level' (Le Roux 2017, p. 204). Evidently resonance is also supported through purposefully engaging in negotiating rival meanings with contributors, so that any secret conflict can be raised, this has meant that my individual interpretations have become more informed. Nevertheless, how participants experience interactions can be ambiguous or unlike my experience, due to the synthesis of individual psychological, socio-cultural, economic and spiritual characteristics. Importantly recognition of this has provoked further reflexivity (Frank, 2005).

Following on from this, fourthly I provide evidence of credibility through verisimilitude, plausibility and trustworthiness as I engaged with the research process honestly and transparently. For example, through creating the relational context in the social world through interviews, I can verify that the nature of kinship interactions can be similar, suggesting a sense of authentication. The ability to report and interpret the data collected is evidenced in the data Log (Table 3.4) and the epiphanies within Chapter 4, which further supports the credibility of the analytic autoethnography design (Morrow 2005 in Le Roux 2017).

Finally, the contribution of this study is developed through making cultural connections resulting in a deeper understanding of the lives of others in the adoption community 'and the way those in power shape them' (Ellis, 2004, p.124). Through the self-reflective evaluative processes, values are sharpened so that further action is inspired or enabled. As such, I anticipate this autoethnography will go some way in providing opportunities to 'liberate, empower, improve practice, or make a contribution to social change' (Le Roux 2017, p. 204). Essentially, empowering individuals to take action that the evaluation implies, on account of its 'meaningfulness, significance, valuableness, coherence and verisimilitude' (Bochner, 2000; Sparkes, 2000 in Tavella 2018, p. 64). Chapter five examines how theoretical analysis (Fig 1) is used to appraise how insights and outcomes may be disseminated beyond the researcher into the adoption community, including impacting upon policy and practice. This demonstrates my commitment to theoretical analysis Anderson's (2006) fifth key feature of analytic autoethnography.

3.7. Managing Data Analysis

In this section I will detail the process of organising and managing data analysis. I systematically use Chang's (2008) 10 strategies for data analysis and interpretation. An illustration of how these have been applied can be seen on Table 3.5.

Firstly, each item of data within this research was recorded on a 'Data log' (Chang 2008, see Table 3.4 below). Each piece of data sourced is named a 'data set'. The log was then used to explain each source and to support the generation and organisation of data, through a practise of primary and secondary labelling. Primary

labelling provided each piece of data with an identification number, denoting its source and to aid future data collection, whilst secondary labelling provided the context (Chang, 2008).

Key

AM – Adoptive Mother

Table 3.4. - Data Log

Data collection Strategy (Primary Labelling - source)					Data collection (secondary labelling - context)				
Data Set No.	Date	Collector	Type	Location	Time	People involved		Source	Place
11	Dec 2015	Self	Timeline	Home	1962 - 2018	Self/family		Personal memory	England UK
14	March 2018	Self	Kinship diagram x 2	Home	2016	Self/family (adoptive and birth)		Personal Memory	England UK
12	March 2018	Self	Self-observation	Home	2016-18	Self, supervisor, colleagues, partner, participants.		Personal memory Reflective Journal	England UK
13	March 2018	Self	Self-introspection	Home	2016-18	Self, supervisor, colleagues, partner, participants.		Reflective Journal	England UK
1	June 2016	Self as Interviewer	Transcript	Interviewee home	various	Ruth (Married 50's)	AM 2 female (21 and 10) and 2 males (20's)	Interview recordings and transcriptions	England UK
2	June 2016	"	"	Café	various	Tracy (Married 50's)	AM and Adoptee 1 male - John (20's)	"	England UK
3	June 2016	"	"	Café	various	Lynn (Married 50's)	AM 1 female – Deborah (20's) 1 male (20's).	"	England UK
4	June 2016	"	"	Classroom	various	Zoe (Married 30's)	Adoptee (with an adopted brother)	"	England UK
5	Aug 2016	"	"	Phone	various	Diane (Married 60's)	AM 1 Female/ 1 male (20's)	"	England UK
6	June 2016	"	"	Café	various	Mandy (Married 50's)	AM 1 female (age 16)	"	England UK
7	July 2016	"	"	Phone	various	Janet (Married 60's)	AM Twin females (20's)	"	England UK
8	June 2016	"	"	Interviewee Home	various	Lesley (single 50's)	AM 1 male – Josh (20's)	"	England UK
9	July 2016	"	"	Phone	various	Jenny (Married 50's)	Adoptee	"	England UK
10	Aug 2016	"	"	Café	various	Sandy (single 60's)	AM 2 females (20's)	"	England UK

I include each of the 10 participants as separate entries to ‘show’ which are others of similarity, others of difference and others of opposition (Chang 2016), in relation to marital status, age, children etc. Completing this process provides a ‘paper trail in which the results of the study can be supported with data’ this enables a defence of the methodology against criticism that data produced from memory is unsystematic (Holt 2003, p. 22).

Essentially, collection and analysis of data is begun at the launch of autoethnographic research, this clearly impacts the organisation and management process by enabling the autoethnographer to recognise gaps or surpluses in data sets as the project develops. Furthermore, categorisation of memories from events ensures the themes of the research are continually observed and so interpretation is relentlessly dynamic.

Advantageous to data analysis is the fact that the author and readers can appraise the spread sheet cataloguing, additionally supporting the visibility of myself as the subject. Furthermore, keeping data on word documents (interview transcripts) and spreadsheet documents enabled beneficial computer assisted word searches when forming thematic categories for interpretation (Richards 2009).

At the cessation of data collection (August 2016 – March 2018) I began the process of transcribing interviews, creating a transcript in accordance with the analysis of this work (Skott-Mhyre et al. 2012). In order to avoid omitting important details, I listened to each of the recordings on two separate occasions. Transcripts are a narrative

response to my prompts during the interactive interview, they contain detailed annotations emphasising content that resonated with my own experience as well as those connected to the research themes (Fig 1). In this way I recognised “me too” moments, made them explicit and then analysed them. Undertaking this process created a series of introspective practices that purposefully develop ‘researcher self-awareness and reflexivity and help us to reveal our blind spots’ (Warin 2011, p. 812). Conversely, potentially ethically troubling blind spots may emerge when differences between participants and myself are concealed, so I was sure to be vigilant in analysing vast deviations.

The scope of data producing activities provides complementary methods to access dislocations such as lack of self-confidence, uncertainty and self-deprecation from memories (Quicke, 2008). By giving categorical comparisons between different dialogues and the contexts in which they take place, I guard against criticism that this is only one person’s account of events, in this way I ensure the research has additional value to the field of study (Tanggard 2009).

Analysis of data from the timeline, kinship diagrams and reflective journal (see 3.5.1.)

Initially, I captured data from my personal memory from an observation of participation in producing a timeline, kinship diagrams and reflective journal, seeing these writing exercises as ‘catalysts for further thoughts’ (Chang 2016, p. 72). The iterative process of ‘chronicling, inventorying, and visualizing self’ (Ibid.) for each of

these writing exercises involved not only me but others from my family, my places and the culture and society of which I am part (see 1.3). For example, in drawing a birth kinship diagram I involved Jean (birth mother). By taking notes of my reflections, feelings, themes, ideas and questions whilst reviewing the data I was able to fulfil the three tasks of 'recognition, self-observation and reporting' (Rodriguez and Ryave 2002). Essential to, for example, analysing the relationship between myself and others in the timeline, kinship diagrams and reflective journal (Chang 2008, point 6, Table 3.5).

Analysis of data from the epiphanies (see 3.5.2.)

Secondly, data from the timeline of events, kinship diagrams and reflective journal (3.5.1.) is enhanced by data from self-observation and self-introspection or *interactive introspection* of epiphanies (Rodriguez and Ryave 2002). Suggestively this analysis has been undertaken not as a solitary experience, but an interactive event with participants, my supervisor, colleagues, my partner and other family members (see appendices Table 4 point 5). In examining actions and insights between myself and others I have taken my writing back to individuals for further comment. In this way, I argue that it is only by 'doing' autoethnography, in much the same way that we 'do family', that I've been able to not only know but understand the significance of abrupt, intense shifts in adoptive and birth kinship interactions. Consequently, I respond to Delamont's (2007) concern about the absence of analysis within autoethnography, which is challenged on the basis that analysis is a relational activity, occurring between the researcher and the views of others (Warin

2011). Furthermore, I undertake this relational analysis to guard against solipsism and to ensure that this inquiry is not embedded in retrospection (Berry and Patti 2015).

In addition to analysis through interactive introspection, I have also systematically applied Chang's (2008) ten strategies for data analysis by looking for cultural themes, recurring topics, exceptional occurrences and inclusion and omission (Chang 2008, points 1-4, Table 3.5).

Analysis of data from external perspectives (see 3.5.3.)

In analysing data from external perspectives, I seek to avoid solipsism by creating a dialogue not a monologue (Bakhtin 1984 in Allen-Collinson 2013). In doing this I undertake thematic coding of the data from documentary evidence, social science literature and interview transcripts from ten participants interviewed as part of this study (Table 1.2).

Identification of themes involved a two-level iterative analysis, appropriate to field research in anthropology in firstly obtaining an emic view (Miles and Huberman 1994; Way and Tracy 2012). An emic view was obtained by analysing reflective journal entries, the timeline of events and the kinship diagrams in detailing my experiences and interactions. Separating an etic and emic view conceptually is difficult because I am the subject and observer, I am part of the 'phenomenon (emic) and apart from the phenomenon (etic)', (Minowa et al. 2012, p. 487). Nevertheless, activities such as reviewing the data produced from self-introspection alongside

interview records and conversations with my supervisor, colleagues and my partner, are considered as etic in nature because categories emerged from existing research according to the conceptual framework and the Data Log/Table 3.4 (Chang's 2008, point 9 and 10, Table 3.5). In this way the synthesis of coded data from personal memory, self-observation, self-introspection and dialogue with multiple voices, alongside introspection, is sought to 'frame existing research as a "source of questions and comparisons" rather than a "measure of truth" (Charmaz 1983, p.117).

These perspectives are systematically interweaved as layers of consciousness. In this way I practice inter-subjectivity, connecting the personal to the cultural (Ellis and Bochner 2000, Chang 2008, Table 3.5, points 2 and 8). Indeed, as a CMR, the opportunity to practice inter-subjective reflexivity in dialogue with others not only satisfies Anderson's fourth key feature of analytic autoethnography but also allowed me to compare myself with other people's cases (Chang's 2008, point 7, Table 3.5). Consequently, inter-subjective reflection was extremely valuable to being able to synthesise aspects of my hidden birth self with my adoptive self and in understanding aspects of my children's birth and adoptive selves (Finlay 2002 in Probst and Berenson 2014).

Conclusion to data analysis section;

As the researcher and subject, I offer coherence in the process of categorising recurring themes across a range of data sources (Chang 2010). Additionally, this allowed me to be exposed to other meanings and interpretations so to realise instances where data can connect, separate or stimulate additional analysis (Taber

2010). The resultant analysis connected personal experience, theory, and external perspectives through writing a ‘layered account’ (Ronai, 1995, p. 395).

The presentation of the narrative in Chapter 4 therefore focuses on ‘the author's experience alongside data, abstract analysis and relevant literature’, (Ellis et al. 2011). This analysis assists discovery of my Self through others writings whilst also using others accounts to create and enrich my story (Ellis 2004) (see section 4.5.). In this way a layered account technique will support consideration of how patterns of embodied adoptive family interactions are reminiscent of existing social research and which aren’t, finding or filling gaps in existing stories or literature.

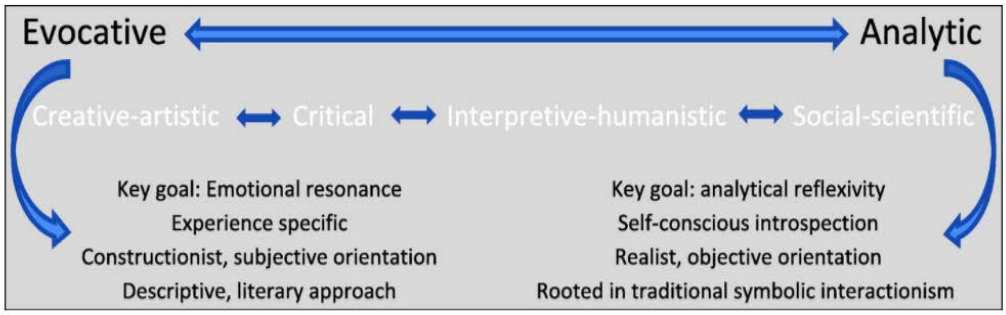
Table 3.5 - Chang's (2008) 10 strategies for data analysis, blended with Le Roux's (2017) 5 criteria to assess rigour in AE research and Tolich's (2010) ethical guidelines for autoethnographers;

Chang's 10 Strategies		Le Roux Criteria	Illustration of Chang's strategy and where it can be seen in this thesis	Tolich (2010) Ten foundational guidelines for autoethnographers (see Table 4 Appendices).
1	search for recurring topics, themes, and patterns		Adoption themes: physical differences, secrecy, narrative presence. Kinship Affinities; other-worldly, negotiated, sensory. Fig 1 – conceptual framework	<u>Consultation:</u> 4. consult with others
2	look for cultural themes	Self-reflexivity Credibility Resonance Contribution		
3	identify exceptional occurrences		Selection of 'major' epiphanies: Chapter 3 – 3.5.2. & Chapter 4 - 4.1 and 4.2 Selection of specific events from the timeline to be foregrounded as epiphanies	<u>Consultation</u>: 5. Autoethnographers should not publish anything they would not be prepared to show persons referred to in the text <u>Vulnerability</u>: 7. Treat any autoethnography as an inked tattoo, by anticipating the author's future vulnerability.
4	analyse inclusion and omission		Choice of data to be included in autoethnography Chapter 3 – Relational Ethics, Chapter 4 – Epiphanies	
5	connect the present with the past		How my adoption experience was similar/different to my children's & participants: Chapter 4	
6	analyse relationships between self and others	Self-reflexivity Credibility Resonance Subjectivity	Chapter 3 – self-observation; self-introspection; Layered account technique Chapter 4	<u>Consent:</u> 2. practice process consent 3. recognise potential conflict of interest <u>Vulnerability:</u> 6. Beware of internal confidentiality – relationships at risk from exposing confidences among participants or family members 7. Treat any autoethnography as an inked tattoo, by anticipating the author's future vulnerability. 8. No story should harm others, if harm is unavoidable steps should be taken to minimize harm. 10. Assume all people mentioned in the text will read it one day, show my writing to those in the text.
7	compare yourself with other people's cases		Interview data from other adopted adults and adoptive mothers: Chapter 4	<u>Consent:</u> 1. respect participants autonomy 2. practice process consent <u>Consultation:</u> 4. consult with others
8	contextualize broadly	Self-reflexivity Resonance Credibility Contribution	Historically, culturally, kinship, affinities, gender, anthropology: Chapter 2 Chapter 4	
9	compare with social science constructs and ideas			
10	frame with theories		Anderson (2006), Mason (2008), Galvin and Colaner (2014), Carsten (2004). Particularly Fig 1 – conceptual framework	

The data in this autoethnography led me to employ three types of narrative analysis: thematic (Fig 1), structural (Table 3.3) and to a lesser extent dialogic (E2), (Silverman 2016, p. 365). This means occasionally engaging in 'discursive deconstruction' as another layer of reflexivity (Finlay 2002 in Probst and Berenson 2014, p.816). The following section will detail what writing style(s) are employed in this Autoethnography.

3.8. Writing as Constructive Interpretation or what writing style(s) are employed in this Autoethnography – analysis of the approach and the process

A continuum of Autoethnographic research - Diagram from Le Roux (2017, p. 198)



The type of autoethnography that I write depends upon my epistemological and ontological position and how I choose to understand, design and evaluate this project. Le Roux (2017) provide a useful summary diagram above. Broadly speaking, there could be seen to be four different types of autoethnographic project (Adams and Manning 2015); social-scientific, interpretive and humanistic, feminist,

queer and post-colonial autoethnographies (which engage in more critical theorising and address issues of power, oppression and social justice) and creative and artistic autoethnographies.

Since this autoethnography blends interpretation of descriptive accounts with social science theory, the writing style employed is likely to be social-scientific and interpretive-humanistic rather than creative-artistic. In this way, my aim is not to describe my entire way of life but to provide the reader with a glimpse of my adoptive family 'web of significance' (Geertz 1973). Occasionally I wanted to emphasise creative-artistic aspects by using metaphor or poetic language to bring to life the nature of the event (Ellis 2004; Muncey 2010). My day to day role as a lecturer offers little possibilities to practice writing artistic prose. Yet convinced that I do possess artistic affinities, I attempted to overcome writing challenges to express this narrative as cogently as possible.

Alternatively, I periodically engage in more critical theorising through analysing matters of power and social justice. In 'democratise(ing) the representational sphere of culture by locating the particular experiences of individuals in tension with dominant expressions of discursive power' (Neumann 1996, p. 189). This means, in practice, I periodically assume critical and creative-artistic styles, ebbing and flowing at different junctures in the thesis, so activating glimpses of atmospheres as befitting individual epiphanies. Accordingly, social-scientific and interpretive-humanistic writing style will pervade, but not exclusively.

3.9. Summary

In summary, I emphasise the methodological decisions taken, including how I have avoided Chang's (2008) five pitfalls in applying autoethnography. These are:

> 'excessive focus on self in isolation from others; overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation; exclusive reliance on personal memory and recalling as a data source; negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives; and inappropriate application of the label "autoethnography" ' (Chang 2008, 2016, p. 54).

Undoubtedly, the autoethnographic researcher is confronted with 'self-related issues at every turn' (Anderson 2006, p. 385). In preventing an 'excessive focus on Self in isolation from others' (ibid) I use analytic autoethnography as my research design in framing adoptive family interactions through a theoretical lens (Fig 1). Furthermore, I also involve participants' evidence which intertwine with mine in challenging and connecting personal experience to cultural experience. This practice underlines Anderson's fifth condition for analytic autoethnography in demonstrating my *commitment to theoretical analysis* (Anderson 2006) through focussing on improving theoretical understanding of adoptive family interactions as a broader social phenomenon.

In response to Chang's (2008) second pitfall, I maintain greater emphasis on analysis and cultural interpretation, rather than narration, by using thematic rather than chronological life story fragments as epiphanies (Table 3.3). Thirdly, I refute the criticism that this autoethnography is exclusively reliant upon 'personal memory and

recalling as a data source' (Chang 2016, p. 54). I begin by using the sociological tradition of social introspection to recall data through self-introspection and self-observation of thematic events (see Data Log, Table 3.4; Ellis 1991) which is then blended with data from interactions with others (Anderson 2006). Namely this means that through analysis of email extracts, a reflexive diary and interactive interview techniques, I ensure I do not exclusively rely upon personal memory and recall as a data source (Skott et al 2012; Ellis et al., 2010; Adams and Ellis, 2012). Fourthly, the debate around potential negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives is ongoing (Chang 2008; Wall 2016). Ethical guidance is 'still emerging and was scarcely available even a few short years ago' (Wall 2016, p. 6). Nevertheless, I confirm that the data in this study has been subject to the same conditions as in other social science research requiring an UREC (University Research Ethics Committee) approval. In the ethics section I note how informed consent has been received from participants whilst also considering ways in which participants and family members are included and represented in the text. I have protected all participants and family members' anonymity and written at length in relation to an ethic of care, which includes ongoing consent concerning how each individual is portrayed. In this way I agree with Tolich (2010):

> 'if autoethnography is to advance its ethical considerations, its leading exponents must provide insight into the ethical boundaries between the self and the other that anticipates ethical dilemmas' (Tolich 2010, p. 1605).

Chang's (2008) fifth and final pitfall concerns those studies which are inappropriately labelled "autoethnography." This study does engage the Self adequately, through practicing analytic reflexivity, demonstrated by self-observation and self-introspection. I therefore posit that this work earns the label of autoethnography.

Chapter 3 - Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued for a nuanced approach to using an analytical autoethnographic approach whilst also writing evocatively within that framework. Consequently, I seek the balance between a readable, evocative, vulnerable and impassioned story. Initially this might be perceived as messy nonetheless by disciplined means of analytic autoethnography (Anderson 2006) and through presenting observable adoptive family themes (Galvin and Colaner 2014) I aim to make sense of wider cultural adoptive kinship lived experiences.

Autoethnography could be considered an 'avant-garde method of qualitative enquiry' yet I do not see the approach I have chosen as experimental, radical or unorthodox (Stahlke Wall 2016, p. 1). I choose to see this work as a commentary between data and social science literature: a layered account, in disentangling adoptive family interactions (Fig 1/conceptual framework). In this way I am also making my personal commitments explicit. I wish this story to be recognisable and systematically understood as relevant to others including the research community of which I am part and so show alignment with traditional ethnography (Atkinson 2006).

Accordingly, in the next chapter I present fragments of interactions between adult adoptees and birth relatives (E2, 4) and adoptive parents and adolescent adoptees (E1, 3). This is done in the hope that this research will serve the greater good and that other adoptees, adoptive parents and birth parents will feel empowered by relating their own experiences in the pursuit of supporting those who come after. This writing is also an invitation to the wider research community and policy makers,

in entering into a dialogue in connecting the wider adoption discourse to autoethnography through a ‘commitment to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings’ (Anderson 2006, p. 375). I hope that in making these analytical connections, this work can influence some of the most heartfelt issues felt by the adoption community.

Chapter 4 - Epiphanies; presentation of insights and findings

What follows are four autoethnographic narratives, presented as epiphanies (Denzin 2014). Each is framed by a research question which have arisen from systematic self-observation and self-introspection of data from the timeline of events, kinship diagrams, entries from my reflexive journal and interview data. Through sections 4.1 – 4.4 I theorise and situate elements of Mason's (2008) kinship affinities, through flashes and moments of insight. Flashes and moments which have left a permanent mark on me as an adoptee and adoptive mother. Furthermore, participants' experiences are weaved within the autoethnographic narrative to exemplify and challenge specific points related to data analysis. These epiphanies matter in illuminating interactions which may disrupt or strengthen relationships between adoptive mothers and daughters (E1): female adoptees and their birth fathers (E2): adoptive mothers and adopted children when sharing adoption documents (E3) and finally female adoptees and their birth mothers at Christmastime (E4).

I confirm that epiphany 1 and 2 are characterised by sensory, negotiated, ethereal and fixed elements of kinship (Mason 2008) including physical differences and secrecy and disclosure (Galvin and Colaner 2014). All aspects of theory are represented in these two epiphanies, so they are regarded as major (Table 3.3) situated at the centre of the conceptual framework (Fig 1). Epiphany 3 is an example of a cumulative or illuminative epiphany (see Table 3.3) and is characterised by fixed, negotiated and created elements of kinship interactions (Mason 2008). Lastly epiphany 4 is characterised by sensory, negotiated and fixed elements of kinship so representative of a major, problematic moment so has been classified as a minor epiphany (Mason 2008).

Finally, I include section 4.5., in order to demonstrate the wider experiences of the ten participants in relation to adoptive family kinship themes. Exemplifying how these are different and/or similar to those in my own story in 4.1 – 4.4.

4.1. What fixed, sensory, negotiated, secret or ethereal interactions can be observed between an adoptive mother and adopted daughter?

The following autoethnographic narrative is recounted from a visit to my marital home I left 12 months before. As the partner who had chosen to leave this visit was undertaken with trepidation. The initial emotive contact became a major epiphany (Denzin 1989, see Table 3.2 for definition) for me as an adoptee and adoptive mother, as it is situated in the centre of my conceptual framework (Fig 1). As a participant observer I scrutinise the meaning of interactions between myself and my adopted daughter. After the autoethnographic narrative this writing is divided into sub sections. Firstly, I demonstrate the importance of negotiated affinities as they connect to the home and material objects such as Christmas cards as transactions of the fixity of kinship. Secondly, interactions expressed in an embodied or sensory way underlie the importance of gender and inter-physical resemblances or differences (Galvin and Colaner 2014). Consequently, this section illuminates a shortcoming in the sociological academic literature through an analysis of gendered sensory relationality and inter-physicality as it is seen to intertwine with biology as the native cultural kinship system in the West (Schneider 1980; Mason 2008).

Thirdly, this epiphany concludes with analysis of ethereal affinities and interactions that have resonances in myths, psychology and the female stages of life.

Family characters;
Jane – my adopted daughter (aged 18)
Anne – family friend
Ethan – Jane and Tom's son (6 months old)
Tom – Jane's partner (20)
David – my ex-husband

Participant characters;
Ruth – adopted mother of 2 females (10 and 20's) Chloe & …. and 2 male's (20's) Mike and Lucas (see section 4.5).
Lynn – adopted mother of a male and female (20's). Lynn's daughter Deborah is directly referred to in this section.
Zoe – adoptee in her 30's
Mandy – adoptive mother of Natalie (age 14, directly referred to in this section)
Lesley – adoptive mother of Josh (20's, directly referred to in this section)
Jenny – adoptee in her 50's
Sandy – adopted mother of 2 females (now in their 20's).

N.B. Names of interviewees' children are given only if they are directly referred to in the text.

January 2009

I had left this house just over a year before, so it was with some nervousness that I entered now. I deliberately called in the morning because I knew that David would be at work. I remember there were so many Christmas cards littered across the sideboard that you couldn't see the wood underneath. Jane began changing Ethan who was lying on the bed in a room just off the hallway. Jane asked me to help her get Ethan ready for the day, so as he lay on the bed, I fastened his nappy and put a grow suit on him. From my position at right angles to his face his deep brown eyes looked into my blue ones. What a beautiful innocent little child he is I thought. The conversation between Jane and I was about how she was feeling and about Ethan.

We chatted happily as Jane put Ethan snuggly in his pram, after a few minutes the phone rang, Jane answered it. I realised Anne, a friend of mine was the caller.

Anne was obviously probing Jane. As far as I could tell the first questions were about how Jane was feeling and then Ethan's health, then there were questions about me. I knew this because Jane looked at me as Anne spoke. Her looks were punctuated by a "yes" or "no" at pertinent points. The last part of the conversation seemed to be about them meeting up somewhere, this morning, to do what I wasn't sure, to talk?

At a pause in the conversation I said, "can I speak to Anne when you've finished please?" Jane looked at me and said "no" quite adamantly and walked out of the room. Jane never spoke like this a child, such a quiet almost compliant child. Why is she like this now?

I was suddenly aware that my pulse was racing, I began to get annoyed that my daughter was talking about me to my friend, why was I being ignored! The conversation must have lasted no more than 3-4 minutes, but it felt like a lifetime.

How could this so-called friend not want to speak to me? How could she speak to Jane and not me? I could forgive Jane the crushing looks she gave me. She has a five-month-old baby and she is only 18 years old herself, perhaps she thinks that Anne has some good advice about looking after babies? What does she think?

She's almost acting as if she is scared, no anxious…. definitely avoidant. I don't understand, why would she be so agitated? A few minutes ago, we were chatting happily whilst changing Ethan.

As Jane held the receiver, her eyes burn into me from where she is stood at the other side of the room, almost saying 'you don't matter to me', what do you know anyway? What a difference from the daughter that wanted me to help just 10 minutes before.

I began to chaotically search my mind for reasons why this was happening. It was obvious by her actions that Jane was listening and responding to Anne's questions.

Was Anne becoming a substitute for me? Jane put the phone down and hurried around the house gathering items and began to put them in the pram. From feeling totally included in the first minutes of my visit, I now felt totally excluded. Jane's indifference to my presence made me feel like an outcast. Whatever Anne and Jane discussed I was obviously not to know, they acted like they were the ones with the knowledge and the power.

Jane got herself and Ethan ready to go out. She couldn't or wouldn't make eye contact with me.

"Where are you going?" I asked rationally. She said curtly "out?" I said "ok, I'll wait here until you come back". She replied venomously "don't bother!"

She pushed Ethan in the pram into the porch and closed the door. I felt bereft.

I looked around at the post-Christmas clutter. There on the sideboard was a card to *Grandad*. I opened it *'Happy Christmas to Grandad from Ethan x'* was written in Jane's handwriting, this was the first card Jane had sent to David from Ethan. My heart pounded harder in my chest. The card evoked a reflexive flash of insight as a recognition of self and recognition of other. My omission from family card giving

meant I was not recognised as Ethan's Grandma. The silent tears ran freely down my cheeks, I couldn't and didn't want to hold them in.

'An important dimension of kinship is that it involves affinities that are regarded as, or feel, fixed' (Mason 2008, p. 33).

What follows is an exploration of the dimensions in fixity of kinship between my adopted daughter and myself, detailing how we negotiated inter-physical, sensory and ethereal interactions in the domestic sphere of the home where I previously lived with my family.

The analysis includes how kinship affinities interacted, influencing practices between the hierarchies performed and accepted in the marital home, and how they connect with those of the political sphere, outside the world of the house (Carsten 2004). This may go some way to offering an explanation why this is considered a major epiphany (Denzin 1989) and a crucial turning point in the relationship with my adopted daughter.

4.1.1. The fixity of kin and the importance of negotiation, the house and material objects.

A strong theme in the sociology and anthropology literature is that kinship is negotiated interactively, this is particularly the case with families formed through adoption (Galvin 2006 in Colaner and Kranstuber 2010). Ultimately this also includes both moral and material dimensions of family responsibilities (Finch and Mason 1993). Essentially as a result this work also illuminates;

'….moral identities and reputations of the participants and a sense of the morally appropriate course of action' (Mason 2008, p. 36).

In this section I elaborate on how the dynamics in the mother-daughter relationship are intertwined with negotiated adoptive family practices around homes and material objects as transactions of kinship. As this epiphany occurred at a time of transition for both Jane and I, the dynamics in this relationship are three-fold and are defined by the process of 'redefinition and renegotiation in terms of their relative statuses, their role perspectives, and their family structure' (Fisher 1981, p. 613).

Part of my own adoptee family narrative (Galvin and Colaner 2014) included social kinship practices which created affinities that felt fixed. For example, I treasured letters and cards I wrote and received from Mum's Welsh sisters and brothers, the photos and gifts that were exchanged were tangible practices of our fixity of kinship. Additionally, photographs had the effect of evoking intangible sensory (Mason 2008) connections, by eliciting inter-physicality, which ensured I remembered my aunties and cousin's voices and the smells surrounding them, all strengthening my associations. I still cannot pass a bakery, with the delicious smells of baking bread, without thinking about my Welsh auntie who worked in a bakery. As I grew these practices were embedded and lived, defining my belonging to the Welsh half of my adoptive heritage, and their belonging to me. In this way these tangible sensory connections flowing to and fro created and re-created my life narrative (Galvin and Colaner 2014). Consequently, the experiences linked to cards and photographs as material objects (Watson et al. 2015) in this epiphany remains substantial to emotional connections with kin.

Furthermore, when I became a parent these creative kinship practices were passed onto my adopted children. So, it could be said that Jane and Jamie socially inherited this practice.

