Adopting siblings : the sibling relationship in parental narratives of adoption

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Adopting siblings: the sibling relationship in parental narratives of adoption

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own

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ABSTRACT

This study examines an aspect of adoption which has been given only limited or partial attention in adoption research even though it is an increasing trend in adoption practice: sibling adoption.

For adoption practitioners the issue of whether to place siblings together or apart is a vexed one. This is the dilemma upon which research on sibling adoption has focused, developing approaches to assessing the sibling relationship to help evaluate the benefits and disadvantages of keeping siblings together, whilst keeping the needs of the individual children in mind.

The present research was motivated by what appeared to be a significant oversight in thinking around this dilemma: the possible impact of the sibling relationship on the adoptive parents. This oversight seemed indicative of a twofold omission: firstly, of a distinction between the meaning and implications for the adoptive parent-couple of adopting siblings rather than an individual child; secondly, of a full recognition of the complexity of sibling relationships - particularly those born out of early experiences of neglect and relational trauma - and how they might play out in the context of an adoption placement.

With the aim of addressing these omissions I interviewed a small sample of adoptive parents and made their narratives of the experience of adopting a sibling-pair the object of my study. My hope was thus to shed some light on what it is like for previously childless couples to become the parents of siblings.

My experience of doing the interviews and a narrative and thematic analysis of the parents' accounts lead to some interesting findings: whilst the interviews elicited rich stories about their adoption experiences, it was difficult to hold the parents to talking about the sibling story. The affective vector seemed to lie in the respondents' narratives of personal transformation or affirmation through the adoption, rather than in their encounters with the sibling relationship.

In my discussion I consider how a sense of omission has often been expressed in sibling research, despite a growing literature on the subject. With reference to Mitchell's psychoanalytic propositions about the role of siblings in our internal world, and Laplanche's concepts of 'going astray' and 'covering-over' in psychoanalysis, I posit that we struggle to engage with the complexity of siblinghood both in theory and practice because of the profound and enduring existential threat that real and fantasied siblings pose to the individual's sense of security, self-identity and value in the family, the group and any social milieu.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Rationale for the study

Adoption Studies are a growing area of scholarship as policies, practices and the meaning of adoption change and the complexities of adoption are increasingly recognised. Shifts in emphasis in adoption and fostering legislation over recent years show how successive governments in the UK have attempted to provide frameworks to align family policy with changes in family structures whilst promoting and safeguarding children's welfare The focus of the Children's Act (1989) was on improving and expanding the provision of care for children looked after by local authorities; the act was also the first to mention the significance of sibling relationships in legislation as it specified: 'so far as reasonable practical and consistent with welfare […] where the Authority are providing accommodation for a sibling, they should be accommodated together' (Section 23 (7) b). The main focus of the Adoption and Children's Act (2002) was to encourage permanency planning for fostered children; other stated aims were to increase adoptions from care, to speed up the process of adoption and to put the rights and needs of the child at the centre of the adoption process. In March 2012 the government of the time announced a further program of adoption reform, which aimed to 'speed up and overhaul the system for prospective adoptive parents and children' (DfE, 2012 in Thomas, 2013). One of the stated strategies was that 'local authorities do not delay adoption while seeking perfect matches if there are other suitable adopters available' (op.cit, p.6). Another point was that adopter assessment process should be shorter and better focused on parenting capacity. The latest legislation, The Children and Families Act (2014), responding to a social context where there are increasing numbers of children placed into the care of local authorities[1], has focused its aims on reducing the time children spent in care and facilitating the adoption process in order to further minimize delays.

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[1] On 31st March 2014, there were 68,840 children in the care of local authorities in the UK (compared to 68,060 in 2013); 5, 050 children were adopted from care during the year ending on 31st March 2014 (compared to 4, 010 in 2013).

The majority of children entering the care system have at least one sibling. In the case of children with siblings it is increasingly considered preferable for their emotional welfare of children that they should not be separated from their siblings when taken into care. This reflects what seems to have been a re-evaluation of the sibling relationship, a re-evaluation that probably stems from an increase in numbers of sibling groups removed from the care of their birth families. As in Britain children are in the most part adopted from care prospective adopters are being encouraged to adopt siblings as a pair or group simultaneously. Nonetheless, not surprisingly, sibling groups remain more difficult to place.