Hence the sending and receiving of cards in this epiphany between Jane and David (her adoptive Father) signified to me that the fixity of kinship between them was embodied, performed and undeniable. Furthermore, this ritualised card giving served to reinforce David's status as Ethan's Grandfather. Conversely, I received no Christmas card from Jane or Ethan. Realising that I had been omitted from family card giving, I could not contain my anguish. In torment I ripped up the cards Jane and Ethan sent to David, the tangible symbols of their fixed affinity lied in shreds on the sideboard.

As one of the adoptee participants (aged 55) said when she realised she was not invited to a celebratory 50th Anniversary family event;

> 'I wasn't invited, and I felt hurt….I was surprised at myself for feeling hurt by that'.
> *Jenny adoptee interview*

I expected to feel hurt in not receiving a Christmas card, yet looking back like Jenny, I was surprised that I felt so hurt that I destroyed the material artefacts of their fixity of kin. Yet after analysis of past adopted kin practices I have come to understand that my reaction was not unique or unusual.

Mandy, another of the participants, is the adopted mother of a 14-year-old girl, Natalie, who is in regular letter box contact with her birth mother. Their letter writing

and sending of cards is reciprocated at least twice yearly. Natalie did receive a birthday card from her birth mother this particular year, however the year before the card was 2 months late. Mandy said;

> "…she got a birthday card off her (birth) mum this year….she ripped it up. See…. I said to Hannah (social worker) these things tell me a thousand things more than Natalie will ever say. She threw it in the bin and said 'I don't care'……. She was angry with her…. **really** angry".
>
> *Mandy adoptive mother interview (Mandy's emphasis).*

So, Natalie also felt anger when she did not receive a card, for the very reason that all kinship practices, whether birth or adoptive are *made* and maintained through negotiation or 'created' through circumstance and agency (Mason, 2008; Carsten 2004). Such practices of sending and receiving Christmas cards *made* the adoptive kinship between Jane and I feel fixed.

Thereafter the memory of this viscerally extreme flash of reflexivity, in being omitted from family card giving became a characteristic of my exclusion from the family group, hence I felt this day became a major epiphany. In reflecting on my reaction, I now appreciate that the qualitative density of kinship experiences which occur in the domestic sphere suggests that what goes on in houses is really important.

Not long before this epiphany our once adoptive nuclear family moved around this shared space, embedding our culture, gave and received cards, gifts and photos. It is for these reasons that 'kinship is made in houses' (Carsten 2004, p.35). Hence

the relationship between Jane and I had previously felt so *fixed* because our kinship affinities had been established through 18 years of negotiations, exchanges and reciprocity in our 'house society' (Levi-Strauss 1949[69] in Carsten 2004). Nevertheless, at the time of this epiphany our family had become fragmented by conflict and distress. The relationship between my spouse and I broke down and I moved out of this house. This undoubtedly strained my mother–daughter relationship with Jane (Cwikel 2016). Significantly and symbolically marriages are inextricably materially expressed through houses (Carsten 2004), so it would seem leaving the marriage may become synonymous with leaving the house. Furthermore, from Jane's perspective me leaving her Father seemed to be tantamount to leaving her. The mother of an adopted daughter in her 20's confirms her daughter's feelings, when her cousin got married and moved away;

> "They were very close…….but now she's gone, and *Deborah* really feels upset about that, you know……. and I think she's quite keen on family ties. I get that impression, and she feels that's very disloyal".
>
> "I still send a card to her. But I don't know if Deborah would still send a card…… no that doesn't happen anymore, she hardly sees her now".
>
> *Lynn adoptive mother interview*

Accordingly, because the domestic and political space of the marital home became a reminder of discord, past exchanges and reciprocity were now compromised, my connection and influence in this material place diminished. Consequently, at the time of the epiphany I was rarely physically present in this house. It therefore follows that my physical absence from this house society may have been taken as a sign,

according to the ideas of Levi-Strauss (1983 in Carsten 2004), that I did not wish to be part of my adoptive kinship group. Or perhaps synonymous with a desire not to be part of this lineage.

The evidence from Lynn's adopted daughter in her 20's concurs with this view;

> Deborah's cousin had left to live with her husband; "Well she's actually said….. She's not part of our family anymore. Which I thought was quite hurtful. Cos I wouldn't say something like that. I'm annoyed with her as well for various different reasons, but she'll always be my niece, you know. But I thought it was a bit harsh of Deborah to say that".
>
> *Lynn adoptive mother interview*

Furthermore, Jenny a 55-year-old adoptee also confirms her actions after being left out of a family gathering;

> But I wasn't part of this clan - I've stopped contact with them over the last……..6 years, 7 years……. it's not religious it's a clannish thing.
>
> It's not that I've stopped communicating, I send them Christmas cards, but I don't…..I've been to county (where they live) 3 times without telling them that I'm going.
>
> *Jenny adoptee interview*

In this way Jenny distanced herself from this part of her ‘clan’.

I can understand this perspective but of course I continued in my attempts to negotiate moral and material responsibilities interactively with Jane (Finch and Mason 1993).

Subsequently, redefining and renegotiating our mother daughter relationship would involve the altered family structure (Fisher 1981). Our once nuclear family had now become an extended family, within 12 months I moved out of the marital home and Jane brought Ethan, leaving her partner, to live with her adoptive Father. Significantly for this epiphany, not only did the family structure change but Jane’s perception of her new role as Ethan’s mother would significantly impact how she perceived her status. Jane unquestionably moved around this house, feeding, changing and nurturing Ethan. In her movements she would learn, ‘embody and convey the differences of age, gender and seniority’ (Carsten 2004, p.55). In light of my absence from this place, I assert that Jane would naturally re-evaluate my role and status as her adoptive mother and what my role or status with Ethan would be.

In this way, on that day and on other prior occasions my discussions and attentions were rejected. Jane’s unresponsive stance seemed to embody an internalisation of hierarchy (Bourdieu 1990). For example, Jane chose to live in the symbolically more powerful marital home which was larger and more comfortable than my house, in this place interactions between the social and the spatial would appear ‘natural and unquestionable’ (Carsten 2004, p. 49). Furthermore, Jane lived here with her adoptive Father as patriarch, which it could be said invoked a ‘moral authority in her

belonging to this lineage' (Cooper 2017, p. 2). In this way parental separation is 'associated with greater negative aspects in the mother-daughter relationship' (Cwikel 2016, p.6).

Undoubtedly Jane's bitter dialogue and rigidity in her body was becoming more commonplace, openly displaying contempt of my agency, as Bartram has found in her work with adoptees who spoke 'with contempt and disgust, as if from on high' (Bartram 2003, p. 29). This deepened my feelings of deficiency over time, an effect which occurs for many adoptive parents (Bartram 2003). Ruth one of the participants of this study concurs with the feeling of deficiency;

> …. Yeah, and it's hard to parent a child if you are constantly rejected.
>
> *Ruth adoptive mother interview*

Nevertheless, as an adoptive mother, with an educator perspective I knew the most positive course of action was to keep my dialogue open, so on this occasion as in the past, I intentionally used 'discourses of preparation, modelling, and debriefing' (Suter et al. 2011). So as Jane left the house that day I continued to try to construct a negotiated adoptive mother stance by saying "ok, I'll wait here until you come back".

I felt an ethereal dichotomy the memories of which still linger, as I remained inside the house and Jane walked outside. In this way the social distinction of the threshold has a sacred you could say ethereal (Mason 2008) affinity for kinship

relations in that ‘it is the place where the world is reversed’ (Bourdieu 1990, p. 282/3). That day the threshold did indeed seem to be the place where Jane’s world and my world were reversed. My decision to tentatively cross the threshold in entering the house that day was characteristic of my wish to reinforce my ‘doing’ the family. Whereas Jane’s decision to cross the threshold in leaving could also be seen as a breaking point of a life, perhaps for us both. Resounding as a ‘decision that changes life’ (Bakhtin 1981, p. 248).

In this way the previous negotiated tangible symbols of our fixed adoptive kin, in the form of sending cards, could be considered as synchronously important as the negotiated everyday sensory elements between the inhabitants of this house. Therefore, my absence from ‘doing the family’ (Morgan 1996, 2011) in this house seemed synonymous with the absence of a Christmas card. In this way Finch and Mason, (1993, 2000) ‘neither see the fixity of kinship as determining, nor the negotiation of commitments as the expression of free choice’ (Mason 2008, p. 33).

For me the house, and its links to my dissolving marriage signified a place of vulnerability and disruption. Conversely for Jane this house could be seen as an anchor of stability with her adoptive father as patriarch. Hence the house held opposing metaphorical meanings for each of us, which would remain resonant in this epiphany.

4.1.2. The importance of sensory, inter-physical resemblances/differences including gender and biology as the native cultural kinship system in the West.

Physical or sensory affinities are;

'….physical, bodily, material and, above all, sensory. These are clearly quite central and resonant in the lived reality of people's kinship and relationships'. (Mason 2008, p. 40).

For this epiphany I choose to illuminate physical and sensory adoptive and birth kinship interactions through and understanding of 'connections between bodies themselves'. (Strathern 2005, p. 26).

So far, I have reflected on the significance of interactions rooted in tangible material affinities in the form of cards, photographs and houses (Crossley 2001). Conversely kinship affinities could also be expressed in a sensory (Mason 2008) way, through our imagination, through ethereal means, so in this way they may be considered intangible. It is the interplay between the tangible and the intangible (Mason 2009) that is vital, central and resonant in the lived reality of my adoptive kinship relations.

In exploring the quality of bodily and sensory connections I would like to acknowledge and explore three major factors. Firstly, the significance of resemblances to this epiphany, these can express more than themselves (Mason 2008) because they are emotionally alluring to the individual, being deeply personal and outside of the individuals' control. Secondly the interchange between resemblances and the importance of physical differences (Galvin and Colaner 2014)

is significant for adoptees, especially because of the allure of the unknown or secret resemblances that may be waiting in some future encounter. Lastly, I analyse gender perspectives and how these interweave with the notion of biology as the native cultural kinship system in the West (Schneider 1980).

4.1.3. Resemblances

Outwardly to friends and family, we would seem to belong to the perfect family. Jane and Jamie looked so much like David and to a lesser extent me that they could have been our biological offspring. Our two blond children were physically 'matched', so we could be considered to have an 'invisible' (Novy 2004 in DelRosso 2015) adoptive status. Or in other words, the resemblance between Jane, Jamie, David and I 'naturalised the relationship' (Howell & Marre 2006, p. 307). People still said, *"oh doesn't she look like her Dad",* or *"oh doesn't she look like a Smith!"* (Pseudonym for David's family surname), even when they knew Jane was adopted. This clearly illustrates that people do not see resemblances as unequivocally fixed by biological connections (Mason 2008). So, the comments observers made, entirely outside of Jane's control may have caused her to perceive a deeply personal emotional allure of fixed kinship to her adoptive Father an important facet of the sensory intangibility of our kinship. More generally these tangible physical resemblances could reinforce our social relatedness. Together these two factors would influence feelings of the fixity for each of us in our adoptive family kinship, so long as we remained living together in the same social group.

Furthermore, blond hair, such as Jane's could be considered both a tangible physical and intangible, other-worldly symbol according to traditional myths and Western fairy tales. The blond hair of heroines such as Walt Disney's Cinderella, Aurora and Rapunzel (Warner 1994), implies all that is good, pure and clean, including having pale skin, a characteristic of Jane. This suggests a lack of exposure, "on a double level, either to the rays of the sun in outdoor work or to the gaze of others" (Warner 1994, p.368 cited in DelRosso 2015, p. 522). Others in our wider kinship group may have viewed Jane in this light, they could have thought she was a beautiful little girl who needed saving through adoption. Nevertheless, as an adoptee myself I didn't hold this view. This theme is relevant to explore in relation to the adoption discourse around metaphors of the parent as protector and parent as educator (Suter et al 2011). For example, fairy tales can portray an unbalanced view of the adoptee, as discourse is characterised by defensive, reactive and hostile remarks about identity which are more likely to perpetuate the protector metaphors. This thesis is not concerned with analysis of adoption discourse through fairy tales in film, yet such ethereal, other-worldly connections should not be disregarded in relation to adoptive kinship relations. Moreover, alternatives and challenges to this view should be advanced, for example the parent as educator needs to be portrayed in film and fairy tales as this relationship builds adoptee identity through performing planned 'discourses of preparation, modelling, and debriefing' (Ibid. p. 242).

Nevertheless, whilst physical resemblances between Jamie, Jane, David and I were tangible, other facets of resemblance through which adoptive families can naturalise their relationship were somewhat intangible. Knowing a brief history of Jamie and Jane's biological background, as written by social workers, meant that it was difficult for David and I to identify similarity of personality traits or gifts between us. Namely

intellectual or emotional traits ‘such as a quick temper, generosity, absent-mindedness’ or a gift such as ‘music, painting, dance, mathematics’ (Howell & Marre 2006, p. 306). Therefore, it is possible that as adoptive parents we underestimated the ‘imagination and fortitude’ (Ibid. p.313) required in identifying any intellectual and emotional aspects of our relatedness. This aspect of our parenting may well have impacted on a naturalisation of intellectual and/or emotional characteristics between us.

4.1.4. Inter-physical affinities

Importantly for adoptees and all kin groups, physical differences (Galvin and Colaner 2014) and gender differences (Carsten 2004, p. 72) are seen to matter particularly at times around the rituals of life such as birth, marriage and death.

The ritual of life that would influence Jane’s perception of resemblances would be the birth of Ethan. At the time of this epiphany Ethan, who was 5 months old, did not resemble Jane in any way, or so it seemed. I considered potential symbolic resemblances as I gazed into Ethan’s deep brown eyes as he lay on the bed that day. As I changed him, I performed relatedness, our mutual interactions would serve to nurture and entangle our personhood over time (Carsten 2000a, Strathern 1988). In that moment I concluded that Jane physically resembled her adoptive kinship group more than her biological son. Yet on reflection I realise that I may have been seeking resemblance between Jane and I, rather than Jane and Ethan, as a sign of our adoptive ‘continuity of family relations and identity’ (Nordqvist 2010). What Jane thought I cannot tell. Jane would recognise Ethan’s strong dark brown eyes and

curly brown hair was reminiscent of Tom (his father), the partner she had just left. Caldwell in *A Hair piece: perspectives on the Intersection of Race and Gender*, points out that, for women of colour, hair "is related to the perpetuation of social, political and economic domination of subordinated racial and gender groups" (Caldwell 1997, p. 110 cited in DelRosso 2015, p. 523). In this way Ethan's hair and eye colour was symbolic of his fixity of kinship to Tom, a reminder to Jane that Ethan belonged to Tom's social, political and economic group. Hence the physical similarities between Ethan and Tom would be part of Jane's everyday lived reality, which is 'in no sense chosen' (Finch and Mason 1993, p. 169). Importantly in relation to this epiphany a 'lack of physical resemblance between herself and her child meant that the parent–child bond was socially questioned' (Nordqvist, 2010 p. 1136). Another aspect of relatedness which could have undoubtedly unsettled Jane.

As Strathern (2005) asserts kinship presents ways of distinctively thinking about bodily connections, then it is 'possible that particular ideas or experiences of sensory relationality accompanies affinities of kinship' (Mason 2008, p. 42). If Strathern is accurate then the powerful sensory relationality Jane now shared with Ethan would be accompanied by affinities of kinship, her ethereal connection would accordingly have a tangible and evidential quality to it (Mason 2008). Consequently, Ethan's dissimilar physical appearance to Jane in this moment would be seen as irrelevant to their ethereal connection. Nevertheless, perhaps later in Ethan's life his physical resemblance to Tom would become important as we know resemblances are not necessarily there in the present, they are dynamic and 'could be waiting for you nonetheless in later life' (Mason 2008, p. 34).

Just as physical resemblances could be waiting for us in later life, in the same vein gender is not a fixed and static concept but can be understood by being in a dynamic and relational context of kinship. There are two important facets of gender, the analysis in the next section will not concentrate upon gender as a sexual construct, but gender as a social or cultural role, a concept which aids cultural understanding. Consequently, it is important to consider the gendered cultural roles Jane and I occupied as adopted females and how this interrelates with the concept of biology as the native cultural kinship system in the west.

4.1.5. Gender

Ryle (2011) explains the importance of viewing the concepts of sex and gender as distinct, sex referring to the physical differences between a man and a woman and gender as the 'social or cultural distinctions associated with being male or female' (Ryle 2011, p. 78). Hence Jane and I are the same sex, yet how our gender has been constructed and how we perform our female gender roles may be different. These aspects are relevant to this analysis.

How much gender is performative rather than biologically driven is of interest to feminist and anthropological scholars (Butler 1990; Strathern 1988). Furthermore, the relationship between biology and culture in female adoptees, like Jane and I, is complex because of the difficulty in being able to articulate the effects of the intersection between social and biological aspects of kinship.

Errington (1990) reiterated Yanagisako and Colliers rejection of a separation between culture and biology;

> ‘human bodies and the cultures in which they grow cannot be separated conceptually without seriously misconstruing the nature of each’ *(1990, p. 14)*

So, I begin with an understanding of how Jane’s adoptive and birth culture are intertwined.

When Jane was two days old she went to live with a foster mother, and just after turning one she and her biological brother were placed with David and I as their adoptive parents. Hence, I suggest the interplay between social and biological aspects of kin with her birth relatives was minimal. Similarly, but at the younger age of 6 weeks, I was adopted, as an only child, into my family. Consequently, it is unclear if Jane had any residual physical and sensory experience of a ‘primal wound’ which is said to develop when a mother and child are separated by adoption shortly after birth (Verrier 1993). For myself I do not subscribe to feeling any sensory deprivation.

Consequently, my gendered female identity was culturally ingrained through my stay-at-home adoptive mother as my primary caregiver (Smart and Neale 1999). In the same way, when Jamie and Jane arrived I took day to day responsibility for them giving up work for a couple of years to become their primary care giver. By the time Jane and Jamie were 5 and 6 years old my working and studying pattern meant that caring responsibilities after school and holidays were taken on by their two Grandmothers (they had no Grandfathers) and their Adoptive Father. Therefore,

female gender roles were performed through two generations of Jane's female kinship network (Carsten 2018). Moreover, as teachers, David and I actively believed in equality, social justice, the importance of our joint family heritage established through rituals and traditions such as the giving and receiving of cards etc. This is the culture Jane grew up in.

Nevertheless, how these cultural factors interacted with Jane's gendered sensory characteristics is relevant to understanding adoptive family interactions. As a child Jane was a little girl who was preoccupied with all family pets and often carried a doll or a teddy bear in her arms outside of the home. Lynn, one of the participants of this study reiterates similarities with her daughter;

> *Deborah* is different (than her adopted brother) she's always had a massive thing about animals, she's had every animal she's ever had in her bedroom! Apart from the horse of course (laughing!)
>
> That shows that someone has another side to her character….always wanted to have something to look after. She wanted it to be close to her. When we got the cat, she wanted to be the one, she wanted to be the one to bond with it. She said I'll take it to the vet. I'll feed it. I'll be the carer.
>
> *Lynn adoptive mother interview*

Mandy, the adoptive mother of Natalie also confirms;

She will…cuddle rabbits and she used to cuddle Guinea pigs, she wants a cat desperately….any small animal she automatically wants to hold it physically close to her.

Mandy adoptive mother interview

In this way sensory affinities that are so preoccupying 'undoubtedly constitute a major currency through which kinship is transacted and understood' (Mason 2008; 41). Consequently, Jane's performance of her gendered female role was informed by a strong sensory affinity to members of her adoptive family, her Grandmothers and our pets. Jane's way of seeing and my way of seeing gendered fixity of kin had some similarities but also differences.

Laqueur (1990) considerably destabilises the relation between biology and culture and between sex and gender, he is careful to preserve;

> 'a distinction between the body and the body as discursively constituted, between seeing and seeing as' (1990, p.15)

This is important in this epiphany because I am seeing as an adoptee and adoptive Mother, whereas Jane is seeing as an adopted daughter and a biological mother.

So, before Ethan was born, Jane's sensory and inter-physical affinities with kin and animals existed outside her body. After Ethan was born and according to the Western theories of biological reproduction, I suggest Jane experienced dynamic

connections between her body and Ethan's body (Schneider 1980; Strathern 2005). Central to this epiphany is how this sensory affinity is transmitted.

Later feminist anthropologists strongly influenced by Schneider argued that the two key concepts of gender and kinship should not be taken for granted. Not only should they be explained but they should not be separated from the 'biological facts' (Yanagisako and Collier 1987). The biological facts in our kinship group are that Jane is Ethan's biological mother, whereas I am Jane's adoptive mother. Furthermore, at that time I was absent from the familial home whereas importantly Jane engaged in everyday interactions with her adoptive Father and her biological son in this house. The combinations of inter-physical and sensory relationality that occurred, or equally those that were absent from the familial home is of central importance to Jane's associations in 'providing substance, performing care, extending touch' (Bruckerman 2017, p. 371; Strathern 2005).

In their critique of gender and kinship Yanagisako and Collier (1987) rejected any pre-cultural material givens, insisting that there is no pre-cultural biology outside social construction. From my own position as an adoptee who chose to adopt two children, I am a living example of this. I didn't obey the dominant Western view (Schneider 1980) of producing a family, I would argue that my gendered status as an adoptive mother was *given* (Mason 2008) and *natural* because I happily grew up in a family constructed through adoption. Additionally, my adoptive Mother role can also be considered to be *made* (Mason 2008) as it is a significant part of my gendered culture. For these reasons I did not see making a family through adoption as second

best (Baxter et al. 2014). As adoptive mothers in Catalonia told Marre; 'I do not need to have my children through my body to feel them as mine'. (Howell & Marre 2006, p.298). Furthermore, part of my life narrative was that David and I wanted to adopt children because I was adopted. Equally, at the age of 27 I placed a much greater emphasis on social resemblances, which would mean that my choice to adopt was 'waiting' for me 'in later life' (Mason 2008, p. 34).

On the other hand, Jane's social construction as an adopted daughter differed to my own, she may have perceived that becoming a mother through adoption was second best. What matters in relation to this study is that our gendered, social construction created different meanings for Jane and myself (Melhuus and Howell 2013).

Useful concepts to explore in notions of second best are ideas around belonging and ownership of children, synonymous with pre-determined Western ideas of family. Nonetheless belonging and ownership are also synonymous with the narratives of families formed through adoption, especially when relational exchanges produce 'claims over one another, claims regarding ownership, identification, and belonging that often amount to ties of kin' (Bruckerman 2017, p. 371, Strathern 2005). Furthermore, as Jamie and Jane shared physical similarities with David and I, the biological framework for thinking about family was maintained, we were configured "as if" we were biological parents (Howell 2006). Therefore, Jane's actions on that day could be considered equally meaningful in relation to the actions of adopted mothers as birth mothers.

Similarly, Ruth a participant in this study, had three children aged 5, 6 and 7 before she adopted a baby. She confirms the deep rootedness of the concept of ownership of children in relation to her fourth adopted child;

> *I wanted to adopt a baby, to push a pram, then people would think this was **my** baby.*
>
> *Ruth, adoptive mother interview*

So, as I stood in the hallway watching Jane close the door that day, her arms and body appeared rigid, her hands never left the handle of the pram, she hardly spoke, yet every aspect of her physical being cried out 'I own this child, this child is mine', just as Ruth did.

At this time, I didn't believe my presence in the marital home I left might have been viewed as a threat. My intention was to be supportive and caring of Jane, particularly as I didn't live with her on a day to day basis any more. Yet when I consider Jane's biography and recent family events I can see that my appearance could be viewed as significant and unusual.

For example, at the time of this epiphany Jane knew from the narrative and sensory evidence from a life story book told and retold by David and I, that her birth parents loved her and her brother but could not look after them and this was one of the reasons they were 'taken away'. Unfortunately, Jane's inclusion in the life story book was secondary to her brother, Jamie. Her story took less space in the narrative, perhaps because she had lived a shorter time. Nevertheless, this was a fact I

always thought relevant to Jane as a quiet, unheard child, evidence perhaps of her feelings of exclusion which resulted in her lack of engagement with the book (Watson et al 2015). Even though I am sure the Social Worker who wrote the life story book did not want to invoke fear in the terminology 'taken away', and as an adopted mother communicating this I was sure not to react in seeking to overtly protect my children. Instead I actively qualified what 'taken away' meant, being an adoptive mother who is an educator (Suter et al 2011). In this way I did not hide or devalue Jane's past, never using the binary terms of real/unreal, although I cannot say what Jane's conversations with her two grandmothers may have contained, or those between Jane and her Father or with Anne. Indeed, I encouraged my children to meet birth relatives if they wanted to and when they were ready (see E3).

Resultantly, what is important in finding meaning in Jane's female gendered affinities is that not only was Jane taken away from her birth mother but her two siblings were too. Jane knew this, being in touch with her younger sister, who was adopted into another family. Accordingly, as Freud (1923) notes if ego experiences are repeated often enough then they could be transmitted through generations. Therefore, the repetition of reading and talking about her life story, including the removal of her siblings, could have created an ego residue in Jane, which was 'laid down as an Id experience capable of being inherited' (Freud 1923 in Noel-Smith 2016, p. 127). Indeed, Jane's early pregnancy seemed to have an uncoordinated, instinctual element, which suggests part of her biography did indeed impact her unconscious, Id.

Furthermore, notions of repetition compulsion, whereby persons inherit and repeat unwanted acts over time, may apply to Jane (Freud 1914a in Noel-Smith 2016). I suggest this is not because she was repeating any trauma from her life prior to adoption, but because she might have perceived aspects of her birth mother's story in her own motherhood. In this way Jane could 'interpret and perceive present reality through a past lens' (Levy 2000, p. 3). For instance, before Jane moved back to live with her adoptive Father with 5-month-old Ethan, she identified herself as a 'Chav'. Lesley, an adoptive mother in this study recounts how Josh her son also identified with being a 'Chav';

> Clearly I'm a middle-class parent…..equal opportunities etc. So, he is challenging who I am, just being a teenager……. So, it's possible it was him trying to find where he fitted. It felt as though that group of people (Chavs) could have provided him with something. They feel disrespected by society at large, the time when he assaulted me, it was not the worst physically, but the worst emotionally……and he said I want you to feel disrespected as I feel disrespected.
>
> *Lesley adoptive mother interview*

Accordingly, the contemporary resonance round the figure of the teenage chav mum was to vilify her as an undesirable form of reproduction. In this way, outside of her adoptive family unit, Jane may have been subject to a barrage of prejudicial views which embodied anxieties around 'the ability of the young mothers depicted to be "proper parents." (Tyler 2008, p. 29). Indeed, many blog sites openly published (2005) that mothers like this 'should have been charged with child neglect, and the baby factory brat taken into care' (Tyler 2008, p. 29). Clearly if Jane was subject to

these views, knowing that she and her siblings were taken away from their birth mother 18 years earlier, would fuel her anxiety that this may happen to her child too.

Conversely Jane's adoptive family knew she was a good mother. Yet her unconscious experiences intermingled with her sensory relationality would impact any sense of her female self and especially the sense of her own motherhood.

What's more this analysis, provides further certainty in her choice of the marital home, as a site of return, in anthropological terms a significant place (Carsten 2004). In this place her adoptive Father would act as a potential or actual protective figure. Ultimately Jane may also wish to align herself with the parent who remained rather than myself as the parent who left, possibly indicative of moral and material dimensions of family responsibilities (Finch and Mason 1993). Furthermore, and importantly in relation to this epiphany at a time when Jane would feel her relatedness shifting, her strong inter-physical, sensory resemblance to her adoptive Father signalled 'genetic connections (representing permanence and predictability)' (Nordqvist, 2010, p. 1140). Even though there were no genetic connections between them.

To illustrate how this manifested, in the first moments of my visit Jane was willing and indeed encouraging of my social motherhood, as I changed Ethan, so supporting her in childrearing (Bray 2009; Bruckerman 2017). According to Stafford (2000) in doing this I was reciprocally building care 'across different generations over time' (cited in Bruckerman 2017, p. 361). Yet the affectionate and supportive

dynamic between Jane and I changed the moment the phone rang, Anne was calling. As a family friend, Anne occupied a strong position, both in terms of her background as a nursing professional and in relation to our family, significantly she was what adoptive family networks would call *fixed* kin (Mason 2008; an auntie who is the adoptees parents' friend). As Anne and I are the same generation, Jane could view us as potential or actual Grandmother's. Indeed, Jane's lack of dialogue, apart from a few yes's and no's, seemed symptomatic of a response to a 'grandmother' who's caring claims 'may turn coercive and even competitive' (Bruckerman 2017, p. 356). Resultantly, the phone call appeared to draw Jane into a vortex of confusing emotions, which had the effect of excluding and opposing me, displaying an anxiety that she did not display previously. Perhaps Jane did not see the physical resemblance between herself and me that I saw. Perhaps our differences of experience in child bearing raised questions for her. Moreover, it is what this meant that is significant to this work in that 'unclear resemblances… are socially stigmatized' (Nordqvist 2010, p. 1140). Furthermore, as Bray (2009) asserts childrearing is also considered 'a powerful force to claim children from their birth mothers' (Bruckerman 2017, p. 361). Significantly and in relation to the notions around repetition compulsion, Jane could have viewed my physical presence as symbolic. As her adoptive mother I represented and replaced her birth mother as the person she was 'taken away' from. So, in this scenario she became to treat me as the other(ed) mother. In this way Jane could have similarities in birth mother experiences between herself and Anne. Indicating that 'family resemblances also link in with ideas of exclusion, disconnectedness and distance' (Nordqvist, 2010, p. 1137).

I reflected on this day and hereafter that the culture I was part of *making* for my adoptive kinship group was being challenged, or even displaced by the so-called primacy of another form of kinship group, perhaps one that could be considered a *given* or biological kinship group. Hence in this atmosphere I sought acknowledgement of the coexistence of adoptive and biological motherhood as wrapped up in the roles of childbearing and childrearing, where not one or the other notions are considered dominant (Bray 2009). On the other hand, through analytic reflexivity I have come to understand that reasons connected to biology as the primary form of kinship group were not as fundamental as I previously believed. Significantly more persuasive reasons are aligned with the facts of Jane's individual adoptive cultural biography and seemingly her need for the physical and sensual presence of a mother figure, materially expressed through Anne's influence.

I acknowledge my feelings of powerlessness and exclusion at the time were a characteristic of a potential denial of difference. Accordingly, I am under no 'oedipal illusion' that I am different to Anne as a mother, so I would not turn a blind eye to how I am different, I am an adoptive mother, whereas Anne and Jane aren't (Steiner 1993; Britton 1989; in Bartram 2003). Nevertheless, the difference between us was not necessarily to do with biology, being an adoptive mother or a birth mother, it could equally be concerned with perceptions of moral and material dimensions of kin. As an adoptee and adoptive mother, I welcomed discourse, knowing successful family interactions could depend on this (Galvin, 2006). I was prepared to wait for Jane to return so that we could talk. Nevertheless, as Jane left the house that day she made it clear that she did not wish to talk.

In the next section I continue to analyse the importance of other-worldly or ethereal (Mason 2008) affinities and how these have resonances in myths, psychology and the female stages of life.

4.1.6. Ethereal affinities - interactions that have resonances in myths, psychology and the female stages of life.

Ethereal affinities are those that are;

'…seen as mysterious, magical, psychic, metaphysical, spiritual and, above all, ethereal – matters that are considered beyond (rational) explanation' (Mason 2008; 37).

So, to elaborate and connect the nature of ethereal affinities to this epiphany, these;

'….exist(s) and emanate(s) from somewhere ethereal, between and beyond persons' (Mason 2008, p. 38).

Linking the archetypal roles of women, of maiden, mother and crone is useful in illuminating potential ethereal affinities between an adopted mother and daughter (Graves 1948). For example, Jane and I had become mothers in different ways. I was 28 when I deliberately chose to adopt Jane and Jamie. Conversely Jane had become a mother, through (it seemed) an unplanned pregnancy at the age of 17. According to the beliefs of Neopaganism and Wiccan worshipers, the triad of the

female stages of life, maiden, mother and crone directly identifies females and their reproductive processes with a deity, this is in direct contrast to patriarchal religions. So symbolically the female physical body can be seen as sacred. Taking this view, and at the time of this epiphany Jane's status would abruptly change from child to adult or maiden to mother (Graves 1948).

Consequently, the sensory affinities between mother and child which might seem intangible to outsiders looking on, might have been perceived as sacred by the mother themselves. Would therefore becoming a mother, as a result of sexual procreation invoke in Jane a feeling that her physical body, in the Western model of kinship (Schneider 1980) should be respected and considered sacred? Since there was a physical resemblance between Jane and I but not a biological connection, my body could not be seen in the same way. This is borne out by Jane's actions towards me on that day. Jane and Anne spoke on the phone in front of me, both refusing to communicate with me, my exclusion from their world meant they regarded me as the *other(ed) Mother*. Their conversation remains a secret to this day (Galvin and Colaner 2014).

I am not the only adoptive mother that has experienced the feelings of exclusion, to exemplify this, parallels can be drawn from the psychology of myths and fairy tales. Jung (1990) noted that almost all fairy tales employ the "splitting effect" of the "good fairy godmother" archetype versus the "bad witch" or "cruel mother or step mother" (Jung 1990). Furthermore, in the Disney film *Tangled*, once Rapunzel's biological mother is known to exist 'the adoptive mother is required to not only step aside but to

degenerate so that the true family can be reunited without the possibility of future interference from the Other(ed) mother' (DelRosso 2015, p. 527-8). Although Anne is not Jane's biological mother, she was the other biological mother than Jane knew well, consequently Anne was able to take this role on that day. Undeniably this seemed to "create issues such as rivalry, competition and polarisation between biological and adoptive mothers" (DelRosso 2015, p. 525). Between Anne and me. An additional possible reason for Jane's polarised behaviour that day whilst also being an explanation for my exclusion from their conversation.

In analysing and questioning our present and future roles as mother and adopted daughter such issues would be significant. If Jane was beginning to perceive the nature of her own biological mother role, then it would follow that she would also be questioning my role as her adoptive mother. At this time Jane also made it clear that she thought I'd left her, seemingly unable to separate my act of leaving her Father, but not leaving her. This could be a sign of an 'Oedipal illusion', whereby the 'differences between the parental relationship and the parent – child relationship, is not acknowledged' (Britton 1989; p. 94). I was not according to the Western model of kinship (Schneider 1980) her biological mother, not a 'real' mother as she had texted a few months later.

Evidence from two participants in this study confirms that in comparable circumstances adoptees have said similar things to their adoptive mothers;

Zoe (adoptee interview) talking about her brother aged 38;

*He told Mum 'you're not my **real** mum anyway'. He's only said these things in the last 4 years and then never to her face, he usually does it over the phone. Don't think he could actually do it to her face.*

Sandy (adoptive mother interview) talking about her adopted daughter aged 7 at the time;

'There *was lots of 'you're not my mum you can't tell me what to do'. As her vocabulary increased and she went to school I became the 'f****** witch' or 'cow'.*

Yet in the context of adoption, I assert the view that realness is not necessarily equated to biology, but that adoptive children view mothers as *real* if they have a physical or sensory presence or conversely those mothers who materially give their adopted daughters (or sons, according to Zoe's evidence) what they want, are also seen as real. Accordingly, because I left the marital home, being physically absent meant I could not give Jane what she wanted, which I presume was my presence. This being the case I could not be seen as a *real* mother.

Sandy confirms this view;

In her down times I talked to her (adopted daughter) about 'want' and 'need', but when she latched onto something……she'd say, 'if you were my other mother you would do this'.

Sandy adopted mother interview

4.1.7. Insights and findings

After analysis I assert that understanding the elements of kinship affinities present in this epiphany go some way to addressing the lack of literature around the nature of sensory negotiated practices between kin and especially between adoptive mothers and daughters (Mason 2008).

In attempting to draw together the threads of epiphany one, I suggest that the dynamics between the negotiated, inter-physical and sensory gendered relations, emphasised in the distinct biographies of Jane and myself, were responsible for destabilising our relationship. Jane exchanged Christmas cards with the social and biological kin she lived with, her adoptive father as the extant patriarch and her biological son.

> ‘In this case, the body is subjected to both physical and moral inheritance – the structural aspect of kinship – and, at the same time, to circumstances and events – the fortuitous aspect of kinship. (Marre and Bestard 2009, p. 13)

Jane was a particularly reserved child, so as adoptive mother and daughter our connectedness displayed itself in a sensory rather than intellectual way. Hence Jane’s body language in this epiphany was not unusual. What was unusual were Jane’s spontaneous rebuffs and her failure to send me a Christmas card, which appeared as silent supremacy. I expected our fixity of kin over 18 years and our shared adopted daughter status to protect our relationship into the future, yet the flash of reflexivity I experienced in not receiving a card implied our fixity of kin was damaged. Furthermore, and to a lesser extent within the entwined sensory inter-physical elements of our kinship the biological facts could not be separated (Yanagisako and Collier 1987). Jane was a biological mother and I was an adoptive

mother. In this way and building upon the work of Howell and Marre (2006), Jane recognised that in the processes of kinning, she did not consider herself 'the same' as me. A point which emphasises reasons for being omitted from card giving. Nevertheless, had we been able to develop stronger intellectual relatedness this may have gone some way to protecting the sensory nature of our fixity of kinship (Howell & Marre 2006, p. 306).

Moreover, and fundamentally, through these events the magnitude of the adoptive family home as a powerful site for studying adoptive family interactions has become apparent. Interactions that took place in the matrimonial home I had left were intensified by a perception of my lesser political influence and subordinate gendered status, together with the political influence of Jane's adoptive father as the resident patriarch. These issues became fused with how Jane and I saw the world. The synthesis of these factors with the potency of kinship affinities we each held, seemed to contribute to the display of confused and polarised behaviour. The torn cards became a metaphor of our fractured kinship, as they did for Mandy's daughter, Natalie (see earlier).

Consequently, after analysis of the physical and ethereal interactions recounted in this epiphany I believe that both Jane and I viewed our fixity of kinship as damaged. I interpreted Jane's lack of responsiveness and indeed outright hostility on that day and earlier, as a sign that there were no grounds for remaking and negotiating our kinship practices at that time. For different biographical yet similar sensory reasons, we both absented from aspects of 'doing' the family. As seemingly did Jenny and Lynn's daughter, Deborah (see earlier). So as Jane closed the door behind her, this

metaphorically ended our embodied relationship, for the time being. A lack of shared, negotiated intellectual similarities meant that our sensory *fixity* of kin dissolved, ethereally.

4.2. What fixed, sensory, secret or ethereal interactions can be observed between a female adoptee and her birth father?

Family characters;
Ralph – birth father

Participant characters;
Lesley – adoptive mother of Josh (20's)
Jenny – adoptee in her 50's

The following fragmented email extracts sent over a period of ten days in January and February of 2009 are part of an autoethnographic scene (Ellis and Bochner 2000), through which I look deeply at the meaning of interactions between myself and my birth father as a participant observer. The initial emotive contact became an identified epiphany (Denzin 1989; see earlier definition in chapter 3) and since it is situated in the centre of my conceptual framework (Fig 1) it is considered a major epiphany (Denzin 1989).

This major epiphany is characterised by sensory, negotiated and ethereal affinities, themes central to how kinship is experienced (Mason 2008). In addition to secrecy, physical difference and narrative presence concepts central to adoptive kinship (Galvin and Colaner 2014). Consequently, the following epiphany is divided into these broad themes vital to understanding kinship affinities adoptees might feel with birth kin, these are; physical and sensory, negotiated and thirdly secret or ethereal affinities. Furthermore, this fragmented narrative addresses limitations in current literature and lack of elaboration on core adoptive kinship themes.

Firstly, it provides an insight into a first-hand account of a birth fathers perspective (French 2014). Secondly, by breaking the silence in narrating my birth fathers story I open a space where my adoptive story can coexist to transform and challenge current norms and values (Hughes 2015). Lastly and importantly, I seek to add to the body of existing research and provide analysis of the features of sensory relationality and inter-physicality, curiously and ethereally witnessed between an adult adopted woman and her birth father (Mason 2008, 2018).

4.2.1. Physical/sensory affinities

Physical or sensory affinities are;

> '….physical, bodily, material and, above all, sensory. These are clearly quite central and resonant in the lived reality of people's kinship and relationships'. (Mason 2008, p. 40).

This writing aims to illuminate adoptive and birth kinship interactions through an understanding of 'connections between bodies themselves'. (Strathern 2005, p. 26). As Mason notes what is lacking from the academic literature is an analysis of sensory relationality and inter-physicality in kinship relations (2008, p. 40).

Within 24 hours of emailing the man I thought might be my birth father, he replied;

You may be the long lost child. I thought that you'd turn up one day, but we both have to be sure.

Ralph, email excerpt January

In this first email exchange Ralph used the word 'lost', yet I did not consider myself to be lost in any way. The reasons I searched for him and my birth mother were not to do with my woundedness and need to return to the biological mother (or father) for wholeness (Yngvesson 2010), or because of suffering some kind of primal wound (Verrier 1993). On the contrary, my reasons were concerned with a curiousness to find out who I physically resembled. This curiousness is experienced by adopted females more than males and could have been deepened by my perception of a physical mismatch between myself and my adoptive parents (Hollingsworth, 1998 in Muller and Perry 2001).

In the same way a participant in this study, Lesley the adoptive mother of Josh (in his 20's), recounts her son's observations when attending a family wedding. Looking around the room he said;

…….this isn't really my family is it? This isn't my family, this isn't my blood….and… there was this sense then that something had to be found.

Lesley, Adoptive mother interview

It was also important for me to know if I might have a similar personality, interests and values to Ralph (Benson et al., 1994). In reflection, I recognise that I did not perceive too great a personality mismatch between myself and my adoptive parents, but I did perceive a greater sensory and negotiated mismatch between myself and

my adopted children, who were 19 and 20 years old at the time of my search. So, the combination of sensory and inter-physical affinities and my perception of a lack of these in my current kinship relations was, at least in part, responsible for eliciting my search.

Within two days we both sent another email, the detail was palpable, it was clear who we were to each other. Then, almost as an afterthought in the second email he wrote a post script;

> *p.s. Do you recognise yourself in me?*
>
> *Ralph, email excerpt January*

Do you (personal) recognise (verb accept) yourself (reflexive pronoun) in me?

I was struck by this heartfelt statement. So much so that reading this produced a visceral physical reaction in me. The power of this phrase evoked a reflexive flash of insight as a recognition of self, and a recognition of who I was in relation to Ralph. Not only did he want to know if I resembled him, but he also wanted to know if I identified aspects of myself which were like him. Furthermore, he used the word recognise rather than saying 'do you look like me?' Recognition used as a verb is an 'acceptance that something is legal, true, or important' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2017). Recognition is a deeply significant concept to adoptees as well as being central from an interdisciplinary perspective drawing from the work of Hegel (1807/1977) and Mead (1934) (in Kallio 2014). Consequently, the intersubjective and

intergenerational contextual recognition in Ralph's statement became forcefully dynamic in our burgeoning relations.

Furthermore, the carefully selected words Ralph chose to describe this action and the explicit use of reflexive pronouns showed that he may have done this for added emphasis. The emphasis was on me the searcher, no doubt another reason for the physical, visceral reaction in me. Many years later, I also reflected how Ralph's choice of grammar was pertinent to my epistemology and the autoethnographic approach I chose for this thesis, since using embodied relational language has a much deeper fundamental effect on the reader (Allen-Collinson 2013, Ellis and Bochner 2006). Clearly in these reflexive flashes I dynamically felt sensory familiarity, caused when aspects of my fixity of kinship interacted with my intellect and my social relatedness. Creating in me a 'certainty in perception' (Mason 2008, p.38).

I decided to keep my response to Ralph's p.s. light, being afraid that the depth of feeling may extinguish this burgeoning relationship. So, I responded implicitly, reflectively, by sending a photo of me. I also felt I was not yet able to judge in what ways I recognised myself in him, after all it had only been two days since my initial email. Perhaps he thought I had trawled his social media sites to get to know him a little. Yet I did not have a Facebook or Twitter page at that time and I really didn't want to go much further than analysing our shared physical features and elements of his life story for the moment. Nevertheless, from his presence on the internet I discerned that our facial physical similarities were immediately recognisable, even

though we are a different gender. Within 24 hours the next email provided his affirmation;

> ‘I don't think that we going to need a DNA test; I think that I'd pick you out in a room of 200 people…..
>
> *Ralph, email excerpt January*

Our undeniable biogenetic connection is further emphasised by Ralph’s choice of the terminology DNA, a marker of the dominant biological kinship system of the West. I agree with Ralph, yet I wonder if the other 198 people in that fictitious room wold pick us out as related.

In the same way Lesley, a white adoptive mother of a mixed-race son said;

> …..people tend to assume first of all that Josh might be Mediterranean, he has olive skin, dark hair, very dark eyes, very big eye lashes…. *but black people tend to recognise his blackness*…. which used to be really heart-warming for me.
>
> *Lesley adoptive mother interview*

This evidence assumes that recognition of physical appearance from ‘insider’ kin is powerfully evocative. In this way recognition has a powerful sensory element, just as I felt a warm glow of belonging in my resemblance to Ralph, Lesley too confirms she is heartened because black people have recognised her son’s black characteristics. Therefore, the heritability of Josh’s physical traits and Ralph and my shared

characteristics meant that this would reinforce the fixity (Mason 2008) of our feelings to the group who recognised us as one of them.

So, I felt, to some extent, that one of the aims of my search to find kin that I strongly resembled was fulfilled in finding my birth father.

Likewise, after a birth family reunion, Josh said;

> "…that bit that was missing is filled up now". When he saw his siblings for the first time he said, "I'm seeing people that look like me….."
>
> *Lesley, adoptive mother interview.*

A particular fixity to birth kin is in no sense chosen, nevertheless it is there for both my birth and adoptive self. I was thrilled that Ralph welcomed me wholeheartedly, so I did wish to convey my belief in a fixity of kin to him (Finch and Mason 1993). In the same way I had non-electively yet happily belonged to my adoptive kinship group too, so I was very comfortable in being recognised by both my adoptive and birth kinship groups. Being a member of both an adoptive and birth family simultaneously might seem conflicting, for me as for other adoptees and participants in this study the choice is to be made electively or selectively (Mason 2008). I know these choices to be individually subtle, steeped in dynamic physical, sensory and negotiated affinities over time with both families.

Jenny an adoptee in her 50's exemplified the idea of electivity perfectly when talking about her spirit which is so like her birth family;

> Most of what I do now is really like my (adoptive) Mum was. Like being involved in community things …. and they (birth sisters) don't get it. …. like I've got a similar spirit to my (birth) Irish family, but they don't get where I put my energy…you know?
>
> *Jenny, adoptee interview.*

> Nice pics. We have the same natural haircut...
>
> *Ralph, email excerpt January*

Yes, we do, our hair is the same colour and it goes the same way, it naturally falls more heavily over one side of my face than the other, and we've both gone with nature rather than against it……..

Undoubtedly as Jenny confirms an almost fatalistic recognition of her 'meant to be' hair colour indicates that 'resemblances of course speak of more than themselves' (Mason 2008, p. 34);

> I did meet my mother just the once….. what was really kind of strange about that was she'd hardly gone grey and she had quite red hair, but I have always since I've been in my early 20's I'd always dyed my hair red. It was exactly the same colour as her hair.

I mean I have brownish hair with a tiny bit of reddishness in it. But I used to dye my hair copper or mahogany or something with henna. So, it was really the same colour, so he (birth father) said when I met him, he said your colouring is the same……so I feel as though this should be my colour. It feels as though I was meant to have red hair.

Jenny, adoptee interview.

I didn't know at this stage how much I did or didn't look like my birth mother, I'd not seen pictures of her, nevertheless I knew that when I looked at Ralph it was like looking in a mirror. Clearly the realisation of our strong physical resemblance, struck me with awe, ethereal in origin yet producing a physical reaction I had not expected.

Funny things..

You seem to have my eyes and hairstyle and your mother's teeth. The nose seems to be a shared effort. Your mother's eyes were dark. She reminded me at the time of Rita Tushingham, but her eyes were darker. Funny the things you remember after years of not thinking about them.

Ralph, email excerpt January

So, I believed through the shared concept of recognition our relationship could grow ethically. Conversely, I knew keenly from recent interactions with my children that I might also experience the possibility of misrecognition (Kallio 2014). As a result, and

importantly according to in connecting this autoethnography to adoptive and birth kinship culturally, interactions supporting, or refuting recognition are politically consequential (Deranty and Renault 2007).

Likewise, the analytic power of autoethnography combined with the concept of intergenerational recognition, is politically significant in that it shapes interactions. Varga (2011) identified the analytic power of intergenerational recognition, in that it:

> '…..spreads far past our everyday activities and notices the process as influential beyond the place and time where the very acts take place' (Kallio 2014, p. 143).

Jenny an adoptee in her 50's confirms the power of intergenerational recognition:

> My adopted Dad was a carpenter and he had really, really thick fingers……and my birth father's hands are quite long and slender, slightly crooked, but there is something about the tips of the fingers or the shape of them that is really similar to my son…yeh!
> *Jenny adoptee interview.*

Likewise, when I did meet Ralph, I became acutely aware that I could not recount such powerful images of intergenerational recognition, I did not have birth children to compare their hands with my birth fathers' hands. In this way through experiencing a flash of analytic reflexively, I became mindful that my choice to adopt children would extend beyond the time and place when I made this decision. My decision fitted perfectly into my adoptive family construction, until I met Ralph. Predictably and as

Brinich (1993) suggests adoption enacts certain tensions that are linked to basic human impulses such as ‘sexuality and aggression, procreation and rivalry’ (Hughes 2015, p. 158). In this way for the first time, I became aware of a previously invisible tension, a potential disappointment on Ralph’s part that he was not a grandparent to a biological child of mine (Brinich 1990).

Nevertheless, at this point (January 2009) Ralph and I had not met face to face, even so our sharing of reciprocal images provided a stark reminder of our legitimacy. I was struck by the sensory nature of Ralph’s musings about my appearance, and how comparable they were to conversations between kin around similar or dissimilar features of a new born baby. Moreover, in this way the act of seeing is multidimensional and analytically useful for examining sensory dimensions of interactions (Davies 2011). Hence when Ralph as an older but unfamiliar family member vocalised his sensory and experiential knowledge of my resemblance I felt the double-edged intimacy of these privileged observations (Davies 2011). Since it is what resemblance means that is important to this work. On the one hand I felt serenely comfortable in the minutiae of recognition. Yet, the person with less knowledge I also felt a flash of discomfort. In this moment I reflexively recognised my self, perceiving for the first time that my reserved, private character, was immediately and for the first time in my life fully known. Significantly for future research, reflexivity as recognition of self was layered with reflexivity as recognition of Ralph. Therefore, the potential for researchers of kinship interactions involving recognition or denial of recognition, is their influence to transmit and produce power beyond these moments (Foucault 1981).

Likewise, it seems that when Jenny, an adoptee in her 50's, met her birth father she experienced a reflexive flash of discomfort;

> When I met him…(he said) so you're just like Irene, your mother. In a funny way it was almost uncomfortable because I had to keep….I felt as though I had to say to him – "I'm not Irene" (Birth Mother). I came along probably around the age when he'd last seen her…..and …it was almost too much to cope with. So, the first time he came to see me I didn't want him to stay in my house, I mean I'd only just met him for a day. He wanted to come over to the town where I live, and I arranged for him to stay with a neighbour. Just because the intimacy was too much, too quickly. *Jenny, adoptee interview.*

In this way, resemblances were sought and rendered relevant by Jenny and I (Howell and Marre 2006). The difference was that Jenny strongly resembled her birth mother whereas I strongly resembled my birth father, an indication that the inter-relationship between us as adoptees and the relative we resembled may play out differently.

In this way it is evident that the relational qualities of kinship and gender are vividly elemental and generative (Strathern, 2016 in Carsten 2017). Indeed Strathern (2016) emphasises an obscure yet potent point relevant to exploring the relational qualities of kinship and gender in that it is difficult to escape our own cultured versions of gender relations, because 'gender inscribes, models or inserts itself into other forms of relation' (Strathern in Carsten 2017, p. 190). The structuring power of gender and age would normally be minimised in intimate familial relationships (Kallio

2014), such as those between Jenny and I and our adoptive Dad's. Whereas, with newly encountered birth fathers and daughters, the structuring power of past culturally defined and created gendered roles were, as yet inestimable and undefined. Jenny and I were therefore in the process of finding out how the cultural gendered roles between us and out birth fathers varied and hopefully how they could be successfully intertwined. This knowledge had the effect of producing a mysterious indefinable, sensory affinity in me (Mason 2018). For the present Ralph and I continued happily in our observed roles.

> It's quite frightening but really exciting to find myself with a daughter at three score and ten minus 3.
>
> *Ralph, email excerpt January*

Ralph clearly named me as his daughter and from my perspective he is my birth father, a tension that I was aware of. Yet, from this time onwards Ralph never refers to me as his daughter, perhaps because he was aware of the tension I might have felt in having two fathers. A point which could undermine and expose our fragile relationship and so offered us possibilities for resistance (Foucault 1981). On the other hand, I was convinced that we could construct a joint narrative with these beginnings, interacting via email until we spoke for the first time by phone.

On the phone Ralph and I developed and nurtured an insider rapport, not necessarily from shared experience but from a recognition of a tangible physical likeness and trust in our burgeoning email conversations (Puwar 1997). Ralph's voice echoed

confidence, being resounding and reassuring, as he humorously and anecdotally recalled the terms Lad and Lass, demonstrating the parochial, sensory and gendered vocabulary of the region I live in, a cultural space Ralph knew well. As a result, our tangible physical recognition deepened through reciprocal conversational negotiation.

4.2.2. Negotiated

Sociology and anthropology literature emphasise how moral and material dimensions of kinship obligations are negotiated interactively (Finch and Mason 1993). Essentially in the email extract below negotiation was absent, this shaped Ralph's, birth father experience in that it was characterised by; 'discomfort, distress and dysfunctional behaviour' (Clapton 2016, p. 158).

I have to tell you that it was one of the most desperate moments of my life. I was in love with Jean and it hurt me more than most things before or since. I went off the rails……. The fact that it isn't written in the papers you have relates more to the fact that her mother detested me, and I suspect that she was only willing to admit to the minimum required by law when it came to adoption. She was determined that I would never find the baby.

I'd known Jean for about a year when she became pregnant. I'd met her mother. It was chalk and cheese, and she became almost instantly confrontational. She told me right away that her husband had been a brave man, and that he'd died for his country, and she produced a medal from a drawer and stuck it in my face without letting me touch it…….. She was unwilling to give me the time of day. I could

see that she was still suffering from his loss. She was obviously depressed, really vengeful and living alone. Actually, when I think about it now, I realize that she was in bad shape mentally.

Ralph, email excerpt January

Ostensibly Jean's mother's lack of affinity, through a refusal to talk, to negotiate at the very outset of my existence, resulted in Ralph, like many birth fathers immediately feeling profound criticism and humiliation (Clifton 2012). Secondly, Ralph's omission from my birth certificate (but not my adoption papers) also had the effect of reinforcing secrecy and so attempting to secure his future exclusion in "reunion" processes (Coles, 2004). In the context of this caldron of emotions some birth fathers 'self-harmed, attempted suicide and experienced severe depression' (Clapton 2016). In this situation of powerlessness, Ralph could have either maintained a strong sense of *entitlement* or alternatively *resigned* himself to minimise his responsibility for the so-called adoption crisis (Clifton 2012). I would argue Ralph has taken not one but both these positions synchronously and at different times.

The depth of emotionally reflexivity Ralph demonstrates through his emails is unquestionable, in the same way I realise my writing style is influenced by my daily practice as a tutor in corresponding with students. Accordingly, I found his writing style amicable and vulnerable yet showing a strong sense of entitlement, a style which has been influenced by a lifetime of practices which worked to embody his role as a writer and the effect he wants to convey. So, when Ralph began to display

elements of annoyance and depression in his last email to me I believed this to be characteristic of a birth father who has a strong sense of his entitlement (Clifton 2012). Yet conversely his complete withdrawal from me after this last email suggests he wished to distance himself from any stigma and humiliation therefore as a *resigner*, hides from public scrutiny (Clifton 2012). Indeed, evidence of Ralph's career in the public domain is extensively documented after 1965, confirmation that the period prior to this in which I was born is characterised by secrecy (Galvin and Colaner 2014). Further evidence which suggests Ralph is *resigned* to distance himself from the so-called adoption crisis.

Conversely as a birth father with a strong sense of entitlement, I can see there have been times in Ralph's life where he seems to have maintained the emotional and metaphorical fight he began with Jean's mother 47 years before. Perhaps he found the mantle of chronic loss and unresolved grief intolerable, since adoption seemed to leave a permanent emotional scar on Ralph as a birth father (Coles 2011). Indeed, the challenge from Jean's mother may have caused Ralph to recount instances 'of a fight for their child lost heroically against a powerful opponent' (Clifton 2012, p. 53). Clearly maintaining such a mind-set into the future would have the effect of denying himself a chance to find a new role in his relationship with me, his birth child. Yet recounting a fight, fictitious or real, is also central to depicting himself as morally good whilst also being an affirmation of manhood in being a competent father (Clifton 2012; Cheng 2014).

It is obvious Ralph and I share affinities, 'we are bound by some tie', in genetic, physical and sensory ways. Yet kinship has;

> ‘the capacity to construct chains into the past and future, to memorialise and forget to imagine and ignore connections, to build correspondences and deny them’ (Carsten 2017, p. 189)

Jenny, who resembles her birth mother more than her birth father confirms;

> To be really honest, with my birth father and my half-sister…..it’s been absolutely fine. The relationship with my mother’s family has been a bit more tricky. I don’t know what it is, but I find it really difficult to maintain contact.
>
> *Jenny adoptee interview.*

Interesting Jenny’s birth father has another daughter. Importantly this birth father has relationally practiced being a father to this daughter before Jenny appeared. As a result, the created and negotiated everyday practices of being father and daughter are significant in untangling the unique relational and gendered affinities between adoptees and their birth parents. Conversely my appearance was the first time Ralph had practiced being a father to a daughter, he did not have any other daughters. In this way we understand kinship to be tangled with temporality and similarity, which therefore also inevitably underlies processes of rejection and removal. This is clearly illustrated by the removal of Jean and rejection of Ralph by Jean’s mother in this epiphany (Carsten 2017).

Consequently, it is how relational and gendered affinities are temporally re-created and negotiated through everyday practices between adult adoptees and their birth relatives that are key to future harmony. Given time and negotiation I believe that

my relationship with Ralph would have been ‘absolutely fine’ too, yet there were added dynamics at play, demonstrated in the next section.

4.2.3. Secret/ethereal/otherworldliness – linked to sensory affinities

Ethereal affinities are those that are;

> ‘…seen as mysterious, magical, psychic, metaphysical, spiritual and, above all, ethereal – matters that are considered beyond (rational) explanation’ (Mason 2008, p. 37).

So, to elaborate and connect the nature of ethereal affinities to this epiphany, these;

> ‘….exist(s) and emanate(s) from somewhere ethereal, between and beyond persons’ (Mason 2008, p. 38).

Hence this epiphany illustrates momentary visual and sensory flashes of reflexivity as a recognition of self and a recognition of other (Pillow 2003). They are illustrated by familiar and inevitable interactions between myself as an adoptee and my birth father, enhanced by participant evidence.

One fact I knew, Ralph was named as my father on my adoption documents, but not named on my birth certificate, typical for many pre-1980’s adoptees (Clapton and Clifton 2016). Yet I knew little else of his characteristics and the circumstances of my adoption, so I asked Ralph what he knew of the history behind my adoption. I did not expect the genuine outpouring that ensued, however I was really grateful for the

complexity of detail, indeed I found it comforting that another human being had also carried a secret story, relating to my beginnings, with him for 47 years.

> ‘I've wanted to write a memoir of those times, but I always suspected that there was someone going to be out there who might eventually arrive, so I haven't done it. There is still a temptation’.
>
> *Ralph, email excerpt January*

I was a little uneasy when I heard he wanted to write about those times, yet importantly Ralph’s inter-subjective recognition of ‘someone out there’, shows awareness of how ethereally recounting events ‘between and beyond persons’ could affect our relationship (Mason 2008, p. 38). Hence by keeping the details of those times secret for now, he shows an ethic of care towards those who may be implicated in his story, and those who may also be my relatives (Ellis, 2007; Ellis et al., 2011). Nevertheless, it is evident we both share a burning desire to write, stirred up by our deepest emotions and most probably triggered by the reflexive action of my *arrival* (Winter 2013).

So, Ralph and I, as people involved in the arts (see 3.1. and 3.3.), demonstrate that our ethereal affinity is more easily understood through ‘existential multi-dimensionality in our real-life resonance’ (Mason 2008, p. 38). For example, Ralph’s day to day occupation is aligned to the arts, whereas mine is more closely aligned to the academic discipline of social science research. Nevertheless, this epiphany

ignited an affinity in us both to write. In this way our shared sensory, ethereal affinities imitate and reflect the fixity of our kinship.

Conceivably adoptees and persons with unknowable origin, can embody the fleeting mystical, ethereal affinities of unexplainable dimensions more plainly because of the opportunity afforded them through the fantasy and then recognition of mysterious parentage.

Ethereal affinities arise from a visual or sensory potion, such as Ralph's statement '*do you recognise yourself in me'*, from familiar situations or a surety of perception (Mason 2008, p. 38). Undoubtedly I experienced ethereal affinities before I met Ralph but could rarely explain them. Conversely after this epiphany I came to know through reflexive engagement with my adoptive and birth history, both my given and made characteristics (Carsten 2004).

Ralph continued to explore intangible connections between us as he reflectively mused what it must be like for me….

…. It must be very strange for you to suddenly have a new and older relative. I can imagine what that's like because I found out that my step-mother was not my real mother in a row between my parents when I was nine. I didn't like her at all, and it was a great relief. Disturbing, but a great relief'.