Recent media interest in the fate of siblings in care highlighted the emotionality of the issue. In September 2014 a 'row' erupted in the press when the charity 'Action for Children' published figures showing that over a third of children in foster care were split up from their siblings[2]. One headline declared, "We must make it illegal to split siblings when fostering" (Heraldscotland.com, 8.9.14); another ran "Foster care sibling separation row: I'd hear him cry out for his brother in the night" (Telegraph.co.uk). It was reported that the system was failing children. In 2014 Adoption week was dedicated to promoting sibling adoption; the homepage of the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) website was dedicated to testimonials by couples who had adopted siblings. The concluding paragraph of one testimonial states:

> My advice? Think big. Get approved for as many children as you think is your limit, plus one. You can always go for fewer, but our experience is definitely that at least 2 children is easier than one. They entertain each other, learn together and understand each other better than anyone else on this planet. Your child's sibling could be the best gift you ever give them. If you can, keep them together.
> Think Big, and good luck!

Starting out as trainee child psychotherapist in CAMHS five years ago I encountered a number of couples struggling to cope with the emotional needs of their two/three adopted children - aged between 18 months and 6 years - whose arrival into their home as a sibling group affected them in ways they were completely unprepared for and emotionally unequipped to deal with. When I asked my colleagues about how there could be such a mismatch between the adoptive parents' emotional resources and their

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[2] In wales the figure was 40% (BBC News Wales, 8.10.14); in the East Midlands it went up to 45% (communitycare.co.uk).

adopted children's level of need, their explanation was that there had recently been a push by the local authority to place children more quickly and to keep siblings together. It seemed that the well-intentioned government legislation to reduce waiting times for prospective adoptive parents and children risked leading to hastily made matches to the detriment of both children and adoptive parents.

This study was motivated by the need for a better understanding of sibling adoption and the realisation that this is an aspect of adoption practice that has not received enough specific attention. I considered that the complexities of the issues involved for both adoptive parents and adoptive children needed to be better understood to help inform adoption and post-adoption practice.

Contextualising the study

My interest in this issue stems from a convergence of personal and professional experiences. From a personal perspective I am both a sibling, with my own experience of being the eldest of a sibling pair (and subsequently of gaining a half-sibling, so becoming one of three), and the mother of a single child (a boy). Professionally, working in a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service as a Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist, much of my work is with psychologically damaged children and their parents. The children we see have usually suffered a combination of neglect, physical and emotional abuse, repeated losses and disrupted, chaotic family lives. A significant number of these children are in foster care or are adopted.

Some of my first encounters as a trainee child psychotherapist were with adoptive families where a sibling group had been adopted. All came to the clinic presenting complex psychodynamics: between parents and children, between the siblings and also between the parent couple. Common to all these families was fear of breakdown; the sibling relationships were characterized by intense ambivalence and polarized presentations. The overriding sense was of parents traumatised by the difficulties they were encountering in the adoption: either distressed by the intensity of the rivalry between their children or disturbed by the siblings' dependence on each other, these parents seemed unable to meet the different needs of the sibling they had adopted.

An initial literature search revealed a paucity of adoption practice literature on siblings, which strongly suggested to me that the specificity of sibling adoption and the emotional and psychological demands it could place on the adoptive parents was underestimated or even disregarded.

Aims of the study

My principal aim is to shed light on an aspect of adoption which, as yet, has been given only limited or partial attention in research even though there have been efforts to promote adoption of siblings. I embarked on the project curious as to why both social work and psychoanalytic studies about adoption seemed generally to be written with just one child in mind: what about those children adopted with their brother or sisters or with their sibling group?

In the social work literature I had come across, when children with siblings were thought about, the assumption seemed to be that it is usually in the interest of siblings to be placed together. The risk of losing sight of the needs of the individual child in practice was recognized and the tendency to do so lamented; however, it appeared that by failing to distinguish between what was involved in the adoption of an individual child from that of a sibling group, there was a further significant oversight: the needs and capacities of the parental adoptive couple with whom the children would be living. Little seemed to have been written about what happens relationally, emotionally and psychologically when you place a sibling pair with another pair - the adoptive parents; or about what it is like to go from being a couple without children to bringing home two children simultaneously, children with a pre-existing relationship. What might the implications be for the individuals involved? Might the adoption of siblings constitute an additional stressor in the already difficult task of adoption? What motivates prospective adopters to adopt a sibling pair?

With this study I set out to gain insight into the range of issues, challenges, pleasures and vicissitudes faced by adoptive parent-couples as they learn to parent two children at once. Ultimately the two questions I aim to address are: what is the nature of the emotional work of adopting a sibling pair? And how does this impact on the adopters' sense of self in their role as adoptive parents? To do so part of the investigation has involved considering the psychoanalytic literature on siblings and sibling relationships,

in order to better understand what seems to be a paradoxical and contradictory practice: to promote sibling adoption on the one hand, and to fail to look into its complexity on the other.