Ralph, email excerpt January

Ralph's writing was deeply empathetic, yes it was very strange having a new and older relative. Unwittingly or not in this email Ralph juxtaposed our physical resemblance with a potential psychic or ethereal affinity (Mason 2008) from Ralph's past. In this way his narrative connected with dreams of roots and belonging, in Freudian terms these primal hopes are universal to early psychic life (Hughes 2015). Accordingly, I became aware that our physical likeness may indicate a more profound, psychic or ethereal connection that may be beyond rational explanation (Mason 2008, see 3.2.; *Graphy*).

Ralph's ethereal moment of relief seems to have been activated by a flash of reflexivity in finding out the mother he disliked was not his real mother, confirmed through her lack of biological realness. Pursuing this argument could indicate that non-biological familial relationships are inauthentic, fictive and therefore inferior (Baden 2016). Consequently, Ralph's narrative implied a belief that legitimate familial relationships are based on the supremacy of a biological, blood connection rather than an affinity or relatedness as would be the case for relationships formed through re-marriage or adoption (Carsten 2004).

Hence what I seemed to be reading was a symbolic opposition, between real and unreal, the axis of which evoked a visceral feeling of mysticism in me, potentially imbuing our relationship with an emotional rawness.

I wonder if he thought that I too might have a similar ethereal moment in finding out that my adoptive mum was not my 'real' mum. In this way our tangible physical resemblance could also be intangibly recognised thought a shared dislike of our mothers.

Or, another possibility could be that through this story Ralph was trying to tell me that he thought himself to be my only true father, a *vindicator* (Clifton 2012). As a result, he could be upholding the Western cultural view of biological hegemony, illuminated by Schneider's American Kinship (1980). Indeed, in this way perhaps Ralph believed that because he was my biological father, my arrival being the result of sexual procreation, then our relationship could be taken for granted as 'given'. Whereas, I was culturally an adoptee and an adoptive mother, so I took the point of view of feminist scholars that the natural and the social, or the given and made in gender relations cannot be explicitly separated (Yanagisako and Collier 1987).

Immediately I explored how his view impacted on me, I reflected on Ralph's experience with his step-mother and related this to my experience with Mum. Popular culture and fairy tales generally depict two types of adoptive mother or step-mother, the villain and the rescuer (Baden 2016). Evidently Ralph's perception at the time of this event, seemed to position his step-mother as more villain like than rescuer. Yet my story was not like his. I considered my adoptive mother to be my real mother, there was no mismatch, and I didn't dislike her at all. Neither did I consider her to be a villain or a rescuer, she was just Mum.

Ralph's narrative unwittingly or not reinforces an implied belief that only biological parentage is legitimate. If so this belief could invalidate my adoptive daughter status but also my adoptive mother status, and therefore my whole history, a double adoption micro-invalidation (Baden 2016). As an adoptee and adoptive mother, I hold the belief that I share affinities with two sets of kin, birth and adoptive, so 'relations of procreation are patterned by the kinship order in which they are embedded' (Sahlins 2013, p. 76).

Clearly, my arrival had triggered anxious feelings from Ralph's ancestral past, so through recounting this story he could have been attempting to link past events to a relationship with me in the present (Myers 2014). In his narrative Ralph painted his relationship with his step-mother as destructive. Therefore, if my relationship with my adoptive Mum was found to be similarly destructive then we could share an empathy, possibly reinforced by 'cultural narratives of the masculine figure as a rescuer or prince who extracts the female subject from the powerful but destructive mother/stepmother figure' (Hughes 2015, p. 161).

I this way I believe the feeling of being disturbed and relieved would permeate Ralph's future relationships with a 'yearned-for fixity of kinship, but they would do so ethereally' (Mason 2008, p. 40). Conversely, I grew up always knowing I was adopted, so my scenario of fate was differently composed to Ralph's. My scenario of fate was related to a rupture in my adoptive family experience caused by family breakdown, which meant that the discursive, linear, complete adoptive kinship view I previously held could not be maintained (Myers 2014). Consequently, my future

relationships would likewise be permeated with an ethereal yearning for fixity of kinship (Mason 2008).

In this way both our stories illustrated that sensory affinities existed beyond our control or choice, so attesting to the many creative possibilities and potential for ethereal affinities to flourish (Mason 2008). Clearly any interpretation of 'abstract connections' (Edwards 2000, p. 214) between Ralph and I would not be found in our so-called *unreal* mothers. Yet because both our intimate familial relationships had suffered ruptures, there was the possibility of finding abstract connections in our ethereal yearning for a fixity of kinship.

At the time of our email interactions I realised I was totally absorbed in wanting everything to go well with Ralph that any deeper reflections were concealed by more immediate emotional musings. Many years later and after reflexive engagement with literature I came to understand Ralph's recognition of me was so profoundly important because it involved within me a 'complex and multi-layered spatial negotiation of belonging, proximity and distance' (Koefoed and Simonsen 2012, p. 638). In other words, recognition was a counterpart to the estrangement I felt from my adopted children (Koefoed and Simonsen 2012). So, it did feel extraordinary when he said; 'It must be very strange for you to suddenly have a new and older relative', the sense that I had other kin in the world that recognised my belonging was intense.

PPS. Your mother became a different story, and obviously you are not aware of that. I never had contact with her again, but about 15 years ago I heard a story about her that isn't happy at all. I'm going to get in touch with my very first girlfriend Peggy to try to find out what the details are. That might take some time.

Ralph, email excerpt January

I tried to phone Peggy a while ago, but she's x-directory so it's going to have to wait until I can write to her and get a reply. I have to tell you now though that the story that I heard from her some years ago was that she thought that Jean had taken her own life. I realize that this will not be good news for you, and it wasn't good news for me when she told me. I will of course hold out some hope, but it does seem strange that she never once contacted me. Perhaps she felt guilty about you. I've no doubt that she did, but perhaps, if that is true, and she has left the planet, it had nothing to do with either you or me. In any event, if it's true that she's gone then I could only lament that. if she'd have contacted me, I'd have tried to put her mind at rest. She was a quiet girl. We never had any argument during our year together.

Ralph, email excerpt January

At this time, I hadn't even thought about trying to trace my birth mother, so when Ralph conveyed this story I showed little emotion, probably because it's difficult to feel affinity with abstract, physically anonymous person. I deferred to Ralph's knowledge about my birth history, in control of the narrative it could be said he held a relationship of power over me (Berman 2012). I was also aware that Ralph's words

‘left the planet’ had a metaphysical, ethereal echo, with the hint of a *microfiction*, in my adoptive history, if so this could have contributed to the secrecy between us (Baden 2016).

Nevertheless, after reflection I realised Ralph was eager to find information about my birth mother to confirm or refute this story, so I believed Ralph to be truthful and I found it plausible that Jean had not contacted him since, evidence of her feelings of guilt no doubt (French et al. 2014). Indeed, the relationship between birth mothers and fathers after adoption is unlike any other relationship, since divorced or single parents for example can still physically see their child. So, I suggest absence of any contact over 47 years exacerbated Ralph’s feelings of loss and grief for us as an adoptive triad; birth mother, birth father and birth child (Coles 2004). It could be argued the unresolved relational issues are threefold for birth fathers, rather than for a birth mother and child in a dyadic relationship. The story that Ralph heard was credible, and if true the finality of suicide was further compounded by my birth mother’s physical absence in juxtaposition to my sensory, ethereal presence via email and in ‘memory and emotion, but absent from either home’ (Fravel et al., 2000 in French et al. 2014, p. 593).

Yet there could be another explanation. As our growing interactions show Ralph seemed to be constructing our kinship ties as physically and genetically *real*, perhaps a logical primary position to take given the appearance of a *lost* daughter. Conversely if ties with my birth mother and my adoptive mother were seen to be absent or unreal, I could be influenced to stay close to him, in solidifying our

legitimate kinship (Berman 2014). Furthermore, taking one's own life is a silencing family taboo, and one which I recognised could develop into an ethereal affinity between us with the potential to develop bonds through joint consolation and suffering. I can't explain why, but I did not truly believe my birth mother had 'left the planet', nevertheless I could not disagree with Ralph at this stage, I had no knowledge of her, and so as a person with so much to lose, it was pointless to challenge this view. Ralph knew that I could choose to be present or physically leave his influence at any time, a tension which extends to 'all parent–child relationships, not just adoptive ones' (Berman 2014, p. 585).

Importantly, many years later I reflect that adoption narratives around 'fixed binaries of real/unreal and past/present could be seen as symbolically violent' (Myers 2014, p. 186). So as our everyday interactions blossomed, I attempted to negotiate and re-create unconscious notions of cultural dominion that Ralph seemed to fleetingly display in the hope that the past would not taint any present and future that we might share.

> I must own up. I went to Somerset House when it was still the records office….In the 70s it was still the BMD records office and I did go and search through the books to find you, and did. I stood there for a while with the giant open book, and thought. At the time, all that I could do was to remain inactive. I knew that your circumstances would be way more settled than mine, and I was loathe to disturb a past I'd left so far behind. All I can actually remember of that day is that I kept stopping, suddenly

finding myself in different places in the West End. And thinking. Being quietly shocked.. and letting it pass. Knowing that I had to.

Ralph, email excerpt January

Birth fathers suffer the loss of the deeply rooted paternal bond in similar ways birth mothers, suffer the maternal loss. So, in recounting this story I am not surprised that Ralph is like 'a great majority of birth fathers are inclined to seek contact' (Fu-jen Chen 2014, p. 2). When reading Ralph's email, I experienced an inexplicable transitory flicker of visual, sensory familiarity in the spaces of his real or imagined visit to the records office. I felt an ethereal affinity with the dream like narrative that extended 'between and beyond' each of us (Mason 2008, p. 38). As I reflect on this I realise that he electively narrates himself on a magical, spiritual journey as any shadowy erased birth father could (Clapton 2008). Ralph clearly blamed Jean's mother for obliterating him from her daughters and therefore my life, so through interactional sense-making in retelling his story he is establishing a narrative inheritance.

Furthermore, and importantly he has passed on this narrative inheritance to me, as I now make this part of our joint, future narrative presence (Ballard and Ballard 2011). My affinity with Ralph's position was heartfelt, as I too experienced erasure from my adopted children's lives after the events of epiphany 3 part 2. In the same way I became aware that at some future date I would engage in elective narration of my elimination from my adopted children's lives. As a result, reflexive engagement

allows me to selectively untangle a ‘mysterious, magical, psychic, metaphysical, spiritual and above all *ethereal*’ (Mason 2008, p. 37) affinity I perceive between us.

4.2.4. Insights and findings

Accordingly, through self-introspection and analysis of literature in being the subject, participant and witness to inter-physical, sensory recognition this epiphany displays how traces of ethereal, cultural and gendered affinities intertwine. Significantly for both Ralph and I as kin, they ‘occurred around the rituals of the life cycle; birth…. marriage, death’. (Carsten 2004, p. 72).

To conclude the physical, negotiated and ethereal affinities in this major epiphany are significant to this and future research for three reasons.

Firstly, the sensory inter-physical aspects of our central and resonant fixity of kinship meant that my birth father and I shared a facial resemblance that was striking. Yet it is what this resemblance meat that was significant to me and future adoptees in the same position. Inter-physical resemblance is politically significant because it is electively there, in no sense chosen and therefore influential in that it shaped interactions between Ralph, I and other biological relatives beyond the everyday. Furthermore, in taking the work of Howell and Marre (2006) further I suggest that when an adopted person meets birth relatives in adulthood, a kinning process begins, which involves the deliberate inclusion of the adopted person into birth relatives personal domain of resemblances. During this kinning process the adopted person has to be acknowledged by birth relatives as ‘the same’. The evidence from

this epiphany suggests that Ralph had already accepted me as 'the same'. Conversely, because of my likeness to Ralph, I suggest the process of kinning, would be more difficult for Jean and I (4.4.). Since we did not share resemblances, our differences were tangible. Therefore, the political significance of similarities and/or differences in resemblance impact inter-relationships beyond the tangible.

Secondly, and interrelated to this, the evidence shows that our sensory and ethereal life narratives were differently composed. So, for example, after engaging in self-introspection, I have come to understand that the symbolic opposition in the axis of real/unreal motherhood produced an emotional rawness in me because of the gender injustice I felt. I didn't know anything of Ralph's step-mother of course, yet in his narrative there was little sense of any favourable affirmation of her, so in disparagingly devaluing her as not a 'real' mother, I felt a flash of insight, in a misrecognition of me, as an adopted mother and as a woman (Bourdieu 1984; Fraser 1998). As a result, our mystical stories were not only beyond our control, but they had the effect of creating a tension between us. Nevertheless, given longevity I believe we could have successfully dispelled these tensions through negotiation and recognition of our shared affinities. All the same this is one example of misrecognition that could continue to transmit and produce power (Fraser 1998), both overtly and secretly (Galvin and Colaner 2014), past specific times, places and kinship roles.

Thirdly, and also connected to the above, the sensory and inter-physical affinities Ralph and I shared were troubled by negotiated cultural aspects of gendered roles in what it meant to create a birth father daughter relationship. Ralph, entrenched in a

male world had brothers and sons but no other daughters, a cultural fact which would influence our everyday interactions and negotiations.

Ethereally, the sensory resonances of our shared resemblance, our differently composed life narrative and the similarities in our intellectual characteristics inspired both Ralph and I to write. Emphasising the 'reality of relatedness' between us (Howell & Marre 2006, p. 306). Much of Ralph's work is autobiographical, likewise I have an active desire to write autoethnography to;

> 'critique dominant norms and practices, foreground social justice aims, and support ethical social change in the interest of making the world a better place' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011 in Lapadat 2017, p. 592).

4.3. What sensory and negotiated interactions can be observed between an adoptive mother and her children in relation to their adoption documents?

What follows are two first person reflective accounts written as epiphanies (Denzin 2014), moments which have left a permanent mark on me as an adopted person and an adoptive parent. They concern decisions I made to keep secret (Galvin and Colaner 2014) the contents of my children's adoption documents in 2009 (part 1) and conversely to disclose and share the documents in 2015 (part 2).

The scenarios were experienced differently because of congruent or conflicting kinship affinities (Mason 2008) between myself, my adopted son and daughter. Undoubtedly, I knew from my own first-hand adoptee experience, these would form moments of revelation producing some initial certainties and subsequently, inevitably a succession of uncertainties. The characteristics of these narratives are relevant and resonant indicating ongoing decisions every adoptee and adoptive parent must make at different times in their lives.

4.3.1. Part 1. Sensory and ethereal affinities between adoptees and their adoptive mother.

Family Characters;
Jamie – my adopted son (aged 19)
Jane – my adopted daughter (aged 18)
Tom – Jane's partner (20)
Ethan – Jane and Tom's son (6 months old)
William – my partner
David – my ex-husband

Participant characters;
Lynn – adopted mother of 2, (Deborah in her 20's).
Diane –adoptive mother of two daughters (in their 20's)
Mandy – adoptive mother of Natalie (age 14)
Lesley – adoptive mother of Josh (20's)
Janet – adoptive mother of twin daughters (20).

N.B. Names of interviewees' children are given only if they are directly referred to in the text.

It was a dark, February evening when the knock came at the door. I had felt particularly under siege these past few weeks and my heart leapt when I heard the knock.

"Who's that at this time in the evening?" I said to William, we had just finished our meal. I felt a foreboding, a reason why I should not answer so I looked out of the window where I could get a good view of who was at the door. I don't usually look out of the window before I answer the door, so I know this spontaneous knock has already affected my behaviour. There stood in an orderly row, almost like soldiers, were Jamie, Tom, Jane and Ethan in a pushchair. Never before had they appeared together at my door in such a purposeful fashion, aware my feelings didn't lie I took this to be a sign of their serious intent.

I plucked up enough courage to open the door, William was right behind me. "Hello" I said with a faint smile, trying to appear calm. Tom spoke. "We've come for Jane's and Jamie's adoption documents, David said you have them. We want to know Jane's background, for Ethan too"

"What documents?" I asked quizzically.

Immediately I thought, no one has even mentioned these for years so why now. I know I have them somewhere, but I don't know where? I remember talking to Jamie and Jane about them when they were much younger, saying that when they are ready they could choose to read them, if they wished. Evidently they contained personal information about their birth parents which, if I was to put myself in their shoes, could be potentially quite upsetting. Really I though the right way to do this would be to discuss the contents with me (or their Dad or an adoption professional) in a calm, supportive atmosphere where they could choose, either together or apart to discuss any issues that might worry them.

My mind drifted for a few moments as I recalled Jamie and Jane's life story book….. Tom looked irritated, frustrated or was it embarrassed as he swayed from one foot to another. "Well Jane's Dad said that you have them, and they belong to Jamie and Jane".

I continued…. "They may concern Jamie and Jane and they may well belong to them, but now is not right time right to talk about this. These things should be discussed during the day when Jamie and Jane are ready. Maybe with an adoption professional or a social worker…. this is not the right time".

As I said this I realised that I was talking to Tom about the documents not to my own children, they stood one on either side of him and didn't speak! Why was this? Their lack of speech and indeed any form of communication between us gave rise to feelings of oppression in me.

I was aware that in being ignored my feelings of discomfort grew, I knew I couldn't hand over the adoption documents uncaringly like some independent arbitrator at the door. I'm not an independent arbitrator, I'm their Mum. Defensively I maintained my position "…..I don't know where the documents are right now…. and even if I did, this isn't the right time to talk about them".

My mind drifted, looking for reasons this visit had occurred.

Tom protested again; "Well Jane's Dad said that you have them, and they belong to Jamie and Jane".

At this point I started to get irritated, maybe it was the mention of David's name again.

"Look" I said, "if David wants the documents then tell him he must ask for them through my solicitor". I realise I sounded defensive and fractious, because of what I had been through so far with David, but I was determined that I was not going to feel pressurised into handing over the adoption documents to Tom, a go-between in my view, whilst my children were mute.

For a moment, time froze, my thoughts occupied the space between me and my children. Sadly, I felt like they didn't know me, or I them, they didn't seem to recognise any of what we'd been through together. Jamie's eyes were averted, and he shifted from one foot to another not knowing what to do with his hands. Then again this was not so unusual for Jamie, perhaps it was the so-called features of Asperger's that I could see. Jane stood behind the pram, using it as a prop, her eyes looking down at Ethan most of the time. Tom was the only one who made eye contact with me. In my desolation, in a flicker of an eye, I reflexively experienced a recognition of self as their adoptive mother. My children, who I'd loved and brought

up were emotionally very cold, silent, their body language passive. All the relatedness we created over 17 years together, any empathy or gentleness seemed in this moment to have been expunged. It was as if I wasn't their Mum at all. For the first time in my life I recognised the precariousness of my adoptive mother status, and reflexivity of other, in the form of their birth mother. There was nothing more to add, we all stood there on the doorstep in an eternity of silence. Uneasy glances were exchanged.

"I think you should leave now….come back during the day to talk about this, not now in the middle of the night, it's not the right time " and shut the door. My heart beating fast.

Nonetheless they did not leave. They continued to stand in the porch. I could hear mumbling as the little group were trying to decide what to do next. Perhaps they thought I would give in, for a quiet life and open the door again if they persisted in lingering? After what seemed like a few minutes they walked down the garden path and stood on the pavement at the gate, not wishing to give up just yet.

A few moments later I looked out of the window again, Tom was on his mobile phone talking intently to someone. Who? Was he seeking advice, discussing strategy? At this point a passer by walking his dog on the other side of the road noticed that we are having trouble in freeing ourselves from this delegation, perhaps he heard what Tom said to the person on the other end of the phone. A few glances were exchanged between the passer-by and the threesome, minutes later when the little delegation reluctantly drifted away the passer-by came to the front door to offer assistance. Apparently he was an off-duty police officer. He did not know the three young people at the gate were my family. I didn't tell him.

Undoubtedly the way that the documents were demanded ensured that I was considered marginal, subordinate and insignificant that a mutual dialogue was deemed unnecessary. Indeed, it seemed that had I relinquished the documents without a shared dialogue, then I would also be relinquishing any part in my children's lives henceforth.

I have come to understand that simultaneous thinning and thickening of kinship ties are occurring between different members of my family and myself at this time (Carsten 2013). Thickening, as Jane and Tom have a new tangible blood relative, their son Ethan. Thinning, because there was an embodied separation of our 'house society' (Levi-Strauss 1983 in Carsten 2004). Therefore, embodied aspects of kinship are dynamically related to the temporal aspects of kinship, as we no longer exchanged material processes of living together in the same house. Hence this interaction, and any future exchanges with my children, would not necessarily be based around the co-residency and continuity of the marital home as property or therefore my Mothering role. In this way, it could be said that the lessening influence of my Mothering role was culturally invisible or 'invisible in plain sight' (Stark 2007, p. 40). Likewise, the interactions at the threshold that day seem to indicate that legitimacy between Jane, Jamie, Tom and I was thinning. In line with the ideas of Levi-Strauss (1982), as long as continuity of kinship could be passed down, and articulated in terms of relationship or affinity, then it is considered legitimate. But it is the 'estate of the house, not the people, that counts' (1982, p. 174 in McKinnon 2017, Ch9, no page). Consequently, the visit may suggest, that Jane's and Jamie's relationship to me became subordinate to their relationship with the house.

As an adoptee my usual willingness and empathy to negotiate (Mason 2008) turned into a reluctance as I stood on the threshold of my home, the world and my position as an adoptee seemed to be reversed (Bourdieu 1990, p. 282-3). At this time, I was acutely aware of the value of the adoption documents to Jamie and Jane, because simultaneous to this event I was involved in email and phone conversations with Ralph my birth father (E2) in finding out about my own heritage. At this time, I intensely identified with the statement 'a person who does not know her ancestry is denied access to who she really is' (Yngvesson and Mahoney 2000, p. 92). Nevertheless, reflecting on this statement years later I have a problem with the words '*who she really is'*, which firstly suggests a supremacy of blood and birth ties over adoptive ones and secondly through the use of 'is' suggests a static nature of identity. Certainly, I was not saying to my children that 'your past does not matter; denying the historical' and so making their birth parents illegible (Myers 2014, p. 179). I wanted to have a dialogue with Jane and Jamie about the contents of the documents, so that they could recognise the affinities they might share from both their adoptive and birth histories.

From personal experience I have felt the dichotomy in wanting to know about my heritage but also I did not want to hurt my adoptive parents by asking (Kalus 2016). Therefore, initially I believed my children's ethereal silence could have been a characteristic of their shame or resistance (Hyam 2004 in Woolhouse 2017). If this was the case Jane could have presented her embodied shame through looking away or Jamie through shifting from foot to foot. Yet I'm not sure this inference is an accurate representation of these moments in relation to my children. Based on our

previous negotiated and created practices of ‘doing’ rather than ‘being’ (McKinnon 2017) I knew their interactions to be common. Jamie was genuinely and normally hesitant whilst Jane was often an inarticulate, silent child.

From my own adoptee experience I recognise moments where my own (in)articulation or silence was tangibly connected to enduring identity work, likewise Jane’s and Jamie’s voiceless absence can be seen as genuine moments when they were struggling to cognitively construct a coherent story of themselves. In this way their absence of speech could be understood not as meaningless, but as a ‘structuring presence’ (Butler 1990, p. 113), fundamental to the embodied creation of their self-identity.

However, I recognise that in those ethereal moments on the doorstep I privileged Tom’s insistent verbal presence over my children’s voiceless absence or ‘voice over silence’ (Rosiek and Heffernan 2014, p. 727 in Woolhouse 2017, p.9) which I believe served to separate me from any meaningful empathy and engagement with my children’s structuring presence.

Simultaneously I also recognised the temporality of these events, Jane and Jamie were seeking knowledge about their past at a time when our adoptive family kinship was thinning or destabilised, as I had done and was still in the process of doing. Significantly, I had never mislead my children about their genetic origins, recognising that a coherent synthesis of past and present was necessary to their ‘ontological security’ (Carsten 2000b; Smart 2009). In this way, as Howell and Marre (2006)

suggest in their work on children conceived by donor sperm, knowledge of 'biological origins is vital for the development of a balanced personality' (Howell & Marre 2006, p. 297). Interestingly it seems all three of us were on a journey to find ontological security (Giddens 1991).

I am also mindful that this event occurred the year in which Jane was 18. So, there is a sense in which Jane (and Tom) might have considered turning of age meant that this information should be rightfully hers. In this way this event could be seen as a cultural border crossing (Jones, M. 2013). Although this was never articulated by David and I.

Lesley, an adoptive mother participant in this study, did have this conversation with Josh, her adopted son, who wanted to find out about his birth mother as soon as he reached 18;

> ….on his 18th birthday all he said was can we find out now where she is! Gives you a sense of where his comprehension is on this process…..within all this (contact with Social workers etc.) his birth mother wrote him a letter, and for the first time she became real. Josh was so excited to write, he wrote that night. He very clearly called her Mum in the letter and called me Mum if he wanted something.
>
> *Lesley adoptive mother interview*

Quite clearly there is a twofold fixity of kin between Josh and his adoptive mother, and between Josh and his birth mother, as he calls both people 'Mum'. This clearly

demonstrates how this adoptees awareness of their dual heritage is fixed, yet clearly the fixity is also subject to negotiation when Lesley says, he 'called me Mum if he wanted something'.

From personal experience as an adoptee and adoptive mother I knew that Jamie and Jane would only develop a coherent synthesis of their past and present through 'doing', in dialogue with others beyond the self (Anderson 2006) and in negotiation (Mason 2008). Consequently, I knew *how* this information was shared rather than what it contained was far more important to the future stability of our adoptive and their birth kinship simultaneously. By not understanding the vital significance of this point I believe Tom actively undermined our kinship. Perhaps because he believed in the biological hegemony of 'being' rather than 'doing'. Evidently I could not consider my adoptive kinship to be second best, nor could I consider my choice to adopt Jane and Jamie as second best because they are my kin.

Indeed, Tom revealed his beliefs during a visit to my house one week before. These interactions are also significant in understanding why I could not share the adoption documents with him.

1 week before

Tom knocked on the door of my house, during the day, although it was unusual for him to come on his own, it seemed at first like a conciliatory visit. His purpose, or was it his and Jane's purpose, was to affirm that they wanted me to be 'grandma', to

have a relationship with 6-month-old Ethan. Why this had to be tangibly spoken I wasn't sure, true I hadn't spent much time with Ethan so far because Jane and Tom lived with my ex-husband, he had the bigger house. A house which I felt I could not visit. But then I soon realised that there was an ulterior motive.

Tom verbally meandered around the purpose of his visit for some minutes, he was obviously trying to find the right words for what he wanted to express. Then the venomous blow was delivered. "Jane and me, well we would like you to have a relationship with Ethan, we want him to know you …… (he paused)….. but we don't want William to have anything to do with him, we don't want him around Ethan". "What…." I said, in amazement. Tom re-phrased and repeated what he said. I was struck dumb. William brought up three wonderful sons, all lovely well-educated young men. This is a man who would be a positive influence on any children. Did Tom really think that I would acquiesce to his and Jane's dictat? Indeed, I thought for a moment, this was certainly not the impression I had given, I was not the doting Grandma type. Maybe he and Jane believed that because of my status as an adoptive mother that I would value being Grandma to Ethan above anything else, because he is my daughter's birth child?

Momentarily in a flash of insight I realised that never before had someone been so openly manipulative to me and my loved ones. Every fibre of my body was repulsed by what I perceived as an attempt to coerce me. Tears of disbelief and betrayal began to well up in my eyes, my mouth opened but no words came out. Incensed I got up from where I sat and walked to the front door. Tom got up too and followed me. Resolutely I opened the door, stood aside and quietly said 'you'd better leave'. Tom silently walked out of the door and I closed it behind him.

Through engaging with analytic reflexivity in relation to the narratives recounted above I realise that this is a cumulative or illuminative event in my adoptive family interactions as it signifies eruptions or reactions to experiences which have been going on for a long time (Denzin 2014). Furthermore, the importance of my home as central to these events means that this is also categorised as a relived epiphany.

Two intertwined themes are worthy of further analysis in relation to this epiphany. Firstly, the importance of relatedness between Jane, I, Tom and William. Secondly, the significance of the relatedness between family members and the house where William and I live, where my adoptive kinship was made and to a lesser extent where Jane's adoptive kinship was made.

The elements of Tom's dialogue that I did agree with, was that Ethan and I should have a relationship. Perhaps this emphasised a belief that the adoptive mother daughter relatedness between Jane and I, was based on strong inter-generational social and emotional practices. In this way I am reminded that 'kinship studies have taught us to study relations not individuals' (Howell 2009, p. 152). Consequently, Tom demonstrated that he believed to a certain extent, in a fluid kinship community, one which included members that were both biologically and socially related. The elements of Tom's dialogue that I could not agree with came as a result of a flash of insight, as a recognition of self (Pillow 2003). Namely, the exclusion of William from our future relatedness went to the very core of my adopted self, to the feelings of difference I had experienced all my life. Acknowledging that my ontology had been

threatened through exclusion of William, was a sign too that at some future point, I too could be easily spurned.

The second intertwined theme worthy of analysis concerns the relatedness between members of my family and between us and the home where this epiphany was experienced. Even though this family home was smaller than the marital home, in need of renovation and less desirable, at some level my abode could have been considered to exert a powerful temporal influence. For example, this was the house where I was raised, it belonged to my Mother who bequeathed it to me a year earlier and was the place that Jane and Jamie interacted with their Grandmother as children. It is therefore significant that the social relatedness not only between family members but between us and this home could have intensified feelings, which resulted in dialogue seeking to marginalise William.

Diane an adoptive mother of a daughter in her 20's re-counts her daughter's feelings about her home;

> She sees her past as rooted here! And she didn't want me to dispose of anything without her say so, because I might possibly be throwing away her roots, that' she's only just managed to put down.
>
> *Diane adoptive mother interview*

Analysis of the two narratives that form part 1;

From an economic and emotional perspective, I considered myself weaker than David at that time. Yet, from Tom and Jane's perspective not only did I possess the adoption documents but also a symbolic physical, sensory and ethereal (Mason 2008) house that Tom and Jane openly coveted as a potential home for their new family.

Consequently, Tom and Jane seemed to hold the view that they did wish to blend their biological relatedness with me as a socially related adoptive mother, yet this did not extend to William as a socially related other. My refusal to be coerced by Tom's requests was underpinned by a strong belief that no loved ones should be othered or subjugated. Furthermore, activities undertaken by children towards parents which are seen to be coercive, controlling or dominating are examples of child to parent violence (DfE 2014). In this way I write to reclaim the voice of subjugated and subverted experience (Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis 2013). Therefore, I did not concede any power over my home or of the value and magnitude I placed on the appropriateness at this time of my adoptee and adoptive parent view in not sharing the documents.

Evidence from Janet, an adoptive mother of twin girls confirms her decision making in not sharing the contents of life story books with her daughters;

> 'There were 8 photo books for each daughter…and they were presented to us as a work of art……by the social worker saying they were a fantastic example of all this. Whereas inside actually, we were thinking you are passing on a massive thing, this is much more than anyone is ever expecting, and the detail… than was ever needed.

I'll have to say that we've never shown them….as it was really confusing. So, for a lot of reasons we felt it wasn't right. We've got those (photos) to hand but we've never shown them all the writing…. And of course, their birth mother is referred to all the time as mummy.'

Janet - adoptive mother interview

Engaging in negotiation (Mason 2008) would have been key to resolving the differences between us, however Tom was in my view not in a position to ask for the adoption documents. After employing analytic reflexivity, I understand that because of Tom's actions during and preceding this epiphany I considered him a member of my fluid kinship community; afterwards, I considered him, and Jane to some extent, a challenger to my view of our potential integrated kinship.

In conclusion to part 1, the proximity and significance of the two visits narrated here resonate, because it is the only time in my life that the visceral feelings I experienced caused me to show anyone the door, asking Tom to leave my home. Furthermore, on the second visit, I would have wanted to give my children their documents, as it seems they were on the same journey as I, in finding out where they had come from. Nevertheless, Tom's visit left me speechless. Without a consensus or blueprint for the ways in which our future relationship might continue to flourish, or even a willingness to talk, there would be no way forward. Anthropology may provide some answers for my intense feelings, in that some kinship groups, such as those formed through adoption, are based on creating experiences such as living in houses (McKinnon 2017). Furthermore, the interactions took place in my childhood adoptive

home, my mother's house, so the inherent power of this site intensified my feelings of affinity. This I feel is a valid explanation for my own conceptions of kinship, because at a time in my life when I felt threatened, I returned to a house where temporally my kin was made, and where I felt strong intergenerational affinity. Likewise, Jane could have experienced similar resonances with this house, as she would visit often when her Grandmother lived here. Perhaps an explanation why she wanted to live in this house with Tom and Ethan. Through engaging in analytic reflexivity, I have come to understand that because the interactions took place in the house where my kinship was made, I was more able to challenge Tom's threat to my view of the fluidity of kinship. A fluid kinship community which would include William's kin as well as mine. Indeed;

> 'if houses provide a productive opening for ethnography, they might also offer a starting point for a particularly anthropological kind of (auto)biography' (Carsten 2018, p. 103).

As a result, I strongly recommend further study of adoptive family interactions that take place in adoptive family homes, specifically those homes inhabited in childhood. As the interactions in this epiphany have shown these are significant to future research concerning adoptive kinship affinities.

4.3.2. Part 2. Negotiated and sensory affinities between an adopted son and adoptive mother.

Family characters;
Jamie – adopted son age 25
Jane – adopted daughter age 24 at the time of this reflection.

Participant characters;
Tracy – an adoptee and adoptive mother (John in his 20's)

This event details interactions between Jamie, my son (age 25) and I as he read the contents of his adoption documents for the first time. The dynamics of negotiated and fixed affinities between us is readily demonstrated. This section concludes with an analysis of how sensory affinities are seen to interact with gender, some differences between Jamie and Jane as male and female adoptees are illuminated.

I sat in a chair and observed Jamie as he settled on the couch to read his adoption documents. I was there with him in the same room, supporting him by my presence, but not too close. From our 25 years of making, creating and negotiating (Mason 2008) kinship I was always aware that Jamie wouldn't like anyone to be sat right next to him. He likes his own space.

Being an adoptee and his adoptive Mother, I felt affinity with the emotions he might feel, yet I also knew that there may be more differences in our adoption stories than similarities.

Jamie is sat on the couch in the lounge of my house, we began talking about things we did when he was growing up.

“I remember going out to clip the hedge on a Sunday afternoon, do you remember? And you would come with me”.

Jamie smiled and nodded with a wistful look on his face.

“Do you remember that green and yellow wheelbarrow and brush that you had…you used to help me sweep up the hedge clippings….!” I was conscious that my voice was cheerful in remembering these times.

He looked through the window slightly away from me, but I saw on his face memories relived as he faintly smiled.

What a much different young man he was now I thought. Much more self-assured than a year ago. He has a job a future, his own home and a dog! He is clearly taking more pride in his appearance, he does not often wear the shabby builders gear when he comes to visit. I complement him on how smart he looks, and he smiles broadly.

“You know you said that I could look at the adoption documents whenever I want to?” Said Jamie.

“Yes, you can, if you want to….are you ok with it?” I pause. “There’s some potentially upsetting information in there, so I don’t want you to read it if you are not ready. Do you want to read it?”

“Yes, I’d like to”.

Jamie had never read the contents of this file before. I had told him snippets of what was in here, I always thought a gradual drip feeding of sensitive information was the best way, a little at a time would I hoped ensure that he felt completely supported.

"Ok, I'll get them". I bring the folder from the room next door and I give the whole thing to Jamie who is making himself comfortable on the couch.

He opened the file and squinted to re-focus as he began to scan the headings of each page. There were quite a few documents here, so I guess he was prioritising, which he should read first. I didn't want to start reading a book or leave the room to do other chores because I thought this might make him feel that I didn't care. So, in congruence with him, I chose to turn my head slightly away, to look through the window, nevertheless from my vantage point I could clearly observe his reactions.

"If there is anything you want me to explain or you want to talk about…. then we can, let me know and if you want to stop reading that's fine"

"Ok" he nods.

There are numerous documents in here, freeing orders, court appearances, medical reports on him as a baby, letters from the local authority where he was a ward of court. A short life of 23 months before he came to live with us and a little more after, was contained within this dusty pink foolscap folder. The label on the front read 'Mr & Mrs Smith'….(pseudonym) my married name and Jamie's surname now.

Ten minutes may have passed without us speaking. I'd never seem Jamie so quiet and still. He didn't look up from the page, not once. Eventually he turned towards me and said "Mum…what does no….ma…..dic mean?"

"Nomadic?" I replied...."It's kind of someone who does not have a fixed address, who moves around a lot".

"Oh, OK" he said and puts his head down, carrying on where he left off. A few minutes later he murmured "unemployed"…. Not directly to me but into the room. I didn't comment.

I knew instantly what he was reading. The documents said that his birth father and mother were both unemployed at the time Jamie and Jane were born. These two facts, being homeless and unemployed, seemed to affect him more than any of the other information, enough to vocalise his feelings. This mattered to him. In this moment I experienced a flash of insight about my adopted son. Before Jamie read the documents, I knew that he valued his job and having a permanent home, but the importance of these facets above other aspects of his adoption held greater significance for him than I had thought. If I'd read these documents as an adoptee about my birth family, I know I would find some of the other information much more poignant. Then again even though we are both adoptees I'm not him. I can't feel entirely what he feels.

So, the epiphany recounted above had simultaneously sensory and negotiated elements. I did not plan or realise in the moment that I had chosen the same room, in the same house, to have the same conversation with Jamie that I'd had with Mum 35 years earlier. However, through engaging in analytic reflexivity I recognise the temporality between the past, present and future in the narrative between Jamie and I, in sharing his adoption documents, and earlier between Mum and I, as she shared my oral story. As Mum did before me, I was able to play the role of adoptive mother as mediator for Jamie (Farr et al. 2014). In these valuable moments in 'doing the family', kinship stories are co-created, narrated and passed on through remembrances (McAdams and Janis 2004; Mason 2008). Furthermore, because of

sensory similarities in our ‘scenario of fate’ these moments can be seen to have an ethereal quality. I recognised instinctively that this physical place was where Jamie and I felt comfortable, where our shared connections converged and so our belonging resonated, a place our kinship was made and remade (Carsten 2004). In this way I realised that this house was central to my kinship affinity, and the remembering of experiences in this place mean that this is a relived epiphany (Denzin 1989). So, it could be said that the materiality of this house, not our blood, is part of our lineage as adoptees (McKinnon 2017).

So, our affinity was expressed in a tangible way through enacting this conversation in the same place and intangibly through the quality of the negotiated affinity between us. In the same way, Jamie now practised how to negotiate and co-create his narrative by ‘entangling’ (Welbourne, 2012, p. 81) the contents of the adoption documents with his intangible birth parents, who’s only presence in these pages was through the writing of social workers, legal and medical professionals. Moreover, I was aware that memory does not operate in the abstract so although Jamie (and Jane) have a *visible narrative presence* (Anderson 2006) in the documents, Jamie would be unable to produce a corresponding embodied memory of the past events and people, he was too young. I was therefore aware of my potential powerful position being one of the gatekeepers to the next stage, should Jamie choose to meet birth parents.

In the moments where our stories converged and resonated, I could re-enact our adoptive, social relatedness, deepening the fixity of our belonging. Equally I knew

the divergent aspects of our adoption stories could allow for further dilemmas. For example, through the adoption documents Jamie would read that the social services believed him and Jane to be 'at risk', so a reason they were 'taken away' from their birth parents. In this way I was wary that the so-called experts view would not impact upon Jamie's feelings of powerless, as it is in the creation of a story that adopted kin begin to feel they belong or conversely feel rejected. As a participant in Jamie's story and as a co-adoptee I felt an insider but in witnessing the differences in our stories I felt an outsider. To illustrate this temporality, another 1960's adoptee Tracy, reiterates similarities between herself and her birth sister;

> ….. Ciara is most like me …… Whereas Ciara, I feel if I met Ciara we would be on the same page, we'd be fine…….
>
> Yes, we've all done similar things in life, and again I thought how weird is that? We are on a completely separate continent…. When I met Beth…., when I made contact with Beth…….Her title was Business Manager and my title was Business Manager. Yeh, how weird if this! Really spooky. You were talking about your ethereal experiences things you mentioned. Ok we've never met, but we both have the same jobs.
>
> *Tracy, adoptee interview.*

Poignantly, from personal experience and from Tracy's evidence, I knew Jamie may elect to disregard or on the other hand connect with some of his very personal story on his own, as I had done with my birth family story (Finch and Mason 1993). Indeed, he seemed to be moved enough to physically vocalise his thoughts twice,

once when he read that both his birth parents were ‘unemployed’, and secondly when he queried the meaning of nomadic.

Clearly the story of Tracy’s adopted son in his 20’s has similar resonances;

> But John was really…. really pleased that when he got the documents, although it was mentioned that erm…both parents were unemployed, but Mum was a helper in the school and a helper in the community centre, and on some level it sounded like she was a very nice person. And he was really pleased with that, the fact that he could hang his hat on.
>
> …. And I think the same thing, the same thought went through his head, oh something is different here, I can hold down a job…. kind of thing.
>
> *Tracy adoptee and adoptive mother interview.*

Meaningfully Jamie and I are both adoptees, as are Tracy and her son John, yet our adoptions are 30 years apart. So how the physical and ethereal differences in our histories manifest themselves are worthy of analysis in relation to how interactions regarding kinship affinities are experienced. The differences in Jamie’s story, as told through the adoption documents, was that there was a lack of positive aspects, so there was little he could ‘hang his hat on’. Hence I reflect that Jamie’s silence in reading the documents may be a ‘structuring presence’ (Butler 1990). Nevertheless, I hoped my supporting negotiation would aid Jamie’s ongoing construction of a story where he could build a future coherent view of himself (Mason 2008).

It seemed what really mattered to Jamie at this time were the embodied ways he was similar to or different than his birth parents. Clearly aspects of kin that resonated significantly for Jamie and John, as males were those connected to employment in holding down a job. Accordingly, for Jamie, the inter-physical similarities were more closely aligned with characteristics of his adoptive kin. Having a job and a permanent home in the village where he was raised were demonstrably important to Jamie. In this way places and houses could be said to produce and perpetuate lineage through social and material reproduction and across time (Gillespie 2000). Simultaneously Jamie choose to align himself with the fixity of his adoptive family places, whilst also distancing himself from his birth parents' unemployed and nomadic status. Nevertheless

> '…..a kin group, ***either birth or adopted*** *(authors addition)*, is the group….in which the membership is in no sense chosen and where relationship exist through life even if they are left dormant' (Finch and Mason 1993, p. 169).

Gender – Differences in Jane's sensory affinities, as a female adoptee.

Conversely the evidence shows that Jane's choice not to gain employment outside of the home, meant that her physical and sensory experiences were more closely aligned to those of her birth relatives. Consequently, valid to this epiphany is a brief analysis of how kinship affinities can be experienced differently by female and male adoptees.

Females, like Jane, are more likely to view aspects of kinship through an interpersonal lens 'through … chains of connections between various kin' (Mason and Tipper 2008, p. 444). So, when new 'relations' are added to the family these have the potential to transform the chain of connections. Consequently, the gender of the adoptee is significant in considering how affinities can be combined, interrelated, given prominence or forgotten. Dramatic changes in social and biological relatedness occurred for members of my family prior to this epiphany. For example, the year before I moved into a bequeathed filial house, separating from my husband, Jane was in a serious relationship with her partner and had a new child. Each of these changing connections would cause a re-evaluation of aspects of Jane's fixity of kinship, especially those elements that did not resonate with her view of herself. Furthermore, Jane's adoptive family supported her decision in becoming a teenage Mum, yet she could have experienced social stigma from wider associations, which in turn according to the blog by Scambler (2016) could lead to a denial of;

> '….full engagement in society, affecting relationships, lifestyle and work options; the result is that felt stigma is the principal source of unresolved tensions and problems and obstacles to accomplishment'.

Consequently, I suggest inter-relational and inter-physical connections had numerous dimensions for Jane's female status as a new biological mother. For example, she had a concoction of sensory, created and fixed elements of kinship, through her biological son, her adoptive family and it seems significant chains of connections across the species barrier, to particular animals (Charles 2014).

It is significant that, as is the case with many children and adoptees as per adoptive mother's evidence from Mandy and Lynn (see E1) Jane also prized sensory affinities to animals as kin, choosing particular embodied interactions with cats and horses (Smart, 2011). When Jane and her son subsequently moved into their own home, without her partner, she took the family cat with her, showing that the 'interpersonal dynamics [were] specific to that relationship and that person' (Mason, 2008, p. 37). This implies the chains of created connections continued to resonate with Jane, as she demonstrated ethereal or spiritual dimensions of affinity to a specific cat in particular analogous ways she would to people (Mason 2008).

In addition, by engaging with analytic reflexivity simultaneously with *part 2,* the contents of her adoption documents and through compassionate knowledge of the cultured experience of Jane's life, I came to understand the previously invisible yet temporal similarities between Jane's experiences and those of her birth mother. Both females were similarly unemployed and drifting, living in temporary abodes, at the time they became a mother. Occupational reoccurrences in families have been noticed by Kramer (2011), in her study exploring the role of genealogy in personal lives using the Mass Observation Project at Sussex University. Yet this study goes one step further in locating similar work-related links between female adoptees who have been separated from their birth relatives. This particularly seems to be the case for female adoptees in this study; for Jane, Tracy and myself in pursuing a career linked to writing as my birth father has. Meaningfully the processes involved in undertaking autoethnography have enabled previously invisible embodied aspects

of Jane's, Tracy's and my own history to become visible. This suggests that invisible sensory affinities have the ability to manifest and resonate through time, between separated female adoptees and their birth relatives, taking this enquiry into the dominion of 'memory, myth and the extra-literal' (Smart 2011, p. 551). Undeniably otherworldly.

Consequently, a person who is born into or adopted into a kinship group by no means chooses to be a member of either group. Convincingly this is evidence of the 'myriad dimensions' (Finch and Mason 1993) by which every adoptee chooses to illustrate affinity.

4.3.3. Insights and findings

The ways in which adoptive families discuss and make sense of interactions through materially sharing adoption narratives in documents is fundamental to illuminating the nature of negotiated and created affinities.

In epiphany 3 part 2, created and negotiated kinship experiences around physical objects of kin such as 'residing on land, in houses, exchanging valuables…. and remembering' (McKinnon 2017 no page) provide the necessary conditions for building relatedness. Conversely the lack of negotiation around exchanging valuables such as adoption documents in epiphany 3 part 1, can potentially or actually destroy relatedness. In this way the two parts of this epiphany exemplify how adoptive kinship 'build correspondences and deny them' (Carsten 2017, p. 189).

In epiphany 3 part 1, I knew as an adoptee and adoptive mother that *how* the knowledge from the adoption documents was conveyed had the capacity to change Jane's and Jamie's view of themselves and their relationships with others (Stathern 1999). Consequently, they could derive no sense of identity (Misztal 2003 in McLaughlin 2015) without having concomitant *negotiation* (Mason) or *dialogue with informants beyond the self* (Anderson) or through seeking *sensory* (Mason) embodied interactions with birth parents themselves. Therefore, I acted from a belief that kinship is rich and fluid, where all members, adoptive, birth and socially created kin share a co-existing relatedness (Carsten 2000a). I knew that sharing dialogue would be more likely to result in the synthesis of a coherent identity, comprised of birth and adoptive features and so lead to future ontological security for Jamie and Jane (Colaner et al. 2014, Giddens 1991). I also believed doing this would ensure intergenerational kinship affinities would endure. Evidently, my adopted children did not want dialogue at that time, and not with me. Therefore, in refusing to hand over the adoption documents without a shared dialogue, I not only challenged the way I was treated as a subordinate, non-resident, non-real Mother figure but also the potential domination of the biological view of kinship. To my knowledge, my adopted children did not seek purposeful dialogue with others either, even though they were encouraged to and given contact details of counselling services at adoption charities for example. This was the time when they needed it the most as 'most adoptions disrupt during the teenage years' (DfE 2014b, p. 25). Consequently, without engaging in relational aspects alongside reading the documents, my children's affinity with adoptive and birth selves would likely continue as it was, fragmented.

Misztal (2003) would argue that a sense of self formed by memory ‘continues even thought everything else changes’ (in Smart 2011, p. 543).

In conclusion there are three claims to knowledge. Firstly, the exchanges around adoption documents that have taken place in homes, underlies the magnitude of the adoptive family home as an authoritative physical, gendered and hierarchical place for studying adoptive family interactions.

Secondly, the gender of the adoptee is significant in understanding and recognising how life events such as the birth of children, the formation of new relations, moving home or parental separation impact on kinship affinities. The male adoptees in this chapter are seen to align their affinities with their adoptive kin as Jamie and John both valued having employment. Conversely as a female Jane’s life experiences of being unemployed and regularly moving home strongly resonate with the experiences of her birth mother at the time both females became mothers. Interestingly Jane did not know anything of her birth mother’s life circumstances until many years after Ethan, her son was born. Parallels can be found here between Jane’s story and Samuels (2009, cited in O’Leary Wiley 2017) study of 25 Black–White, mostly female adult adoptees (Ages 19–22). In this study only two of those who grew up in predominantly White communities remained in White communities as adults. Evidence from Tracy and myself as female adoptees also suggests that secret, sensory affinities can through their individual ‘chains of connections’ entwine through the past and present to dynamically resonate into the future.

The interactions detailed here establish that the dynamics between the temporal, gendered, social and biological aspects of kin are significant in understanding the tensions individuals feel. Such tensions are also vital to understanding hierarchical beliefs and so to stimulating conceptions of how kinship affinities are configured and valued. Accordingly, I would endorse future studies of the interplay between sensory and ethereal affinities in adult adopted females. I suggest that due to the secretive nature of confidential and to some extent mediated adoptions (where mediated are seen as the mid-point of the openness continuum; Grotevant et al 1996, Brodzinsky 2005) that sensory and ethereal affinities could be felt more acutely by females because of their unknown or other-worldly quality.

4.4. What sensory and negotiated interactions can be observed between an adoptee and her birth mother at Christmastime?

Family characters;
Jean – birth mother
Gary – Jean's husband
William – my partner

Participant Character;
Tracy – adoptee in her 50's

The fragmented extract below is in the form of a thematic life story scene. Within this I look deeply at self-other interactions from the perspective of a participant observer. This extract is presented as autoethnography (Ellis 2004, p. 40) and characterises an early epiphany (Denzin 1989; see earlier definition in chapter 3) in my relationship with Jean, my birth mother. It suggests that we were becoming involved in negotiating and creating (Mason 2008) our kinship practices. Whilst this event took place at Christmas time these practices could equally have occurred at other significant events for families such as religious festivals, birthdays, marriages or anniversaries. Nevertheless, the major annual family event of Christmas is the context for interpretation of the kinship affinities I sought at this time, these were to be crucial and would resonate into the future.

I had first made contact with Jean, my birth mother in September 2009, so at the time of this epiphany I had only known her 3 months. Gary, Jean's husband, William, my partner and I sat in the lounge of Jean's house. Jean had left the room momentarily. We had just finished talking about the breakup of my marriage. I didn't give all the details, but they knew it had been very difficult. Gary listened to me intently, nodding from time to time, having gone through a divorce himself I thought

he might have been in the process of recognising, relating and then (re)acting (Wray and Tracy 2012) when he said;

"Well…." he paused, "this Christmas is going to be a really good un!"

He smiled very broadly, I smiled in return appreciative that he cared but didn't say anything. Because of my silence perhaps he felt the need to try to respond to my hurt

"I'll give you a good Christmas" he said.

Perhaps he was trying to act as a father figure, being Jean's husband maybe he thought he could fill this role. But I didn't want this. I felt trepidation inside. I really didn't want to spend Christmas Day with Jean and Gary, but I didn't want to hurt their feelings either, so I remained silent.

As the weeks passed William and I discussed the arrangements for Christmas day. He said,

"If you don't want to go you should speak to them, they're going to be disappointed no matter when you tell them, but it may be better sooner rather than later. Then they have chance to get used to the idea".

"Yes, I know you're right, but what can I say? Jean and Gary seemed so happy that they were making plans for us to go over on Christmas Day, they're going to be really disappointed when they know".

So, the next time that Jean rang I was determined to talk to her about Christmas. As she usually did she chatted for a while and then handed the receiver to Gary, not mentioning Christmas. I don't know if she didn't want to bring the subject up with me

knowing that I had been evasive before or if she asked Gary to talk to me or even if she felt uncertain about spending Christmas with me. Whichever scenario was nearer reality it became evident that I would speak to him about the subject of Christmas when he brought it up ….

"We're not sure what we are doing for Christmas yet, you know with everything that has happened with my children and everything, I think I should be at home". I was aware that my reasoning may have sounded feeble to Gary. After all what possible reason was stronger than spending Christmas with my birth mother that I had just met at the age of 47.

"Oh, you don't want to be on your own at Christmas!" Gary said dismissing my reasons.

"Look…." he paused and took a deep breath, trying to take control of the situation*, "the way I see it is, we're on our own and you two are on your own, so what's the point of us being separate at Christmas when we could be together?"*

I could understand Gary's point of view, but I didn't want to be anywhere else but my home on Christmas Day. Talking to them I could see that their Christmas Day routines would not be that much different to mine but I didn't want to feel like I had to pretend. In this moment I experienced a flash of insight as a recognition of self and a recognition of who Jean might want to be. I knew I could be myself in my own home and I didn't quite know who I would be in their home. Basically, I didn't want to spend the day in the company of two people I didn't know that well, even though one of them was my birth mother. I just wanted William and me to be on our own where we could please ourselves, where communication between us was relaxed and there was no pressure from other people's expectations.

I replied, *"I'll think about it Gary, but I don't want to say definitely yes right now".* Was I losing my nerve here? Why could I not say what I really felt? I could hear Mums words in my own words to Gary. When I asked her something as I was growing up, she often said "we'll see" or "maybe" or "I'll think about it". These were the phrases that signalled to me that she had heard me but wasn't going to give me an answer there and then. In the same way that Mum obviously didn't want to say 'no' to me, I too didn't want to say 'no' to Jean and Gary.

I remember it was fairly simple to find someone like Ralph as he had an internet profile, not so Jean.

The journey to find Jean involved searching the census records, paying for copies of birth certificates, marriage certificates, travelling to the area she used to live in knocking on doors, asking the right questions, going to libraries and looking through telephone directories, even walking past her front door. Such journeys become the narratives of so-called search and reunion (Docan-Morgan 2014) experiences noted by many adopted people.

Yet one of the main reasons I voiced for choosing to trace Jean and Ralph was to have the question answered, 'who do I look like?' (Muller and Perry 2001, p 18). 'What kind of characteristics have my birth parents passed on to me?' These reasons are significant in people's decisions to investigate their genealogical heritage and so evidence of *a real-life fascination of kinship* (Mason 2008). I can support the views presented through literature that mine and the majority of

adoptees reasons for wanting to meet birth parents was due to curiosity or the 'wish to connect and deliver a message of affirmation' (Benson et al 1994, p. 26 in Muller and Perry 2001) and definitely not a desire to replace or betray my adoptive parents.

Adoptive family stories are marginalised in a culture where families created from biological (*given*) children are seen as the dominant canonical 'right' families, so the issue of choice and entrance stories is an important theme in the adoption literature (Grotevant et al. 1999 in Galvin and Colaner 2014, p. 203). To demonstrate familial legitimacy entrance stories are told and retold (Galvin and Colaner 2014; *disclosure*) this was really important for me as a child as I needed to hear how my parents 'chose me'. The story that I was chosen from a room of several babies in cots is what I was told all of my life, the story never faltered. I later realised that there was no room full of swaddled babies in cots in fact it would have been unlikely that there would have been any more than me there, but the important identity work that was being undertaken by telling me this story was invaluable to my development of a solid sense of self-esteem (Kranstuber and Kellas 2011 in Hays et al. 2016). My sense of self had suffered a blow after Mum died and especially when I left my husband and my family fractured apart, in this way the death of an adoptive parent on top of individual contextual lifespan changes did seem to prompt me to seek out my birth parents (Grotevant and Von Korff, 2011). In seeking out Jean and Ralph, I was attempting to construct a part of my adoption narrative or entrance story which was previously missing. As Stone (2005 in Galvin and Colaner 2014, p. 204) notes a lack of birth family stories can contribute to an adoptees sense of loss. So, at the age of 47 I was attempting to assuage the loss I felt, not from being an adoptee but from losing the physical (Galvin and Colaner 2014) embodiment of Mum and from

ever lessening communication with members of my immediate family. Furthermore, and importantly I was also interested in exploring significant aspects of kinship that may exist between myself and other kin, which 'involve affinities that are regarded as or *feel* fixed' (Mason 2008, p. 33).

The dimensions of fixed affinities could be those considered biogenetic or socially constructed and are significant for adopted people. Although unaware, it could be said that those I experienced as an infant adopted daughter were non-elective and given (Carsten 2004), in this way I non-electively belonged in law to my adoptive family kinship group, as Galvin and Colaner emphasise in the title of their chapter 'Created through law and language, communicative complexities of adoptive families' (2014). However, as I grew I also wanted electively to belong here. The growing strength of the fixity of our relationships were characterised by the cumulative negotiated and created affinities, involving situated, interactions between Mum, Dad and me over time. Consequently, the sum of all these negotiations is that the resultant kinship feels *fixed* to me.

Conversely it could be argued as I am Jean's biological daughter, there would also be elements of non-elective or *given* (Carsten 2004) genetic characteristics in my nature. Whereas my adoptive family *made* (Ibid.) me as I am today. However, a purely biological definition of '*what is given'* (Ibid.) is too narrow. All the same Strathern (1995) makes clear that the critique of gay kinship argues there would always be a choice whether biology is made the foundation of relationships. This would also be the case for me as an adoptee attempting to build relationships with

birth relatives. So, in exploring the interplay between 'what is given' and 'what is made' (Carsten 2004) I offer an understanding of the complexity and interconnectivity in kinship affinities of myself (and others) who are adoptees.

The process of feeling a sense of belonging to one family rather than another can be lengthy and is subject to change through circumstances. Given the right conditions and negotiations I now know, after meeting both Jean and Ralph, that I could find kinship affinities in either my adoptive or birth family. As an adopted child I grew up with lots of stories, these experiences shaped the conditions under which I could enjoy a stimulating adoptive family kinship support network. On the other hand, at the time of the epiphany above I had only know Jean for 3 months so the possibility of co-creating family narratives (Galvin and Colaner 2014) or interpreting the electivity of our kinship was limited. Naturally given these circumstances being able to create stimulating kinship affinities between myself and my birth mother were less certain.

In attempting to empathise with Jean she could have thought why after I had found her, did I not want to spend Christmas together. Initially, my reasons for searching were assuaged to some extent, I had found out who I looked like. In this way I am aware, as research on Family Resemblances in Lesbian Donor Conception demonstrates 'that seeking resemblances can be as much about creating distance as about connectedness' (Nordqvist 2010, p. 1129). So, through engaging in analytic reflexivity and self-introspection I examined my motives for continuing our relationship. Jean is my kin, yet I found myself reiterating the same questions I had experienced with Ralph, what sort of kinship would we be able to build and what role

would I comfortably want to take. The fixity of effortless kinship I enjoyed with Mum and my family and which was characterised by open emotional communication I knew I could not yet find with Jean (Carsten 2004).

What is accurate is that once I had met Jean and got to know her a little I began to interpret the features of our fixity of kinship, I was becoming elective in what I found. I now realise it is much more demanding to be elective in analysing the kinship features of my adoptive parents, the acceptance and open communication was continually *made* as I grew-up with them, resulting in improving the quality of our affinity. Conversely because I met Jean as an adult I wanted an adult to adult relationship with her as I had undoubtedly had an adult-mother to adult-daughter relationship with Mum (Fischer 1981). Yet I did not perceive my relationship to Jean as *her* adult daughter, even though she might have thought herself mother of me, her adult daughter. As an adult I reviewed and considered her as another adult with all my adult analytical skills. On reflection my secretive (Galvin and Colaner 2014) evaluations of her were probably going to be even more erudite because she is my birth mother. Additionally, I was aware that 47 years had passed since I was her baby. I had no awareness (ibid.) of the nature of the communication that passed between us during our month together in 1962. Nevertheless, the fixity of kinship she experienced then may still evoke a significant memory for her.

Furthermore, the order in which I met my birth parents is significant here. This emphasises the importance of the temporal and interconnected nature of fixed affinities and how they are negotiated and created. For example, bodily Jean and I are both female, we share a similar stature, nevertheless I believed it to be unlikely

that we would be recognised in the street as being mother and daughter because facially we are dissimilar. Conversely the first time I met Ralph, I experienced an emotional allure of resemblance, experienced powerfully and instantaneously, striking me viscerally. In such circumstances actors choose characteristics to be significant to their play. From a 'myriad of possibilities characteristics provide visual, concrete evidence of abstract connections' (Edwards 2000, p. 214). Consequently, I conjecture meeting Ralph first followed by Jean seven months later, caused me to employ layers of electivity differently in each situation, at the time I deemed facial characteristics I shared with Ralph to be more resonant and deeply ethereal than bodily characteristics I shared with Jean. I now believe my electivity in feeling connected to Ralph was layered with temporality from my earlier *made* kinship, for instance as a child I was said to facially resemble my adoptive father, this meant that my connections to Ralph as another father figure, were layered with a feeling of *fixity* (Carsten 2004, Mason 2008). With Jean I did not experience the sensory depth of instantaneous resemblance.

Undoubtedly sharing bodily similarity creates multiple layers of affinity so that 'resemblances of course speak of more than themselves' (Mason 2008, p. 34). Resemblances do communicate possible affinities through heritability, these are noticeable in more than biology. An example was clearly articulated through Gary's words when he said in sheer astonishment and wonder;
"You walk the same…..you cross your legs the same way…..you hold your tea cup the same….you laugh like Jean!" I began to feel the impact of some of Gary's observations viscerally, yet some on the other hand I electively chose to ignore. The resemblances which I acknowledged could be accurate were the ones whereby I

experienced an emotional allure of congruence. On the other hand, if I had felt these resemblances to be conflicting to my own view of myself then it could have produced an emotional state characterised by dismay or even revulsion. Upon reflection, Gary's observations were largely concerned with what he saw as the similar physical and sensory attributes of Jean and I (Galvin and Colaner 2014, Mason 2008). On this occasion I did not feel the allure of the fixity of kinship that Gary saw between Jean and I, either a physical, social or intellectual way. In the same way that adoptive parents, need 'imagination and fortitude' (Howell and Marre p.313) to identifying intellectual and emotional aspects of relatedness between themselves and their adopted child, as an adoptee I too required imagination and fortitude to see connections between Jean and I. Remarkably, at that time, Jean, did not speak of resemblances she might have seen between us. This was in complete variance to Ralph (see E2).

Consequently, any variance between us and in plans to spend Christmas together could be due to the way that the layers of electivity played out, so aspects of our kinship affinity were blurred, neither of us could interpret what was happening. At this point it is relevant to bring out the connection between nature and culture or between biological and social aspects of kinship. Schneider (1980) described this distinction as the *order of nature* and *the order of law* or between *substance* and *code*. I know from experiencing this epiphany that the separations and combinations of substance and code were particularly difficult to grasp. Consequently, the slippage between what was symbolic from my adopted daughter view synthesised with appreciating our literal physical appearance made becoming kin more difficult. I am certain that the layers of electivity we both experienced were instantaneously

deeply personal and outside of our individual control (Mason 2008). Nevertheless, by understanding the layers of symbolic and physical electivity the process of becoming kin could be made less challenging for other adoptees.

Part of my interactively negotiated kinship practices growing up as an adopted daughter include having moral responsibility, this characteristic is one reason I did not seek out my birth parents until my adoptive parents had died (Finch and Mason 1993). So, on one hand, as the epiphany above shows, I did feel a moral responsibility to Jean, yet at this time it was underdeveloped. I really wanted to find the words to say that I didn't want to spend Christmas Day with Jean and Gary, but my social relatedness, or my social familiarisation code (Schneider 1980), hadn't allowed me to find it in myself to say in a straight forward way, I *don't think I can be there, sorry*.

Nonetheless my upbringing provides tangible evidence of the way I lived out inter-personal relationships with my parents, in this epiphany I acted in precisely the same way, consequently my lack of being able to find the words I wanted to say should not be seen as unusual. I was at the core of a relationship which was being partially created and for which negotiations were ongoing. So, the ambivalent feelings I held about spending my first Christmas with Jean can be explained in part by an unsophisticated understanding of the impact of my negotiated and created adoptive family affinities.

Tracy a participant and adoptee in her 50's confirms her similar adoptive experiences in relation to Christmas experiences;

In terms of Christmas we tend to spend Christmas on our own in our house, we don't have big family Christmases. …….. I'm more part of my husband's family, my family are all over the place. So, we never got together.

I was an only child, I was quite jealous of people, I wish I'd had that opportunity.

Tracy, adoptee interview.

Furthermore, my kinship negotiations were also bound together with my moral and material affinities which I discern was also bound to a place, the same home I inhabited in childhood and inhabit now. The exact same house has been a place of return, from the time Mum and Dad brought me here from the adoption agency, to when I left to be married 26 years later, returning again at the age of 45, when Mum died, and my marriage broke apart. Significantly the temporal and evocative power of eating Christmas dinner in my home is meaningful in analysing kinship affinities in that homes contain powerful memories around the 'processes of feeding and nurturance, the emotionally charged social relations of close kinship and repetitive bodily practice through which many rules of social life are encoded' (Carsten 2004, p.31). In this way perhaps, my resistance was because I knew that in feeding visitors Jean and Gary may be beginning a series of acts of hospitality which 'often have a coercive edge' to them (Carsten 2004, p. 139). Coercive acts inevitably 'diminish family members' closeness and commitment to one another which in turn, compels them to want to continue to conceal negative secrets' (Afifi and Olson 2005, p. 192).

Tracy an adoptee participant confirms her thoughts about the home she was brought up in, and returned to live in as a married person with a family;

I lived in the home I was brought up in for …. pragmatic reasons - I rented the house from my Dad to help pay for his care fees, not an active choice. My Dad has since passed away, so we have sold the house and moved. It felt like there were too many ghosts (frowning)!

Tracy adoptee interview.

It seems Tracy's choice to leave her old adoptive family home, and my choice to return were made because of the different dynamics in our family situations at that time. A catalyst for my decision to reclaim Christmas at my home was because the Christmases of 2006 and 2007 were characterised by loss, arguments and family breakdown. So, I was determined that the Christmas of 2009 was to be spent in the home that I had sensually named *sanctuary* in my emails to Ralph. There I felt safe, comfortable and familiar. Yet internally not one room remains the same in this place now, walls have been felled, rooms have been re-configured, so it is not a shrine. Nevertheless, this sanctuary may be an unconscious sensory shrine. In this place my tangible negotiated and created relationships had been lived out and were conveyed between kin (Strathern 2005). Bourdieu (1990) could illuminate my dilemma further as 'apparently simple acts of negotiating house space involve the internalization of hierarchy' (Carsten 2004, p.49). When I was a child in this place I experienced strong inter physicality and sensory (Pink 2015) relationality in hearing the sounds of my parents voices, in the touch of their hands, in their kisses as they bade me good night and from all the myriad pictures that remain in my mind of their faces mingled with other family members in the rooms the way they used to be. So, the very nature of unspoken communication between social and spatial distinctions

makes them appear ‘natural and unquestionable’ (Carsten 2004, p. 49). Yet in Jean’s house these social and spatial communications would feel unfamiliar and potentially unwelcome, therefore questionable. This may also explain some of my opposing feelings.

Sensory experience is often regarded as existing on two levels, body and mind. ‘One level is experienced by the body; the other constructed by the mind’ (Tuan, 1993. p. 165-6 cited in Pink 2015, p. 26). Shilling (1991, 2003 mentioned in Pink 2015) deconstructed the notion of the mind body divide, maintaining that the body is not just the source of experience and activity that would be rationalised and controlled by the mind but in itself a source of knowledge and so of agency. Consequently, one reason I set out to find Jean was also to find an explanation of my physical appearance, I found it through the embodiment of Ralph and Jean. Coffey (1999) would argue this shows an embodied ethnography. Whereas Pink argues for an emplaced ethnography accounting for the experience between ‘bodies, minds and the materiality and sensoriality of the environment’ (Pink 2015, p. 28). Consequently, during this epiphany, or in the months that followed, I realised that I firstly experienced embodied affinity followed by emplaced affinity. Understanding the fusion between my bodily experiences and those interpreted by my mind could explain my preoccupation with my need to be at home at Christmas. These ideas are supported by Finch and Mason’s study (2000) of inheritance where loss, death, material objects and the perception of these becomes importantly ethereal. Whilst I recognise the ethereal affinity (Mason 2008) I hold for my home could be transitory and dynamic it does not negate the impact of reflexive engagement with this epiphany. As these aspects were unknown to me at the time of the epiphany I could

not rationally explain my tangible need to be at home to Jean and Gary, in this way my feelings were also entirely outside of my personal electivity or control.

Christmas periods define time in recognising past, present and anticipated future for successive generations in that they provide situations around which families can engage in making memories and telling stories (Mason and Muir 2013). I did have the opportunity to re-*make* kinship affinities in Jean's home, as Carsten emphasises kinship is *made* in houses (2004, p. 35). Nevertheless, in analysing this epiphany it is evident I declined the opportunity to spend Christmas with birth kin on an embodied level because paradoxically the sensory resonance of my emplaced affinity was stronger at that time. Consequently, I recommend the embodied and emplaced aspects of adoptees histories and how these intersect with ideas of blood or place as lineage is worthy of further study. The unanswered questions remain, why was Jean silent and Gary did all the talking? Did Jean really want us to spend Christmas together, or was Gary the one who really wanted this to happen, for himself? Either way spending Christmas together could have been an attempt to situate me as part of the descendent generation in one place, making us 'part of one family line and tradition rather than another' (Mason and Muir 2013 p. 617). Evidently my circumspect nature and Jean's silence could serve to conceal a structuring presence (Woolhouse 2017, Butler 1990). Within this epiphany there were aspects of Jean's embodied and emplaced history that I did not yet know, as she did not yet know mine.

In reliving the epiphany above I recognise the way in which I chose to communicate my opposing feelings with Jean and Gary. This included using Mum's words which are tangible evidence of my negotiated and sensory kinship. I chose to be circumspect by saying "I'll think about it". A somewhat honourable dimension to my negotiated kinship practices meant that I was obviously, reluctant to say outright 'no I'm not coming on Christmas Day', but yet I was in a double bind, in some ways it would have been right to tell Jean outright. Consequently, and importantly the way I attempted to 'do' the family with Jean, were based on the interpersonal dynamics practiced over time with my adoptive family (Morgan 1996, 2011). Importantly demonstrating the concept of *Habitus* at work in adoptive kinship (Bourdieu, 1990). In this way kinship practices can be both transitory, transferable and negotiated from adoptive to birth kin. Nevertheless because of the longevity of my social relatedness with Mum the same results would not be reached on this occasion. Due to the combination of affinities analysed here, my circumspect stance and Jean's silence, I was not able to articulate reasons I could not go to Jean's house for Christmas. Instead William tried to communicate reasons (Galvin and Colaner 2014) for my reticence. Which was to create tension in my kinship relations as Jean and Gary may have believed that this was not my request but William's request. Their immediate interpretation being literal; "*how could she not want to spend Christmas Day with her (birth) mother?"*

4.4.1. Insights and findings

The benefit of applying an autoethnographic methodology brought to light previously hidden strong temporal, inter-physical and sensory affinities between myself and my birth mother. In conclusion the interplay between fixed, negotiated and sensory

kinship affinities resulted in elements of congruence and conflict between myself and Jean. I felt a flash of discomfort as I perceived Jean's intangible inter-physical silence (Galvin and Colaner 2014). Which caused me to reflect, did she want us to spend Christmas together, or was it really motivated by Gary? Perhaps Jean electively perceived a lack of facial resemblance between us, which was mirrored by me. This suggests the lack of inter-physical sensory recognition was layered with a difficulty in identifying other resemblances between us, so a reason for her structuring silence (Howell & Marre 2006). Moreover, my strong facial resemblance to Ralph may have intangibly influenced Jean's silence as well as my electivity in where I felt I belonged or didn't. From my interactions it is certain that I didn't feel I belonged in Jean's house at that time, as I seemed to experience a disconnected embodied relationship to Jean (Jones, C. 2013). Significantly, I suggest that my lack of sensory facial resemblance to Jean, whether electively or not, meant that in times of 'moral uncertainty, the space of my adoptive family home, became cognitively "more concrete" than persons' (Mourao 2017, p. 214).

A strong emplaced material relatedness may have been experienced in that my home was 'peopled with forebears and descendants, metaphorical and real' (Carsten 2017, p. 192). For these reasons exploring emplaced, temporal affinities between adoptees and homes as kin, especially at times of life transitions is significant to future research., Therefore, like Carsten (2018, p. 103) I see great benefit in studying the 'intersection of biography and ethnography through an anthropology of the house', for adoptees this specifically means their adoptive family house or the house they inhabited in childhood.

In conclusion, elective inter-physical sensory recognition is politically significant because it undoubtedly impacts on adoptee self and therefore influences interactions beyond the present.

In section 5.3.1. I present insights and findings from the autoethnographic epiphanies 1-4.

4.5. Wider experiences from the ten participants in relation to adoptive family kinship themes.

The purpose of this section is to illustrate adoptive kinship interactions as observed by the ten participants interviewed and to exemplify how these are different and/or similar to the kinship interactions illustrated in sections 4.1. - 4.4. In order to do this, I deliberately add an overarching set of questions which allow me to speak to the broader contribution of the thesis and to strengthen the connection with the literature in Chapter 2, specifically kinship affinities (Mason 2008) and adoption related themes (Galvin and Colaner 2014). For example, each of the original research questions specifically name family relationships between; adoptive mother and adopted daughter (4.1.); female adoptee and her birth father (4.2.); adoptive mother and children (4.3.) and lastly a female adoptee and her birth mother (4.4.). The resulting re-phrased questions have the potential to expand our knowledge of affinities between diverse kinship relations. In this way I integrate research question 4.1 and 4.2., which has now become;

> 4.5.1 and 4.5.2. What fixed, sensory, negotiated and ethereal interactions can be observed between adoptees and members of their adoptive and/or birth family?

Likewise, question 4.3. becomes;

> 4.5.3. What sensory and negotiated interactions can be observed between adoptees and members of their adoptive and/or birth family in relation to adoption documents?

Finally, question 4.4. seeks to broaden the contribution of this thesis by giving voice to other significant family gatherings, as well as Christmas, in becoming;

> 4.5.4. What sensory and negotiated interactions can be observed between adoptees and members of their adoptive or birth family at Christmas, birthdays or other significant family gatherings?

The following extracts from interviews include;

Participant characters;
Sandy – adoptive mother (in her 60's) of 2 daughters in their 20's.
Ruth – adoptive mother (in her 50's) of 2 females, 2 male – Chloe, Mike & Lucas are named (in their 20's).
Tracy – adoptive mother (in her 50's) of John, and an adoptee herself.
Zoe- adoptee (in her 30's) and her adopted brother Leo (also in his 30's)
Jenny - adoptee in her 50's
Janet – adoptive mother of twin daughters (20), one named Bella, and a sister in law of Pip (adoptee in her 40's).
Lesley –adoptive mother of Josh in his 20's.
Carol – Josh's birth mother

Family characters;
Jane – adopted daughter
Anne – family friend (4.1.)
Jamie – adopted son

4.5.1 and 4.5.2. What fixed, sensory, negotiated or ethereal interactions can be observed between adoptees and members of their adoptive and/or birth family?

This section begins with adoptive mother daughter interactions that are dissimilar to my own. Then I move onto analyse the interactions between adoptive mothers and sons and finally between adopted siblings.

Sandy an adoptive mother of two daughters, recounts dissimilar interactions to my own when she nursed her youngest daughter, after a hip operation. This period was a reparative experience for their relationship. Nevertheless;

> A year or so after this (when she was age 14-15) she revealed that while I'd been asleep she'd lain all the kitchen knives on my bed. Eventually she did talk about this and talked of her birth mother as a shadow, come into my room for a cuddle, and seen two people in bed, but there was only me, but the other one she called a shadow was her birth mum. So, the only reason she said that she hadn't stabbed one, she wanted to stab the birth mum, was that she didn't know which was which. She wanted to stab the shadow – she got quite psychotic at that point too. She did say that it's not you I want to be horrible to, but she did get sectioned at that point because she was a danger to me and her sister.
>
> *Sandy, adoptive mother interview*

These interactions reveal an intangible, ethereal mystical element to adoptive mother, daughter interactions, which could be potentially or actually physically damaging. Conversely, Sandy's recounts very different sensory yet tangibly

secretive interactions between her and her eldest adopted daughter. Sandy, acted as a birthing partner for this daughter, she recounts;

Sandy continues

My eldest daughter was in the shower after giving birth, she was bleeding….and she said to me, was it like this for you mum? I had to pretend and say I think this is normal even though I didn't really know. But the important thing was that my daughter thought that I'd been through this, and just asked me because I was her mum. I was in that role.

Sensory and otherworldly affinities intertwine as Sandy and her daughter warmly participate in 'interweaving social and biological' relatedness (Carsten 2000a, p. 16). This is unlike my experience in 4.1 for several reasons. Firstly, Jane and I no longer lived together so could not share everyday interactions. A lack of being able to create and re-create our relationship on a daily basis mean that Jane was more likely to omit me from her chains of connections, including sending me a Christmas card. Likewise, there are sensory and potentially secret similarities between Sandy and her youngest adopted daughter and Jane and myself. For example;

….little one was physically violent – extreme, everything going, she was really quite violent, kicking, I had bruises on me quite often. She was a big 2-year-old…... When she was not in that state she was cuddly. I'm not sure you could call it loving in hindsight, she was affection seeking and attention seeking. As she grew, I sometimes felt manipulated, I sometimes felt abused by it, very much designed to

illicit what she wanted. With my eldest daughter it felt there was something 2 way going on.

Sandy, adoptive mother interview

Sandy's description of sometimes feeling manipulated by her daughter's interactions, is similar to and exemplified by the events in 4.3. and to a lesser extent 4.1. The differences for Sandy and myself is how the sensory and secret interactions between us and our adopted daughters were created. Namely, Sandy's youngest daughter seemed to negotiate by being physical, whereas Jane's interactions were not physically violent, or cuddly, or affection seeking. They were non-verbal, intangible and ethereal.

Moving on to analyse interactions between adoptive mothers and sons, Tracy, also identified that physical aggression could be a way of negotiating for John, her adopted son;

Last night, I had a do with my adoptive son…..(he) spent all his money before pay day, so just gave him money to get out of the house. There have been occasions with John, he doesn't seem to have the same boundaries as other people, his boundaries are different than the other 2 teenage lads (Tracy's step sons) ….. they've all grown up together John was 2, but he's still not reacted the same….the words to describe his birth father in the adoption documents were volatile, aggressive – John has never met his birth father - does beg the question about genetics doesn't it?

Tracy, adoptive mother interview

As the above evidence shows Tracy and Sandy's experience of tangible violent or volatile interactions between them and their adopted son and daughter were unlike my somewhat intangible yet intense experiences (4.1., 4.3.). However, both emphasise the potential differences in intellectual and emotional traits between adopted parents and adoptees. Each adoptive parent goes through a kinning process of attempting to naturalise the differences in intellectual and emotional traits between themselves and their adopted child (Howell & Marre 2006). Furthermore, I suggest that this process is somewhat similar when adoptees meet birth parents in adulthood. Therefore, significantly for this study John, a male adoptee, showed flashes of aggression when he perceived intellectual or emotional differences between himself and his adoptive mother, Tracy. Whereas, Sandy noted her daughter became manipulative (similarly to Jane 4.3.) in a flash of reflexivity as recognition of other (Pillow 2003). Through the sensory, embodied interactions Sandy uncomfortably recognised the differences between herself and her adopted daughter.

Conversely, Ruth's adopted son Lucas did display non-verbal, intangible and ethereal interactions, in a similar way to Jane;

… It's very hard to tell because Lucas never really spoke, but from picking up his body language and stuff it would be Lucas…who wanted more to look like….you know, wanted more information (about his birth Dad) …..erm, but couldn't tell you. So, you couldn't help him. And when you would try he would completely blank you.

He would shut down….he would want to know did we have any pictures of this man and stuff, but we didn't.

Ruth, adoptive mother interview

Lucas's ethereal, sensory and 'blank' interactions are extremely similar to the unresponsive interactions observed between Jamie, Jane and myself (4.3.) and Jane's interactions (4.1.). In a situation where Lucas's 3 half-siblings all knew what their birth father looked like, Lucas was unable to create and negotiate a resemblance he knew nothing of. Importantly, Lucas's lack of being able to negotiate verbally meant that his adopted sister interjected;

Ruth continues

I think Chloe had a memory, on one occasion she met Lucas's birth father (Lucas and Chloe were thought to be half siblings). ….. but Lucas didn't actually know…..no information was known about him, no photograph or anything like that, and Chloe said no, I remember him coming to the house Mum, erm…..and he did look like Lucas.

This evidence underlies the importance of Chloe's sensory interactions as a means to negotiate connections between her brother's birth and adoptive affinities or between his social and biological relatedness (4.2.). Consequently, it follows that adoptee lack of recognition between themselves and their biological or social kin, is strongly related to continuing problematic sensory and secretive interactions (4.1, 4.3. 4.6).

Having exemplified some interactions between adoptive mothers and daughters and adoptive mothers and sons, I now move onto an example of fixed, sensory, negotiated or ethereal interactions between adopted siblings. Zoe recounts an experience between herself and her adopted brother, Leo, who lives in a city 3 and a half hours away and is 6 years older than Zoe. Leo does not send cards to Zoe for her birthday or for Christmas neither does he make the effort to visit her. This meant that Zoe had never met his 6-year-old step daughter (potentially her niece). Leo said;

> 'Why didn't you send my daughter a card – 'you are dead to us until you acknowledge my family'
>
> *Zoe, adoptee interview*

Leo's hostile reaction on not receiving a card, reveals that he regards the kinship between himself and his adopted sister to be fixed through time and social processes (Mason 2008). Similarly, when Natalie (4.1.) received a late birthday card this challenged her view of the fixity of kinship between her and her birth mother. This illustrates that card giving is considered by adoptees as fixed, non-elective and created through relationality in relation to both birth and adoptive kin. Nevertheless, on perceiving a sting or flash of reflexivity, adoptees reactions to receiving a late card (Natalie) or not receiving a card at all (Leo) differed. Significantly, adoptee interactions have similarities in that they are characterised by sensory elements; 'ripping' cards (4.1.) and saying, 'dead to us' (Leo). Likewise, interactions recounted here could also be considered indicative of a rejection of kin, and to a lesser extent by a refusal to engage in negotiation (Jane in 4.1.).

Conversely, Bella (20's) is an example of an adoptee who is beginning to explore sensory kinship affinities between her physical resemblance and that of her brother and boyfriend. She is doing this by seeking material kinship connections, as I did between myself and Ralph (4.2.).

Janet, Bella's adoptive mother;

….there is a photo of one of her birth siblings, her brother…and he has the same dark hair, slightly Mediterranean looks…..Also what I think might be more relevant, my daughter the olive skinned one is more solemn, her boyfriend at the moment is Anglo Chinese…..and I do find it quite interesting how she's got dark hair, but she had dyed her hair black since meeting him and I have wondered if that is to do with the fact that he sort of looks like her, and when you see them together, you could almost think they are brother and sister. They are in Hong Kong together right now.

There seems to be a physical (Mediterranean) and ethereal (solemn) affinity in the photographic resemblance between Bella, her boyfriend and her brother, who she does not know and has never met. Furthermore, Bella's choice to travel to Hong Kong demonstrates that her physical resemblance is just one part of her attempt to create fixed kinship which is rooted in sensory, cultural experiences.

In the next section I exemplify interactions between adoptees and members of their adoptive and or birth family through the lens of adoption documents.

4.5.3. What sensory and negotiated interactions can be observed between adoptees and members of their adoptive and/or birth family in relation to adoption documents?

This section illustrates sensory and negotiated interactions between adoptees and family members relating to adoption documents. The similarities and differences between these interactions and those recounted in Chapter 4.4. are noted. Firstly, Tracy recounts interactions between herself and her adopted son which are seen to have similarities to the interactions between Jamie and I (4.3.);

> John left his adoption documents on the table almost inviting us to read them. Took them into his car and showed them to his friends. (He told people) I've got a sister who's the same age…… (a half sibling). So, he's in touch with siblings but I don't know in what way. The younger ones are involved with the traveller community, so he doesn't have anything to do with them, but the older ones who have jobs he thinks their ok.
>
> *Tracy, adoptive mother interview*

In this way John expressed aspects of openness in verbally communicating and negotiating relationships between himself, his birth and adoptive relatives. Nevertheless, there are obvious differences between John's interactions with some of his birth relatives than others. John is evidently interweaving social and biological relatedness with those siblings he wishes to be part of his kin, those who have jobs. Whereas he does not do this with relatives from the traveller community. So, within John's openness there are graduations of secrecy. Therefore, the negotiated and sensory resemblances between John and his employed siblings are politically

consequential to decisions of who he chooses to interact with. Likewise, Jamie (4.3. part 1) is seen to value relationships with kin who are employed.

The theme of secrecy and lack of negotiation between adoptees and adoptive family members is further exemplified by Lynn;

Lynn

So yeh, about that sort of age (14-15) was when Deborah was obviously questioning things in her mind and I noticed that some of the (adoption) papers had gone missing. …… It wasn't as if I kept them under lock and key or anything but some of the stuff I didn't really want them to see….and that was the stuff that had gone.
So, I just sat down with her and said the reason that we haven't gone through this with you is because obviously it's very sensitive and I didn't want you to be upset.

At the time Deborah took her adoption documents she was becoming a woman and going through what Lynn called 'difficult years'. This Also resounds with evidence form Janet, who's 17-year-old daughter shouted out "well I'd like to meet my birth family!" when she was going through her Advanced Special Level exams. Lynn recounts, that at this time Deborah's sensory actions displayed in elements such as pretending to be older than she was, using language that shocked her adoptive parents and bringing boys home that were much older than her. Jane's sensory and unresponsive interactions (4.3.) are dissimilar to Deborah's although this could largely be because we did not live together and therefore experience everyday interactions at that time, whereas Deborah and her adoptive mother did.

Lynn continues;

(Then when Deborah was 17-18 she went on holiday with a boyfriend.)

….. I tried to drop hints to her, to try to get her to bring something up…oh what did you do on holiday, where did you go…. To sort of draw something out of her erm and I said to her on numerous occasions, don't be afraid to ask if you want to go and trace anything, you know, but come to us. And she's always said oh no it's fine, I'm not interested. But obviously she's lying…..we found out she went on holiday, to meet a birth relative, and she's *still* never discussed it with us. …….

Similarly, a lack of negotiation between adoptees and adoptive parents is characteristic of several adoptees in this study as Jenny recounts;

Jenny

But then I had a really good friend when I was at University, 2 friends actually, that enabled me to talk about it (being adopted and wanting to find birth parents). One of my friends had had a really difficult relationship with her father …you know she wasn't adopted, but she had family difficulties... it enabled me to even express actually, I've got this.

Jenny found affinities with a friend she could talk to about her adoption, Deborah discussed her journey to meet birth relatives with her boyfriend rather than her adoptive mother. Moreover, there are notable similarities with Jane's interactions, as she obviously discussed her wishes with Tom her partner, in maintaining her silence with me (4.3.).

Beyond these adoptee ethereal silences, Lynn believed Deborah would try to trace her birth mother, because they were the same gender. However, Deborah's adoption documents made it clear that her birth mother had issues which resulted in Deborah being taken away.

Lynn continues;

……the person we found Deborah had been trying to contact on the internet, was her birth father, and not the mother (*surprised*).

Importantly, I suggest Deborah chose to trace her birth father because she experienced what Pillow (2003) might consider reflexivity as recognition of herself and as recognition of her birth father, from her adoption documents. A resemblance that Lynn confirmed. Deborah's perception of this strong resemblance could be seen as a fixed affinity (Mason 2008). If so, it would be politically and powerfully consequential in her decision to find him, rather than her birth mother (4.2.). Similarly, to my experience, Lynn has still not had the opportunity to talk with her adopted daughter about the content of her adoption documents including perceptions of a strong resemblance between her and her birth father. It is clear from experiences of Jenny, Lynn, Jane (4.3.) and myself (4.2.) that kinship interactions are tinged with secret, ethereal affinities.

Zoe provides another example of the way that ethereal affinities can be experienced on reading her adoption documents which provoked a flash of reflexivity;

Zoe

…..there was a handwritten letter …….it wasn't the content that mattered…… I didn't analyse the handwriting or anything but…….. (pause)

Interviewer; so, was this the most meaningful piece of your birth records?

I don't know that it was the most meaningful or emotive even, but it was definitely the one piece that provoked a reaction in me.

I suggest, Zoe's reflexive reaction to the letter more than other documents, occurred because it was a material and ethereal connection to the writer, her birth mother, as a member of Zoe's fixed kin (Mason 2008). For these reasons, and in adding to the work of Carsten (2000a), I suggest adoptees are likely to experience major epiphanic kinship flashes when aspects of their biological and social interactions collide. Flashes that feature sensory, negotiated and ethereal affinities are central to how kinship is experienced and are likely to occur in the moments when adoptees experience a challenge to their perception of fixed kinship. For example, when interpreting adoption documents (4.3. part 2 for Jamie and Zoe above) or in meeting birth fathers (4.2. for Jenny and I).

4.5.4. What sensory and negotiated interactions can be observed between adoptees and members of their adoptive or birth family at Christmastime, birthdays or other significant family occasions?

In this section I include participant observations around interactions at Christmastime, whilst also including other significant sensory and negotiated family occasions such as birthdays, Mother's Day or holidays in striving to extend the contribution of this thesis (re holidays; see Deborah in the previous section).

Janet illustrates what appears to be a lack of negotiation about her adopted sister in law, Pip (age 40 at the time of this event);

Janet

So, when she (Pip) searched for them (birth parents), she kind of withdrew from her adoptive family… she didn't want to tell anyone she was searching, for them. She told her adoptive mother on Mother's Day! 'And actually, she went from wanting to see them (birth parents) and obviously it would have been different because then she would have been showing them their birth…. you know well…..their grandchild (yes, yes). She didn't want to see them at all…'

It seems astonishing that Pip chose to tell her adoptive mother on Mother's Day that she'd searched for her birth parents. Yet what Janet goes onto say confirms that Pip may have deliberately chosen Mother's Day to tell her adopted mother, not to be hurtful, but as a confirmation of the importance of their relatedness. Pip wanted her adoptive mother to know that this search had happened but that it wasn't going any

further at that time. In the same way I wanted Jean to know that I was pleased to know her, but I did not necessarily want to spend Christmas together (4.4.).

Janet continues;

'…but you know there's no relationship there….I don't know what it is really… they don't particularly get on, they would get on in a sort of how are you, smile and a nod and everything, but there's no, there's no relationship there…. they're not a good advert for adopted mothers and daughters'.

This illustrates that in relationships where sensory and negotiated affinities may be lacking, such as that between Pip and her adoptive mother, Pip would find it difficult to talk to her adoptive mother about searching for her birth parents. Therefore, an explanation for the seemingly painful timing of Pip's statement. On reflection, I acknowledge that the rudimentary 3-month-old relationship between myself and Jean (4.4.) could also have resulted in sensory and negotiated reticence. Likewise, at the time of 4.1., Jane and I had not lived together for approximately one year, this inevitably minimised the quality of our sensory and negotiated affinities, facets which should not be underestimated in contributing to the distance between us.

Interestingly, Josh, an adoptee in his 20's, displays dissimilar interactions around Christmastime to those recounted in 4.4.

Lesley Josh's adoptive mother;

I dread Christmas anyway because I can't have it the way I would want it. I can't have my family – which is me and him…..so there's a lot of sadness there for

me…… He can't come up here and I can't go down there. I think last Christmas I actually paid for the pub lunch that he took his birth mother out for….it was a big deal for him to be with her at Christmas**.**

Lesley goes onto illustrate Josh's preoccupation with the places he went to with his now deceased birth mother and the occasions he spent with her;

Lesley

When we go around the city where he lives, he says – "we had coffee in there, I bought her a handbag in there". How to position myself (Lesley thoughtfully muses). I do that with my Mum when I go back to town, but he's doing it in a constant loop, everything reminds him of Carol (his birth mother).

Significantly, Josh's sensory and negotiated interactions around significant places confirm how he experienced relatedness and fixity of kinship. It seems that for Josh the fixity of kinship to a place was further layered with ethereal affinity. Ethereal in that Josh's emplaced sensory memories are temporally connected to his deceased birth mother in the same way that mine were connected to my deceased adoptive parents (4.4.). Josh wanted to live in the city where his birth mother had lived, even after she had died. Whilst I wanted to stay at home during Christmas 2009 because home was a place of sanctuary. Therefore, I suggest kinship affinities experienced around significant places do impact adoptee decision making albeit with a temporal element.

Therefore, it is clear there exists a sensory relationality, between places, occasions and resemblances, which is significant to how kinship is experienced for adoptees.

4.5.5. Insights and Findings

In this section I give a summary of the response to the holistic research questions as posed in section 4.5.

> 4.5.1 and 4.5.2. What fixed, sensory, negotiated and ethereal interactions can be observed between adoptees and members of their adoptive and/or birth family?

1. Interactions of a sensory and/or ethereal nature occurred in this study when adoptees perceived differences in their fixity of kinship. For example, John's interactions displayed sensory, physical aggression, and Sandy's youngest daughter could be said to ethereally display manipulative behaviour. Likewise, differences in sensory and ethereal affinities were felt by Jenny and Zoe (4.5.3.), and Pip (4.5.4.).

2. Adoptees interactions are characterised by ethereality, or blankness (Lucas), when they are unable to create and negotiate a resemblance, a fixity of kin, they know nothing of.

3. Adoptee sensory affinities and perceptions of their resemblance to birth kin seem to be strongly connected to their decision making. For example, Bella's (4.5.1.) choice to travel to Hong Kong and Deborah's decision to trace her birth father not her birth mother (4.5.3.).

4. Adoptees may choose to interweave both social and biological kin into their family group (John 4.5.3.). Equally John illustrated electively, embodied reasons for omitting other biological or social kin who he did not want to be part of his family.

5. The interplay between fixed, sensory, negotiated and ethereal kinship affinities around significant places is seen to affect adoptee interactions and decision making (Josh 4.5.4.).

Therefore, the evidence in this section suggests that moments characterised by a collision of adoptees fixed, sensory, negotiated and ethereal affinities, are likely to produce flashes of reflexivity as recognition of self. I suggest that these flashes of reflexivity are observable in the sensory nature of adoptee interactions. These can be experienced through a realisation of intellectual and/or emotional differences and/or when aspects of biological and social interactions collide.

4.5.3. and 4.5.4. What sensory and negotiated interactions can be observed between adoptees and members of their adoptive and/or birth family….

4.5.3. ….in relation to adoption documents?

4.5.4…..at Christmas, birthdays or other significant family gatherings?

1. Adoptive siblings can act as negotiators and creators of birth kinship affinities if they have the sensory knowledge of birth kin (for example Chloe, Lucas's sister).

2. Adoptee interactions on receiving or not receiving a greetings card have similar sensory elements, e.g. ‘ripping’, ‘dead’. At the worst these are indicative of a complete rejection of kin (Leo) and at best a refusal to engage in negotiation (Natalie 4.1.).

3. Adoptees are more likely to talk to friends/others about searching for birth kin rather than their adoptive kin. For example, Deborah, Jenny and Pip (4.5.4.).

Chapter 5 – Discussion

The aim of the methodological analysis was to focus on specific epiphanies highlighted by theory from the conceptual framework, supplementing these with participants' narratives. This meant that I prevented the reflexive analysis from becoming skewed, ensuring insights were bounded by focussing on themes that are of central significance to adoptees, adoptive mothers and crucially the adoption research community.

The autoethnographic process has enabled me to look simultaneously outward through the cultural lens of adoptive family kinship, whilst also reflexively looking inward, exposing evocative, personal vulnerabilities. Consequently, through undertaking a reflexive approach, I share insights not only as a researcher but by putting myself in the position of subject as an adoptive mother, adopted daughter and birth daughter. I suggest the transferability of kinship interactions experienced by me in these three roles, will not only resonate with members of adoptive families, but with kin groups of differing forms, including reconstituted families. For the reason that at times of sensory and physical change such as the birth of a new baby, new partnerships, separations or moving house, embodied kinship interactions are likely to be more salient. For example, it is already known that female adoptees are more likely to search for birth parents after pregnancy or birth (Kowal & Schilling, 1985; March, 1995a, in Muller and Perry 2001). As this study illustrates, when sensory and physical differences become striking, changed interactions have the capacity to impact the very core of adoptive family relationships.

This chapter is organised into four sections. Initially in section 5.1. I explore the inherent tension between autoethnography and the self, particularly as exposing a vulnerable self and its possible use as a cathartic tool to inform these deliberations.

Secondly section 5.2 explores the nature and relevance of emotional support whilst undertaking autoethnography (see section 3.3.1). At the beginning of this research journey I recognised the universal emotions of despair, despondency and discomfort in myself upon feeling rejection by members of my immediate adoptive family. In the same way I suggest recognising universal feelings and emotions are key to understanding how as Bob Dylan said, “I'm a mystery only to those who haven't felt the same things I have” (Shelton, 2011, p. 301). In this way recognising and responding to universal emotions is important because as Richardson (2000) explains ‘the ethnographic life is not separable from the self’ (Emerald and Carter 2015, p. 741). This led me to question issues to do with relatedness, which primarily shaped a research question and enabled a search of theory.

Accordingly, I perceived a dichotomy between on one hand feelings of discomfort, from sometimes feeling like I didn’t fit in the culture in which I live (Wegar 2000) and on the other delight when experiencing music, arts or literature as spaces and places ‘both deeply personal and implicitly universal’ (Winter 2013, p. 115). For example, throughout my life I was aware that specific pieces of music evoked an ethereal quality in me. These ambiguous emotions provided motivation to explore reflexively and relationally reasons for these feelings. After reflexively recognising the other, in coming to know my birth father’s musical influences, I began to recognise (my) self (Pillow 2003). Clearly the reflexive connections between other, self, truth and

transcendence according to Pillow (2003) could provide an explanation for the ethereal aura I experienced when I listened to specific pieces of music.

I section 5.3., I then refocus the autoethnographic lens, in providing a reflexive summary to the research questions illuminate how the insights and findings may inform theoretical analysis. The entwined hermeneutic nature of reflexivity and theoretical analysis is achieved through layering Anderson's (2006) analytic autoethnography concepts, Mason's (2008) kinship affinities and Galvin and Colaner's (2014) adoptive family themes (Fig 1). The resulting interpretation informs our knowledge and understanding of the connections between members of adoptive kin and include messages for policymakers.

Lastly, in section 5.4. I summarise the valuable claims to knowledge and recommend directions for future study, which are justified and contradicted by this research.

5.1. Autoethnography as catharsis versus vulnerability

As a social researcher I have chosen to make 'visible the emotional and relational dimensions of social life that are often assumed or neglected' (Finn 2015, p. 27). Consequently, in this section I consider the distinctive tensions between doing autoethnography and the self. For example, I deliberated how much should I share about adoptive and birth family interactions, what this would be and why and ultimately what factors I took into account when making these choices. These

considerations convey the tension between autoethnography as exposing a vulnerable self and its possible use as a cathartic tool.

How much I should share

At the beginning of this research, I became anxious that the reflexive methodology may place expectations on me to reveal possible narratives which would leave me and my inter-relationships vulnerable. As the research progressed it became clear that in protecting vulnerability my decisions were informed by theory and literature, notably and originally the application of Denzin's (1989) categorisation of 4 types of epiphany. I deliberately chose to covey interactions through epiphanic moments primarily to give the reader a sense of the nature of interactions without identifying in depth family narratives. Importantly the epiphanies selected also had to be understood independently of the full context and satisfy ethical concerns regarding anonymity. In this way, and through my design of the research methods, I retained the authority over which personal disclosures to share in attempting to balance the inward, autobiographic gaze, with the outward ethnographic gaze (Tedlock 2005). Simultaneously balancing the tension of vulnerability felt at the outset of this autoethnography, and catharsis in experiencing personal and professional advancement.

I acknowledge that in setting parameters and deciding when adequate self-reflexive data had been collected, I deliberately limited the narrative featured in chapter 4. I was aware that too much retrieval of events from memory may produce distress, whereas not enough may limit perspectives. In this way, methodological processes presented new possibilities rather than decisive answers. Furthermore, focussing

my reflexive data enabled me to purposefully seek thematic connections (Fig 1) through empirical data collection from interviewees, including intergenerational and inter-relational witnesses. Last but not least, decisions of how much to share were also taken with the academic and adoptive kinship community in mind. In the hope of profoundly stirring readers to social action (Dashper 2015).

What to share

My purpose in writing an autoethnography was not to share every aspect of adoptive family experience in a 'biased and subjective' way, as some kind of 'personal therapy' (Holt, 2008; Wright, 2009, in Emerald 2015, p. 744). Fundamentally, decisions of how much to share were taken alongside what to share, or indeed what to omit. I did this being mindful of protecting and sustaining potentially fragile inter-personal relationships, between family members and myself as well as seeking to protect myself as researcher and subject. In guiding and encouraging autoethnographic decisions of what to include or omit, I suggest it is extremely valuable to identify reflexivities of discomfort (Pillow 2003) from personal narratives. One decision, amongst several that I made, was to omit excerpts of my children's adoption documents. In doing this I sought to protect myself and family members from narratives which may be subject to social constructions around deviance and stigmatisation which could potentially intensify vulnerability. Simultaneously, I anticipate omitting such material, would minimise the occurrence of a so-called normalising gaze (Foucault 1995). This highlights the association between intra-subjectivity, when an individual holds different perspectives within their own reasoning, and inter-subjectivity, when the relationship between self and others is considered. The prior would inform the latter (Kristeva 1991). This thesis has shown

that it is difficult to generalise from autoethnography, nor would I wish to. Yet the inter-subjectivity of readers' insights and experiences, has provided a useful mirror to my own. In this way and in attempting to bridge the gap between the personal and the political I sought opportunities to explore reasoned perspectives through self-observation, introspection of data and by dialogue and analysis of data created between self and others. I wanted to share this narrative with every family member who features in this writing, as I did with each of the participants (see 3.3.2.). I did this in the hope of eliciting a discussion to benefit ongoing analysis (Tolich 2010) as well as to envisage possible ethical dilemmas (Wall 2016). In taking my writing back to most family members I was able to consider each family member in turn, including my relationship with them in the past, present and anticipated future (Ellis 2007) (see 3.3.3.). However, sharing this writing with Jane, Ralph and Tom was not possible at this time for different reasons (See point 8, Table 4 appendices and section 3.3.3.). When sharing was not possible, I endeavour to protect our future relatedness by only selecting data I was content to show anyone mentioned in the text (Medford 2006 in Le Roux 2017). In this way, I recommend that others considering autoethnography should provide an insight into the unique ethical boundaries between the self and the other, in relation to their own contexts (Tolich 2010).

Why I chose these; what factors did I take into account in choosing?

Differences in adoptive context is crucial in understanding and balancing aspects of catharsis and vulnerability when choosing what to share and why. For example, being given away as I was (1962) meant that I was subject to negligible sensory neglect. Whereas children taken away from birth parents, as my children were

(1991) are more likely to have experienced sensory neglect (see 2.4.1.). Consequently, being removed from birth parents would essentially impact sensory kinship affinities, a central consideration in selecting and sharing interactions. Yet in these choices I am careful not to disclose details of actual instances of sensory neglect, but to include interactions between adoptive parents/birth parents and adoptees as adults.

Consequently, differences in adoptive context are also intertwined with obscured practices relating to parenting culture (birth and adoptive), history of the child and the parents, emotion, gender, hegemony and hierarchy. I valued these obscured practices in informing my decisions of what to share or omit because they 'offer the possibility of exploring the graduations and accumulations of kinship as well as its ruptures and dissolution' (Carsten 2013, p. 248).

Significantly, gender as a potential obscured practice, became an important consideration when achieving the balance between catharsis and vulnerability, and in challenging hegemonic masculinity. For example, as I occupy multiple female roles, I am part of the salient adoption discourse on several levels, which 'is, on the whole, gendered as feminine' (Chen 2016, p. 162). Consequently, all of my female familial roles and my professional role as a University tutor were central to my decisions of what to share, and indeed how to share it. In this way, a strength of this study is that I write in the first person to maintain my narrative visibility. Conversely one of the limitations of this study is that it is written by a female adoptee in her 50's, who is also an adoptive mother. Furthermore, the ten participants are all female (see section 3.3.2.). This supports the notion that adoptive mothers create

opportunities for dialogue around adoption (Von Korff et al. 2010). Hence, I acknowledge adoptive family interactions, as observed and witnessed, are gendered. Yet within these female perspectives I sought 'to break down some of the power divide between researched 'others' and all-knowing researcher' (Dashper 2015, p. 514). In doing this I aimed to extend the dialogue in the adoption field to questions around reproducing gender difference, which might be more likely to support traditional constructions of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity (Montemurro et al 2015). Specifically, as the research progressed through self-reflexivity and self-introspection, it became clear that gender and hierarchy were intertwined and crucial in balancing vulnerability and catharsis, and so became important factors in my decision making of what to share. On the one hand, sharing emotional gendered interactions could place me in a vulnerable position inter-relationally. Yet through the synthesis of my voice and the voices of participants, I could cathartically and potentially act as an agent for social justice, in voicing the subjugated and subverted experience of adoptive mothers. Therefore, I seek to illuminate the link between female adoptees and adoptive mothers ontological status and global socio-political themes which impact women considerably, specifically the dominant 'Disney' type fantasy about adoption (DelRosso 2015). In doing this, I seek 'alternative narratives that offer a stronger socio-political impact' (Chen 2016, p. 163).

In conclusion, examples of obscured practices noted above all woven together impacted choices of which aspects I shared and why. I was able to limit potentially vulnerability by omitting data which may leave me feeling vulnerable. For example, I ensured I discarded some aspects of interactions with my birth parents which may

have exposed me to necessitating excessive emotional support and may have affected inter-relationships. In this way I seek to balance aspects of vulnerability and catharsis in the hope that more adoptees, and adoptive mothers, will feel empowered to become ethnographers in the broadest sense through for example social media (e.g. Twitter). Social media provide spaces for communities of likeminded individuals with common cultural connections to explore stories and in doing so, create a stronger socio-political impact. Indeed, the asynchronous nature of online media creates a mediating effect, so that individuals can control what and how they disclose by choosing to participate or not, in this way vulnerability can be protected. So, individuals like me can transform 'the story she tells and continue to construct a story in which she can live' (Nin 1976 in Ellis 2004, p. 144).

5.2. Emotional support – myself and participants.

Emotional support of myself as researcher and participant observer has taken several forms. Firstly, mindful of the ethics process from UREC at Lancaster University (see section 3.3) I could but didn't find the need to build emotional resilience through for example using professional adoption support services. Secondly I sought the views of adoptees and adoptive parents who experienced similar events, therefore establishing the importance of mutual emotional support through dialogue with others beyond the self (Anderson 2006). Last but not least I have taken my writing back to family members, participants, colleagues and my supervisor as I regard relational ethics (Gilligan, 1982, Noddings, 1984), feminist ethics, and feminist communitarian ethics (Christians, 2000; Denzin, 1997, 2003) as paramount.

In regards to participants, who may feel the sting of stigmatising themes I know ‘emotional processes are crucial components of social experience, but they could leave participants feeling exposed or vulnerable’ (Haynes 2006, p. 217 in Emerald and Carpenter 2015, p. 742). In this way I was sure to strike a balance in interview conversations between sharing too much of my own kinship interactions that may invoke vulnerability, yet reflexively sharing enough so that I can legitimate claims to knowledge (D’Cruz 2007). These considerations endorsed ethical mindfulness, in ensuring participants dialogue occupied the majority of the space between us. Equally, continuous ethical mindfulness became a strength of using this methodology (Warin, 2011). For example, during interviews opportunities for emotional support for participants and myself occurred naturally in recognising and empathising comparable experiences.

Subsequently writing the reflexive narrative, further established verisimilitude between our dialogues. When the first draft was completed I took the writing back to participants and family members. The responses from the participants confirmed that they felt emotionally supported in that the writing confirmed not only their story but our joint stories. In this way I am certain we developed mutual emotional support and enthusiasm in that this story is worth telling. Family members who I have shared this writing with (see Table 4 appendices) have also responded affirmatively (see Chapter 3 for Jean, Jamie, David and William). Consequently, the intertwined processes of analytic reflexivity provided emotional support effectively resulting in feelings of liberation for me. In this way the blurring and interchangeability of my personal and professional roles became a strength in using this methodology.

Had I engaged with this research at the time the events occurred (2009) I know from data I collected at that time, my ability to be reflexive could have been hindered, more likely to be labelled solipsistic. What enhanced my reflexivity, minimised emotional reactions and supported self-learning was repeatedly practising inter-subjectivity through distance, temporal boundaries and time (2014-18). For example, emotional support is enacted through communal dialogue between adoptees, adopted parents, social workers and adoption researchers from across temporal boundaries e.g. social media sites such as Twitter (see 2.4.3.). Hence the importance of the intersubjective multifaceted nature of this study is acknowledged, resonating not only with the adoptive family community, but the wider sociological research community engaged in studying the family. Therefore, relevant for families currently 'doing adoption' and those yet to do adoption as well as researchers yet to 'do autoethnography'.

5.3. Responses to research questions

Initially it might seem that in using a range of theories this study could be seen to be messy (Geertz 1973) or be susceptible to variability. Yet in harnessing and analysing the variability of adoptive and birth family interactions I have arrived at a theoretically imaginative solution, which supports us to make sense of the world. The use of several interwoven theoretical lenses for example Anderson (2006), Mason (2008) and Galvin and Colaner (2014), was further enhanced by anthropology literature from Carsten (2004), McKinnon (2000 in 2017) and

Yanagisako and Collier (1987). This connected the cultural, autobiographical and 'graphy' or the relevance of place in this study, but also demonstrated the power of autoethnography as being able to reveal and strengthen analysis in relation to theory.

In the next section (5.3.1.) I provide a reflexive response to the original four research questions as posed in section 2.6. This is followed by a response to the four holistic research questions (as posed in 4.5.) blended with original research questions 1 - 4 (5.3.2.). I do this in order to broaden the contribution of this thesis whilst also driving commitment to theoretical analysis (Anderson 2006).

5.3.1. Insights and findings from the autoethnographic epiphanies 1-4.

The major epiphanies 1 and 2 fill a gap in the sociology literature in exemplifying and analysing how inter-physical, sensory, negotiated and ethereal affinities intertwine through culture and gender (Mason 2008).

Observed changes in interactions between myself as an adoptee and adoptive mother and my adopted children as adults, and between myself and my birth father and birth mother, considered in this thesis have occurred in moments of sensory and physical disruption. Namely family card giving at the time of beginnings/endings of partner relationships (E1), discussing adoption documents, the birth of a child, (E3) and meeting birth parents (E2, 4). Reflexive analysis of the epiphanies has shown that interactions imbued with secrecy, sensory and/or physical elements between

myself and my birth or adoptive kin has resulted in observed variance in kinship affinities (E1, 2).

For myself, as an adopted female, I assert that recognising emotional responses to interactions was the necessary first step to heighten awareness and so to enhance reflexivity as a recognition of self and of other. I regard the process of reflexivity through the initial flash, sting or 'reflexivities of discomfort' (Pillow 2003, p.188) as transformational in regards to the perception of kinship affinities. For example, being identified by my adopted child as not 'the same' so not a *real mother* was hurtful. For these reasons I recognise the absence of family card giving and misrecognition of adoptive motherhood as being real (E1 and E2 between Ralph and his step mother) as '(dis)affinities with related others. A deliberate failure to recognise adoptive motherhood as *real* could be considered a manifestation of invisible power relations (Bourdieu 1984, Fraser 1998). Equally, I suggest that there is a great deal of ideological and media pressure (see E1, Chapter 2 and section 3.5.3.) on adoptees in the west to see their biological relatives as their *real* Mum and Dad. Therefore, adoptive family interactions and relationships could be seen as a site of resistance for the adopted child. Nonetheless, I concur that 'any transformation in the use of kinship terminology essentially indicates transformations in the very nature of these family relationships it embodies' (Resmi 2018, p 516).

Epiphany 1 and 2 are appropriately described a major because in the flashes of reflexivity both social (E1) and biological (E2) aspects of my *fixity* of kin collided. These major events touched every thread in the fabric of my life (Denzin 1989, Kramer 2011, p. 392).

A ‘mutuality of being’ between Ralph and I went further than a striking physical resemblance, being ethereally reminiscent of a fixity of kinship we shared in our connection to music, the arts and literature (Sahlins 2013). Indeed, music and the arts have a universal ethereal affinity for kinship groups beyond adoptees. Therefore, after analytic reflexivity and in getting to know my birth Father I realised that my adoptive Father simultaneously in a different time and space also performed and sang on stage. In this way I can now cathartically recognise that through time, cultures and social circumstances there is a sense that *adoptive and birth* kin ‘participate intrinsically in each other’s existence’ (Sahlins 2013: ix). Through reflexive relatedness I have connected my adoptive and birth sensory affinities, which has harmonised my previous ambiguous feelings of difference and in-between-ness. I believe this finding to be valuable for adoptee narratives that begin with being ‘given’ away, as mine did.

Negotiation is a key kinship affinity deemed necessary for productive adoptive family relationships (E1, 2 and 3.). Significantly, a lack of willingness to negotiate is observed in major epiphanies in this study, subsequently expressed through withdrawal of adoptees (DoH 2014; HoL 2012a.). Therefore, a lack of negotiation may result in kinship affinities being reconfigured and so resulting in inter-relational change (E1, 3). What's more I assert that an ebbing and flowing of kinship affinities is likely to happen for female adoptees at times of significant sensory, physical and secret interactions, for example the birth of children (E1), no matter how affirmative

the adoptive family environment has been. Consequently, there may be a greater need for future kinship support in relation to female adoptees.

The *fixity* of kinship to my adoptive family home was of key significance to my interactions and decision making (4.4.). Indeed, my feeling of fixity could be further layered with sensory, inter-physical and ethereal affinities which may be characteristics of family celebrations which may have taken place there (E4, Mason and Muir 2013). Furthermore, the importance of place and culture is becoming apparent in research concerning Korean adoptees who are returning to their country of origin in large numbers (Gladieux, 2018).

Hence, I argue, that how kinship affinities and adoptive family research themes are intertwined for individual adoptees in reflexive moments, can be explained through the interaction of theory presented in the conceptual framework (Fig 1).

To conclude, these findings are significant in revealing gendered and sensory interactions unique to individual adoptee contexts and how these impact on the adoptive family. I suggest that because a mother's role is inextricably physically and sensorially connected to biological reproduction this thesis is especially relevant to adoptive mothers. No matter what reasons a couple came to adopt a child, the female partner in a heterosexual couple for example will have more cause to feel the resonances of 'reflexivities of discomfort' (Pillow 2003, p.188) around interactions recounted in this thesis.

As an adoptee and adoptive mother engaged in self-reflexive learning I offer this conclusion for other adoptees/people from one parent families (David) who may also become adoptive mothers or fathers. In situations where a prospective parent knows nothing or very little of their biological relatedness, as I didn't before 2009, Jane and Jamie didn't before 2014 and David still doesn't know anything of his father, kinship affinities felt may be ethereal, unchartered and unknown. In this event, I suggest the process of interweaving biological and social relatedness between an adopted parent and child is more ontologically challenging. As an only child, David experienced a strong biological relatedness from his mother and his extended family. Likewise, for myself, as an only child I felt a very close emotional affinity with my adoptive parents. As adoptive parents David and I also knew the nature of some of Jane and Jamie's biological kin, through the sensory and physical affinities portrayed in their adoption documents, and through their rudimentary life story book. Yet, importantly, it seems that aspects of my, David's, Jamie's and Jane's separate and unknown biological relatedness impacted our social relatedness and vice versa. As adoptive parents, David and I actively and emotionally supported our children, placing education at the centre of our shared ontology. In this situation perhaps, we both overlooked the potential importance of our birth affinities and our children's birth affinities. David omitted talking about his birth father, he was not seen as part of his kin. I omitted my own adoption story to my children, it was not visible. Therefore, I suggest our silent actions were indirectly influential. Jane and Jamie may have got the impression that we thought birth connections really didn't matter, when clearly they do. Hence, once our individual biological relatedness became fully known our biological and social idioms of kinship became subject to change. Indeed, the challenge of interweaving biological and social affinities in our

shared relatedness was exacerbated even more on the death of Jane and Jamie's grandmothers (2006 and 2012). After this Jane withdrew even further from us as adoptive parents. In this way, I suggest adoptive parents who know their biological heritage, which will be the majority, and who have strong inter-generational chains of relatedness will be more able to meet the challenge of interweaving biological and social affinities between themselves and their adopted child over time and into adulthood.

5.3.2. Insights and findings from the holistic research questions blended with original research questions 1-4.

As the original research questions 1 and 2 have common themes, I blend my response to these here. Likewise, I have blended the insights and findings to original research question 3 and 4 for the same reasons.

Original research question 1

What fixed, sensory, negotiated, secret or ethereal interactions can be observed between an adoptive mother and adopted daughter?

Original research question 2

What fixed, sensory, secret or ethereal interactions can be observed between a female adoptee and her birth father?

Holistic research question 4.5.1 and 4.5.2.

What fixed, sensory, negotiated and ethereal interactions can be observed between adoptees and members of their adoptive and/or birth family?

1. Importantly secret, sensory and ethereal interactions occur firstly when adoptees perceive differences between themselves and their adoptive/birth kin. Secret, sensory interactions which resulted from a realisation of difference are three-fold. Firstly, those which are tangibly physical such as the aggression shown by John and Sandy's youngest daughter and Leo's sensory narrative 'dead to us' (4.5.). Secondly, those which are indirectly physical for example Natalie (4.1.) in ripping up the card from her birth mother. Thirdly, those characterised by intangible sensory, secret interactions such as manipulative behaviour exhibited by Sandy's youngest daughter (4.5.) and Jane (4.1.). Likewise, Pip experienced an intangible sensory mismatch in affinities between her and her adoptive mother (4.5.4.) as I did between myself and Jane (4.1.) and Sandy did between herself and her adopted daughter (4.5.). Secret, sensory and ethereal interactions are revealed through flashes of reflexivity. In these epiphanic flashes, kin recognise intellectual and/or emotional differences between themselves and their birth or adoptive relatives (Howell & Marre 2006). Equally, these may include interactions when biological and social affinities collide, so questioning adoptees notion of the fixity of kinship. At the worst these interactions are indicative of a complete rejection of kin (Leo 4.5.) and at best a refusal to engage in negotiation (Natalie 4.1.).

2. Secondly, secret, sensory and ethereal interactions are felt when adoptees perceive similarities between themselves and their birth/adoptive kin. For example,

Jenny felt secret sensory kinship affinities with a friend, because of their similar relationship with their parents (4.5.). Likewise, Zoe felt a sensory and secret affinity on reading the handwritten letter from her birth mother (4.5.3.). I recognised shared affinities between myself and Ralph (4.2.), John recognised shared affinities with some of his birth kin (4.5.), Jamie with his adoptive kin (4.3.), Jenny with her birth kin (4.2.) and Tracy in pursuing similar careers to her birth kin (4.3.). In these epiphanic flashes of reflexivity, adoptees recognise intellectual and/or emotional similarities between themselves and their birth or adoptive kin. Equally, these may include interactions when biological and social affinities collide, so questioning adoptees notion of the fixity of kinship.

3. Thirdly, adoptee secret, sensory and ethereal interactions are connected to perceptions of biological and/or social resemblance to birth/adoptive kin, importantly influencing adoptee decision making. For example, Bella's choice to travel to Hong Kong with her physically similar boyfriend and Deborah's decision to trace her birth father not her birth mother (4.5.3.) were connected to how they perceived their resemblance to a specific relative. Likewise, my interactions and decision making were connected to my perception of shared resemblances between Ralph and I (4.2.). In this way adoptees may choose to interweave individual social and/or biological kin into their family group or offer embodied reasons for omitting them (John 4.5.3.).

Original research question 3
What sensory and negotiated interactions can be observed between an adoptive mother and her children in relation to their adoption documents?

Original research question 4
What sensory and negotiated interactions can be observed between an adoptee and her birth mother at Christmastime?

Holistic research question 4.5.3. and 4.5.4.
What sensory and negotiated interactions can be observed between adoptees and members of their adoptive and/or birth family….

4.5.3. ….in relation to adoption documents?

4.5.4…..at Christmas, birthdays or other significant family gatherings?

1. Adoptees are able to negotiate and create kinship affinities more easily, if they have sensory knowledge of resemblances between themselves and their adoptive/birth kin. For example, Chloe, Lucas's sister (4.5.).

2. Adoptees find it difficult to create and negotiate kinship affinities without sensory knowledge of birth/adoptive kin. For example, Jane, Jamie and I (4.3. part 1) found negotiating our social kinship difficult because we no longer shared everyday interactions.

3. Adoptees are more likely to create and negotiate kinship affinities with friends/boyfriends rather than adoptive/birth kin when interacting with adoption

documents. For example, Deborah talked to her boyfriend (4.5.), Jenny to a friend (4.5.), Jane discussed with Tom (4.3.) and Pip with others (4.5.4.).

4. The interplay between significant places, the ethereality of occasions such a Christmas and temporality are seen to affect how sensory kinship is negotiated therefore impacts adoptee interactions and decision making. For example, Josh choose to live where his deceased birth mother used to live (4.5.4.). Jamie seemed to feel sensory similarities with adoptive kin on reading his adoption documents in my home/his grandmother's home (4.3.) and I chose to spend Christmas in my adoptive family home, rather than with my birth mother, after a period of family breakdown (4.4.).

5.4. Summary of claims to knowledge and recommendations

The following five claims to knowledge indicate that embodied and emplaced interactions are irrevocably and temporally intertwined, they ebb and flow, dominate or harmonise. This emphasises the importance of studying the fusion of adoptive kinship affinities in context.

1. Firstly, this study has powerfully illuminated how adoptee interactions are characterised by differences and similarities in sensory, secret and ethereal kinship affinities. Vitally, it is how these politically and substantially impact present and future adoptive/birth kinship interactions that are valuable to know. For example, when adoptees recognise aspects of kinship affinities which are different between

themselves and their kin, the tangible physical or intangible ethereal interactions indicate a rejection or withdrawal from kin. When adoptee recognise similarity of kinship affinities to either adoptive or birth kin, this knowledge can sustain the adoptee. Importantly, reflection of differences and similarities can result in adoptees accepting, questioning or rejecting members of their birth or adoptive kin. In this way fixity of kin is elective.

2. The second significant claim to knowledge, entwined with the first, is that adoptee interactions and decision making are subject to sensory, inter-physical or secret affinities. These could be felt through resemblances, which also could be gendered. For example, this study has illuminated similarity of adoptee affinities in regards to employment/unemployment and similarity of emotional/intellectual traits as well as similarity of inter-physical resemblances. As a result, the conflicting relatedness felt by adoptees could have the effect of distancing themselves from individual members of their birth or adoptive kin. Or conversely, consistent relatedness, enables adoptees to align their affinities with specific birth/adoptive kin. Therefore, this is evidence that adoptees decide which kin they wish to align kinship affinities with. This study has also illuminated occasions when adoptees have been ethereally unaware of shared affinities until the sensory evidence comes to light.

3. A third significant claim to knowledge is that kinship affinities can be created and negotiated more effectively with sensory knowledge of resemblances between adoptive and/or birth kin. Whereas in the absence of sensory knowledge and affinity between kin this is more difficult. This knowledge is valuable because it gives an

insight into embodied interactions which potentially exclude others, displaying an internalisation and normalisation of the processes of symbolic violence (see Myers 2013 for an exploration of symbolic discursive violence in adoptive families).

4. This study has illuminated and confirmed the magnitude of the interrelationship between significant places, such as the adoptive family home, the ethereality of occasions such as Christmas and temporality. The adoptive/birth family home is an authoritative physical, gendered and hierarchical place therefore it is influential and consequential in the study of kinship interactions.

5. Methodologically speaking the conceptual framework (fig 1) provides an enormously valuable analytic tool. Through engaging in self-reflexive introspection, perspective taking and narrative presence I have been able to recognise flashes of reflexivity which characterise major, minor and illuminative epiphanies as experienced in adoptive family interactions (Denzin 1989). Major epiphanies (E1, 2) are positioned at the centre of the conceptual framework, intersecting Mason's (2008) affinities, Anderson's (2006) five conditions for analytic autoethnography and Galvin and Colaner's (2014) adoptive family themes. This is a significant claim to knowledge for adoptees and adoption researchers, because I anticipate that the reasons the epiphanies were major, minor or illuminative, will be fundamentally transferable to the study of kinship generally.

Recommendations

In undertaking this thesis, I did not set out to establish certainties, but to explore the relevance and experience of engaging in analytic autoethnography as a means to investigate adoptive family interactions. The research presented in this thesis supports this view. The result is an authentic account of my interactional observations and experiences analysed through theories. Throughout, I have attempted to provide a way of doing and writing about relational ethics in balancing the risks and benefits of studying the *self* alongside intimate others. I have sought to protect relationships and inter-subjective vulnerability by supporting the ethical decisions I made, through elaborating on discussions of what data to include or omit. Through using methods of self-observation and self-introspection my well established self-reflexive processes have been developed. For example, at the beginning of this thesis I wrote daughter interchangeably with adopted daughter. Recognising and exposing previously hidden perspectives encourages researchers and readers of research to take a critical stance in relation to 'how power/knowledge is generated, by whom and with what consequences' (D' Cruz 2007, p. 83).

Yet to increase the use of analytic autoethnography, especially by adoptees or others in the adoption triad, more methodological illustrations are required.

From this study I suggest 5 recommendations for further research;

1. A major theme for further research is how adoptees perceive changes in the fixity of their kinship over time. In particular how gendered, social and biological resemblances manifest themselves (E1, 2, 4.5.). This study has shown that the

perception of adoptee affinities are crucial to gendered interactions at times of birth, marriage (divorce) and death (Carsten 2004). Hence those secret but 'waiting for you' resemblances which can be both biological and social, carry manifestations of power and privilege for adoptees inter-relationally and can be passed through generations. For example, I not only perceived a tangible physical resemblance between Ralph and I but also an intangible emotional and intellectual likeness too (E2) (Howell & Marre 2006). These reasons strongly indicate the need for further investigations around the sensory circumstances for recognition and misrecognition in relation to young adopted people (Kallio 2014). I suggest knowing the nature of these interactions would inform adoptive kinship interactions that continue to produce power past specific times and places. Furthermore, revealing politically consequential yet potentially invisible power relations (Adams 2017) are necessary to address issues of social justice and inequality for young, potentially vulnerable adoptees. In turn this will impact on how support services are able to respond when and if relationships collide (DfE 2014a).

2. Additionally and linked to this point, the findings of this study justify addressing a lack of sociological literature around how adoptee gender interacts with inter-physical, other-worldly and/or secretive affinities. Significantly, during times of traumatic life events for female adoptees, especially when these involve children and relationships (E1, 3 and 4.5.) there is a likelihood of withdrawal and internalising emotions (DOH, 2014). This emphasises the need for interventions throughout the female life course including measures to 'protect and promote safety and prevent gender violence and vulnerability to violence in general' (DOH, 2014). Furthermore, I recommend addressing potential gendered limitations of this research by further

analysis to expand knowledge of how kinship affinities are challenged or supported between male adoptees and adoptive fathers. Including how male adoptee gender is constructed.

3. Another recommendation would be to investigate the similarities and differences in adoptee perception of kinship affinities between themselves and birth parents and/or adoptive parents. Epiphany 2 and 4 give a glimpse of the outcomes of my search for birth parents. For me, no matter what the outcome of the search, the value of appreciating previously invisible interrelationships between my birth and adoptive affinities continues to therapeutically sustain me. Enabling me to experience feelings of liberation as well as dissipate 'the mantle of myth or otherworldliness that kinship enigmas may present' (Smart 2011, p. 551). In this way, the interrelationship between kinship affinities and adoption search outcomes could build on the work of Meakings et al (2018). Consequently, this knowledge has the potential to not only impact adoptee understanding and research around adoption search outcomes but has the capacity to impact all kin who seek to connect affinities between themselves and unknown relatives.

Nevertheless, connecting adoptive and birth affinities may not always be positive for adoptees and therefore should be treated with caution. For me as a 1960's adoptee these connections have largely been positive, although they have not been mirrored by so called successful enduring relationships. For 1990's adoptees, who may have been removed from birth parents, the evidence from this study suggests that they may be vulnerable, particularly to powerful sensory affinities. As adoptees seek out interactions with birth kin, I suggest connections of inter-physical or sensory affinities

relating to past neglect or abuse could bring them distress. This valuable knowledge impacts upon way in which adoption support services and policy can be improved in circumstances where adoption could be disrupted (specifically in young people between the age of 17-18 there is a 4%-11% chance; DfE *2014a*). The age that Jane was at the time of E1. Therefore, the importance of individual narratives entwined with temporality as a recurring and interwoven theme in this study is significant for understanding how adoptees may need extremely sensitive directed support in understanding and achieving intimate relationships (Finn 2015).

4. As adoptive kinship is constructed or deconstructed (E 1, 3, 4) in houses this justifies further theoretical exploration of the interconnections between sensory and created affinities and how these may be temporally linked to houses as kin.

5. Finally, it is my hope that Fig 1 could be considered a model for prospective researchers, both in developing and extending knowledge of affinities between kin of all kinds as well as advancing how others may seek to employ reflexive practices.

Conclusion

As an adoptee and adoptive mother, I would have always agreed that it is an adoptees right to know their *birth* (word in italics added by author) parents (Gilman 2017; United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, article 7). An adoptee said ‘a person who does not know her ancestry is denied access to who she really is’ in Yngvesson and Mahoney (2000, p. 92). I agree to some extent with this

statement. Indeed, first-hand knowledge of the sensory and inter-physical affinities between myself and my birth parents, was the first life changing, self-analytical step into the autoethnographical process. Yet there remains an inherent bias in the words 'who she really is', which implies the given-ness and hegemony of the western view of kinship as biologically driven. Through this thesis I have argued that adopted individuals are made up of a fusion of affinities which uniquely intertwine, dominate or compliment according to social and biological influences, through history, environment, parenting, gender, hierarchy, hegemony and intergenerational relations. It is recognising and understanding the ebb and flow of kinship affinities over time which I advocate will enable an adoptee to know 'who she really is'. In exploring the confirmations and contradictions in representing the self through methodological processes, this iterative research became a lived experience. My eyes have been opened to 'new perspectives, cultural standards, people and environments' (Chang 2016, p.133). All of which has significantly impacted my ontological security as an adoptee, adoptive mother and University Lecturer (Carsten 2000b; Smart 2009).

Kierkegaard (1992[1846]) observed that 'life is lived forwards but understood backwards' (Holland and Thompson 2009, p. 464). This statement is genuine in relation to understanding my own adoptive and birth family interactions. Indeed, the dynamic knowledge of my past has touched my understanding of what happened there and how this will positively impact my future. For me, the intertwined roles of subject and researcher, effectively developed my self-learning, including becoming aware of myriad interpretations which may have been previously buried. This effectively identified some earlier restrictive views which were in need of

readjustment. Including the difficult realisation that creating insights in studying adoptive family interactions does not necessarily create change in the relationships themselves. So, at times, disappointingly, it was necessary to disengage myself from 'toxic' relationships', even if these were with family members (D'Cruz et al. 2007, p. 76). Indeed, Ferguson describes individuals who do this as 'creative reflexive citizens' (2004, p. 140).

In this way my outlook has changed to such an extent that I cannot return to a metaphorical place that I once inhabited. I am more than I was previously. The different path I now travel is also deeply connected to the self-introspective and self-reflexive processes used in this thesis in realising how I came to this place and how I will progress from this place. This has double edged resonance in empowering any future journey. On one hand I am resolute in my pursuit of social justice particularly for adoptive mothers and female adoptees of Jane's generation, yet on the other I know this pursuit may result in expanding the distance between myself and my adopted children and/or myself and my birth relatives. Nevertheless, it is my hope that one day some members of my adoptive and birth family may meet me in this pursuit.

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Appendices

1. Adoptive Kinship Diagram – Fig 3
2. Birth Kinship Diagram – Fig 4
3. Table 4, Ethical considerations - Ten Foundational Guidelines for Autoethnographers.
4. Example thematic interview questions
5. Participant Information Sheet
6. First4Adoption request for participants
7. UREC letter - approval granted RS 2014/64 13 October 2015.

Fig 3 Adoptive Kinship Diagram

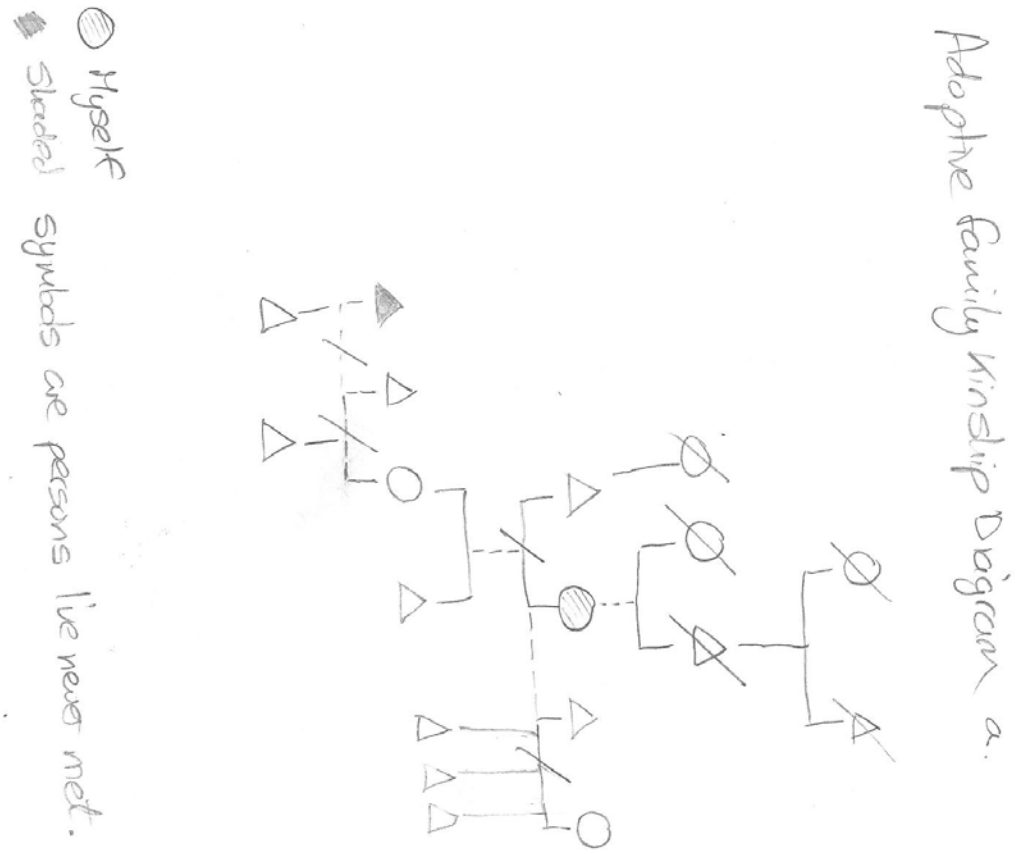

Fig 4 Birth Kinship diagram

Table 4 – Methodology; 3.3. Ethics

A Critique of Current Practice: Ten Foundational Guidelines for Autoethnographers (Tolich, M. 2010).	
Consent	
1. Respect participants' autonomy and the voluntary nature of participation and document the informed consent processes that are foundational to qualitative inquiry (Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, 2007).	1. Yes – Participants' voluntary informed consent is documented see section 3.3.1.
2. Practice "process consent," checking at each stage to make sure participants still want to be part of the project (Ellis, 2007).	2a. Yes - participants see section 3.3.2. 2b. I have anticipated ethical dilemmas before and during data collection and analysis (see no. 5). I have only selected data I am happy to show anyone mentioned in the text (Medford 2006; see section 3.3.1. and 3.3.3.)
3. Recognize the conflict of interest or coercive influence when seeking informed consent after writing the manuscript (see Jago, 2002; Rambo, 2005/7) (unable to access 2005 article – one search). When an author writes about someone who has harmed him or her. Herein lies the therapeutic promise of autoethnography (Ellis, 2007): its apparently unique but as-yet unsubstantiated benefit to heal the author-as-victim. What are the ethical considerations for those attempting to reconcile the right to heal one's abuse with the ethical rights of those perpetrators who caused the harm, be they fathers, mothers, siblings, or spouses?	3a. I do not seek informed consent after writing the manuscript. 3b. There will be no coercive influence because I am not seeking informed consent after writing the manuscript. 3c. This writing is an attempt to find out why my adoptive kinship relations had turned out the way they had and if other adoptive mothers/adoptees had experienced similar events. Thus, I have made it clear that I am not a victim, I do not wish to write this to heal any abuse or to apportion blame. (See section 3.3.3.)
Consultation	
4. Consult with others, like an Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Chang, 2008; Congress of Qualitative Inquiry).	4. I have engaged in 'dialogue with others' (Anderson 2006); UREC Committee Lancaster University, supervisor, colleagues, partner and participants and myself, via reflection. This has resulted in sensitizing myself to anything in the text I would be reluctant to show the persons mentioned in the text and therefore has informed my ethical choices of what to include and what to omit, see section 3.3.3.

5. Autoethnographers should not publish anything they would not show the persons mentioned in the text (Medford, 2006). e.g. "I felt reluctant to show this piece to my mom before I published it." "I feared my mother would become angry." (Ellis 2007)	5a. I agree - see section 3.3.3. (Medford 2006). Although this is not yet a published document I have shown this writing to Jamie (adopted son), Jean (birth mother) and David (ex-husband). 5b. I endeavour to go further in treating everyone written about in this AE as potentially vulnerable, see 3.3.1. 5c. After dialogue with others and self-reflection and self-introspection I have discussed ethical choices of what to share, omit or vary with my supervisor in an attempt to guard against over disclosure. In this way I seek to minimise any damage to my professional life and career, see 3.3.3.
Vulnerability	
6. Beware of internal confidentiality: the relationship at risk is not with the researcher exposing confidences to outsiders, but confidences exposed among the participants or family members themselves (Tolich, 2004).	6a. I consider that the use of pseudonyms for family members may be seen as ethically weak solutions for qualitative researchers in exposing the risk of internal confidentiality; see discussion around surnames/names in section 3.3.1. and 3.3.3. 6b. So, I have sought to protect internal confidentiality by showing this writing to Jamie (adopted son), Jean (birth mother) and David (ex-husband). This is a process whereby I have sought responses and interpretations of the writing and could be said to have developed from the concept of member checking (Tullis 2013). 6c. After self-reflection and self-introspection, I consider the foremost confidences that might be exposed among family members are those between Ralph, Jean and Jean's (deceased mother, epiphany2) see 3.3.3. In showing epiphany 2 to Jean I have attempted to minimise the risk of internal confidentiality. 6d. I have considered instances where pseudonyms might be reckless e.g. giving a family member assailant a pseudonym might harm others by putting them under suspicion, yet there are no assailants in this AE.
7. Treat any autoethnography as an inked tattoo by anticipating the author's future vulnerability. Tolich states – 'imagine dressing up in sandwich boards and walking around the university proclaiming your stigma. Imagine living the moment now, not in the future'.	7a. I have shown concern for the vulnerability of myself as researcher and my participants in section 3.3.1. 7b. I have anticipated and attempted to minimize harm at the outset by the choice of data to be included in each epiphany including consideration of over disclosure (3.3.3. and Fig 6). In this way I attempt to minimise the capacity for this to be an uncomfortable read in relation to disclosing aspects of my and my family's intimate lives. 7c. I show awareness of the vulnerability related to the topic of adoption for myself and participants in section 3.3.1 and 3.3.2.

	7d. I have considered that participants' vulnerability could undermine informed consent, so reiterated 'becoming participant' (Renold et al. 2008 in Warin 2011) and the ongoing importance of 'process consent' (Etherington, 2007) – see section 3.3.2.
8. Photovoice anticipatory ethics claims that no photo is worth harming others. In a similar way, no story should harm others, and if harm is unavoidable, take steps to minimize harm.	8a. I have anticipated steps to minimise harm in the telling of this story for example I have attempted to locate Tom (Jane's ex-partner) to show him this writing (4.3), however I do not know where he is. 8b. I have taken steps to minimise harm by giving recognisable others fictitious names, locations and omitted some details/dialogue whilst keeping the essential elements of the event intact
9. Those unable to minimize risk to self or others should use a nom de plume (Morse, 2002) as the default. The goal there was to minimize risk to the author and those mentioned in the study without silencing the author's story.	9. I do not use a nom de plume as I believe adoption silences should be uncovered.
10. Assume all people mentioned in the text will read it one day (see Ellis, 1995a). Do not assume all people will give their good will or consent 'I tell them they should let their participants and those they write about read their work'. (Ellis 2007, p. 25) "I don't feel right reading about your mother when she doesn't know you have written this about her. What if I met her?" An autoethnographer might have rights to his or her story, but so do the others mentioned in the text. <u>Tolich states AE is different to autobiography for 4 reasons</u>; 1. Chang (2008, p. 43) stated that autoethnography transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation 2. Autoethnography, as any social science research method, as situated ethics, determined by its position within risk adverse institutions (IRBs) prescribing its members to use informed consent. 3. Autoethnography or ethnography are not so much about the unusual, but the mundane or everyday (Silverman, 2007).	10a. I have assumed that all people mentioned in the text will read it one day, see section 3.3. 10b. I don't want to be the one giving this text to Ralph that would be too powerful a mediating effect, just like Ellis reading her script to her mother. I did consider giving the text to Ralph through someone else not connected to the research to minimise any conflict of interest (see no. 3). After some time, I considered it would be better to show him the text after it is completed (see discussion 3.3.3.). 10c. I make it explicit that participants mentioned in the text have rights through ethical processes (see 3.3.1 and 3.3.2.) and consider the following points for family members; <u>AE is different to autobiography for 4 reasons</u>; 1. I endeavour to ensure that this AE is not about family members per se but about cultural analysis and interpretation of adoptive family interactions. 2. Deliberation around situated ethics is deemed highly appropriate (UREC committee Lancaster University) in relation to family members (see 3.3.1., 3.3.2. and 3.3.3.) 3. This autoethnography is about commonplace interactions in adoptive/birth family relationships,

4. And perhaps most important, persons featured in autoethnographies are typically friends and family members, not public figures.	evidence from participants demonstrates that these interactions are not unusual or unique. 4. Persons featured in this AE are family members not public figures. However, Ralph's occupation does mean that his profile is more public than others family members hence the consideration given in section 3.3.3. and 10b above.

Thematic interview questions

Theme 1; Secrecy, disclosure and ethereal aspects of kin

Adoptive parent

Yes I …remember when we spoke last time that, you said something about their life story book that you felt was too much information, so you kept it secret from them….. Could you talk a little bit, a few minutes perhaps about the reasons you kept it secret and if your children knew about it now at all? Or what you have said to them about it?

Is there anything else apart from the lovely thing you were telling me about …… that your daughter made, something that is spiritual or slightly otherworldly, at all, either positively or negatively….that's not explainable?

Adoptee

Was there something happened in your life, could I ask that triggered you to go and look for them (birth parents)? Or was it …sort of just a process that you were involved in on and off anyway?

So, you said about these coincidences – that your adoptive Mum would have loved to hear the story. Were there certain things that were quite unusual….like erm I was thinking of this word other worldly, ethereal. I've had some experiences that I can't pin down well. But it's just left me with a feeling of un-explain ability really. If you know what I mean?

Theme 2; physical differences, sensory and gendered aspects of kin, what happens in houses

Adoptive mothers

I'd like to ask about resemblances, does your adopted daughter/son think they look like you or your husband?

Were there any physical interactions with your son/daughter or birth family – that you saw as positive or negative?

I was going to ask you about physical interactions between you and your daughter/son, so maybe we talked about a few things……(example from the phone conversation) I don't know or weather you can think of anything that's physical that might have happened between you and your daughter/son.

When for example your daughter wouldn't cuddle, you know obviously you don't want to make your children do anything they don't want to do….but was there a time when she did, do physical things of her own volition…. voluntarily or show emotion?

So, can I ask……how did you get close to your daughter/son? You have obviously got a good relationship now.

You mentioned last time we talked that your children had lots of life story books… I don't know whether those helped or hindered, I'm particularly interested in if there are any physical things in there. What you mentioned before about likenesses or resemblances?

You know we mentioned before about the life story books and how your children were different ….and it was really interesting what you said about erm….they didn't want to actually look at the books, they wanted to do something, wanted to go and see the people or do something physically?

Did she know she had a bit of a look of him before she went to find him (birth father)?

Was it his mannerism or was it….?

I was going to ask you about resemblances actually, only because you said earlier that he was really pleased to see his siblings?

Yes, maybe your adopted daughter/son feels that they're like their boyfriend/girlfriend or wants to be like them in some way yes. Maybe the colour (of their hair)….. as you say as well. Yes, that's interesting one isn't it, something that maybe she/he can't explain the attraction?

….These situations (telling her adoptive mother about her birth family) from what I'm finding out do happen at those major events, and it's really interesting I find what you've just said before too, that she actually told her adoptive mum, on Mother's Day?

<u>Adoptees</u>

And when you met your birth mother and father did you see any sort of characteristics that you shared with them?

Ok right, we were going to have a conversation about physical things and you mentioned in your email about your son's hands or something? Being like your father…was that something you noticed when you met him?

Ah fascinating…getting past physical things…could I ask you about your characteristics is there any sort of things that you've noticed that are similar, you know temperament wise, personality wise too…to either your birth parents or your adopted parents, at all?

It's interesting what you said earlier about a failure to recognise…. characteristics that makes that person?

So, you have done similar things in your life….as your birth siblings?

Did your birth mother act towards you in any way…. differently?

Have there been any family times when you have been together, with your birth mother or father….. Weddings or Christmas?

Theme 3; Narrating, negotiating and relatedness

Adoptive mothers

How do you talk to a child who doesn't want to talk about it (their adoptive information)?

(Further probing question) - So without any verbalisation, the physical act and the verbal act, were not connected somehow?

Was there anything in your children's adoption documents that resonated with you?

I guess from what you said that maybe they used to exchange presents, and cards, birthday cards, and does that happen anymore?

Was she speaking at the time? What sort of things did she say to you?

Are there any significant occasions, doesn't have to be Christmas time that you've tried to negotiate with your children?

Adoptee

Was there anything in your adoption documents that resonated with you?

You've obviously perhaps had ups and downs in that time, so has there been an element of trying to negotiate (with birth parents) round these differences that you've got. From what you're saying you sound like there might be…..

Department of Educational Research
County South, Lancaster University, LA1 4YD, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 1524 592685

Lancaster University

Participant Information Sheet

Title of Project: An autoethnographic account of interactional practices in adoptive family relationships

Researcher: Christine Lewis

Department of Educational Research, County South, Lancaster University, LA1 4YD.

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Supervisor: Jo Warin

County South, Room D50, Lancaster University, LA1 4YD, UK

Tel: +44 (0)1524 594266

Email: j.warin@lancaster.ac.uk

Date:__13.6.16._____,

Dear _____,

I would like to invite you to take part in my thesis research with the Department for Educational Research at the University of Lancaster.

Before you decide if you wish to take part you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

This document includes:

- Information about the purpose of the study (what I hope to find out).
- Information about what participation means and how to withdraw when and if you wish (what you will be doing).
- Details of what notes, recordings and other sources of information may be used as 'data' in the study.
- Information about how this data will be secured and stored.

- How the information will be used in the thesis and for other purposes such as conference presentations or publication.

The purpose of the study

My research aims to illuminate issues of interactions and communication within adoptive family relationships. Interactions could be considered pleasant or challenging at specific times in adoptive family relationships, these could occur when the following adoption specific issues become important; secrecy vs disclosure, life stories, discussion of physical differences and the role of the media and technology.

This research is for my thesis on the PhD in Education by Independent Study in the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University. The research may also be used for journal articles and conference presentations.

What participation involves and how to withdraw if you no longer wish to participate

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited because you are an adopted person, an adoptive parent, a birth mother or a birth father.

What to do if I want to take part?

This research is entirely voluntary, so if you wish to be involved please contact me to 'opt in' via the email address or phone numbers above.

You can withdraw at any time up to 2 weeks after the end of the interview, there is no obligation on you to continue nor penalty for withdrawing. Your related data (recordings, notes) will be destroyed and all reference removed. After that time participants can still withdraw but data may be used as it may already have been anonymized/analysed.

What would taking part involve for me?

This would involve one/two semi structured interviews, each no longer than 60 minutes. Interviews will take place in volunteers' homes or alternatively a mutually agreed public venue, at a mutually agreed date and time.

What will I have to do?

You will not be required to answer specific questions from an interview schedule, rather the discussion and conversation will be guided by specific adoption related themes that I have identified from the literature. The conversation will be recorded unless participants state they would not like this, if this occurs I will make notes. The researcher herself will transcribe recorded interviews. If

the interview is stopped for any reason and/or does not continue the researcher preserves the right to use the data collected unless the participant withdraws their data within 2 weeks of the interview date.

I may ask you to talk about a specific photograph that is or has been important in your life. This is a photograph of your choice and will only be used as a prompt to begin a discussion, so no preparation or pre-prepared questions will be asked of you.

Information on sources of support

I am aware that the process of discussing turning points in adoptive family life may provoke feelings that you may wish to explore further. Consequently, after each interview I will reiterate contact details of a charity/organisation which could support you in discussing these issues, this is 'After Adoption' http://www.afteradoption.org.uk/

Protecting your data and identity

What will happen to the data?

'Data' here means the researcher's notes, audio recordings and any email exchanges we may have had. Please note any data used will not identify you in any way. The data will be stored for a minimum of 10 years as per Lancaster University Research requirements. Audio recordings will be transferred from this device to the encrypted laptop within a week, the audio recorder will then be stored in a locked cupboard, myself being the only key holder. Once transferred the recordings will be stored on my personal laptop, which will be encrypted and deleted from portable media. You can request to view the transcript of the interview or listen to the audio in your own time, this can be left with you for one week to ensure you are satisfied with the content. If you would like any aspect of the transcript altering this must be notified to the researcher within 2 weeks of the end of the interview. Data may be used in the reporting of the research (in the thesis and then potentially in any papers or conference presentations). You have the right to request this data is destroyed within 2 weeks of the interview data, as laid down earlier in this information sheet and have full protection via the UK Data Protection Act. The completion of this study is estimated to be by December 2018 although data collection will be complete by July 2016.

How will my identity be protected, and data used in publications?

A pseudonym will be given to protect your identity in the research report and any identifying information about you will be removed from the report. Responses from participants will be blended with my stories and scenarios so each person cannot be identified.

Who to contact for further information or with *any* concerns

If you would like further information on this project, the programme within which the research is being conducted or have any concerns about the project, participation or my conduct as a researcher please contact:

Professor Paul Ashwin – Head of Department

Tel: +44 (0)1524 594443
Email: P.Ashwin@Lancaster.ac.uk

Room: County South, D32, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YD, UK.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

http://www.first4adoption.org.uk/news/adoptees-and-adoptive-parents-needed-for-phd-study/

FIRST 4 ADOPTION

ADOPTEES AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS NEEDED FOR PHD STUDY

20 May 2016

Christine, a University Lecturer, adult adoptee and adoptive Mum, has contacted us with the following request:

My name is **Christine Lewis** and I am a Senior Lecturer at **Edge Hill University** in Ormskirk, Lancashire. I'm presently engaged in completing my PhD through **Lancaster University** and have ethical approval for this.

I am interested in interactions between members of adoptive families, because of my own background as an adopted person and I have 2 adopted children, my daughter is 25 and my son is 26. The first phase of the study was to write up some of my experiences as an adoptee and an adoptive parent, the next stage, is to interview volunteers (anonymously) about their experiences which may be around certain 'critical incidents' as mine were. So, I'm particularly looking for volunteers to interview who are;

1. Parents of adopted children who are in their late teens or early twenties, particularly parents of adopted daughters in their 20's.

2. Adult adoptees of any age/gender who have met their birth parent(s).

From my first phase I have identified 4 events in my life/my children's lives which I think are significant to adoptive family relationships;

1. Treasuring of keepsakes, cards and photos; transactions of my kinship practices

2. Sharing adoption documents with my son and daughter.

3. Meeting my birth parent

4. Negotiating Christmas with my birth mother

As I live in the North West of England I would ideally like to interview participants from this area, but I am willing to travel. If you did decide that you would like to volunteer I would be really pleased to hear from you. This would involve talking about your experiences in an unstructured way, not a formal interview at all. The PhD has been given ethical approval from Lancaster Research Ethics Committee so anything we discussed would be anonymised and not be identifiable to you or your family.

If you would like an informal chat to ask any questions before you decide if you would like to be involved please feel free to give me a ring on 01695 650837 or my email is **lewisc@edgehill.ac.uk**

Thank you.

Research and Enterprise Services Division | Lancaster University

Applicant: Christine Lewis
Supervisor: Dr Jo Warin
Department: Educational Research
UREC reference: RS2014/64

13 October 2015

Dear Christine

Re: An auto-ethnographic account of communication in adoptive family relationships

Thank you for submitting your project for review by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and the information which you subsequently provided.

On behalf of the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee, I can confirm that approval has been granted for the above research project.

As principal investigator your responsibilities include:

- ensuring that (where applicable) all the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are met, and the necessary licenses and approvals have been obtained;
- reporting any ethics-related issues that occur during the course of the research or arising from the research (e.g. unforeseen ethical issues, complaints about the conduct of the research, adverse reactions such as extreme distress) to the Research Ethics Officer;
- submitting details of proposed substantive amendments to the protocol to the Research Ethics Officer for approval.

Please contact the Research Ethics Officer, Debbie Knight (ethics@lancaster.ac.uk 01542 592605 if you have any queries or require further information.

Yours sincerely,

S.C. Taylor

Sarah Taylor
Secretary, University Research Ethics Committee

Cc Prof Stephen Decent, Chair, University Research Ethics Committee

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