In the next chapter (Chapter 2), I review the literature in four sections: Adoption Studies, Psychoanalytic Studies of Adoption, Literature on Sibling Relationships and the Literature of Siblings in Adoption. In so doing I trace where the experience of adoption is investigated from *the perspective of adoptive parents* and note the study of adoption issues through the exclusive lens of single-child adoption. I therefore turn to examine research on siblings and sibling relationships in developmental research and psychoanalytic theory before looking at what research there is on siblings in fostering as well as adoption, both in social work and psychoanalytic literature. Finally, I identify a growing interest in siblings, but a persistent sense of omission around the subject.

In Chapter 3 I discuss my methodological approach: positioning this research as a clinically motivated, psychosocial, qualitative study, I reflect on the epistemological implications of combining a psychosocial stance with a psychoanalytic understanding of the human subject. I then discuss narrative approaches to investigating personal experience and argue that narrative analysis is particularly suited to the examination of accounts of the lived experience of adoption.

In Chapter 4 I give a step-by -step account of the research process from research design, to collecting and analyzing data. This includes a discussion of the ethical issues that arose in the process, and how these informed the interview schedule and my approach to interviewing.

In Chapter 5 I present my findings in three stages: firstly I describe my experience of doing the interviews giving an overview of what the respondents talked about and presenting my understanding of the dominant narratives that emerged from the adopters' talk about their experience; secondly I present a thematic analysis of the accounts the respondents gave of adopting and parenting siblings; thirdly I consider the findings that emerged from a detailed narrative analysis of two discreet sections of the interview texts focusing on siblings.

In Chapter 6 I discuss the findings of my research and the new perspectives offered on siblings by an analysis of the narratives of sibling-pair adopters. Then, reflecting on my experience of *researching* siblings with reference to Mitchell's propositions about the role of siblings in our internal world, and in light of Laplanche's concepts of 'going astray' and 'covering-over' in psychoanalysis, I propose that there is something unthinkable about how siblings function in the adult psyche that induces a 'covering over' the subject every time we get close to it. I conclude that this is what may be underlying the struggle to properly consider the challenges involved in sibling adoption.

Finally I consider the implications of the findings for further research and practice, and in particular for post-adoption support, the role of CAMHS and the dyadic model of working that remains the prevalent model in Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy. I suggest that sibling adopters can be helped to facilitate positive sibling relationships in their children.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Adoption is a profoundly complex societal practice with enduring psychological ramifications for its protagonists. It overtly spans the personal, private and social dimensions of the individual, automatically problematizing assumptions around family and kinship. It encompasses issues of identity and sense of self, the questions of origin and belonging, the experience of loss and the hope of repair, security and love. Adoption involves the intimate dimension of parental sexuality, procreation and infertility; the professional networks around looked after children and adoption support; it has ramifications in all aspects of the social domain - education, medicine, the legal system; like siblings, adoption is a recurring theme in archetypal narratives such as the bible, fairy stories, myths and legends..

It follows that the body of literature on adoption is vast; adoption can be studied from many angles. The present study's small scale, and the specificity of its focus - *adoptive parents' experiences* of *adopting sibling pairs* - means that in reviewing the literature I have had to be very selective. Nonetheless it is necessary to give an overview of the field in order to contextualize the issue in question. Thus, the review that follows is presented in four sections: Adoption Studies, Psychoanalytic Studies of Adoption, Literature on Sibling Relationships, Literature on Siblings in Adoption.

Adoption studies

Patterns of adoption, research and practice

Sociologists and adoption specialists from different fields of practice have diversely noted, conceptualized and commented on the changing patterns of adoption in the last hundred years and their impact on those involved in adoption (Kirk, 1981; Brodzinsky and Schechter, 1990; Triseliotis et al., 1997; Brodzinsky and Palacios, 2005; Hoksbergen and Ter Laak, 2005; Hindle and Shulman, 2008).

In the Untied States and in the United Kingdom the overarching trend in adoption during the course of the twentieth century has been that of going from having as a main

purpose that of providing *a child for a home,* that is as a solution to the needs of infertile couples or to the perceived problem of unmarried motherhood, to being understood as means of providing *a home for a child* (Brodzinsky and Schechter, 1999; Quinton, 2012).

In *Adoption: Theory Policy and Practice,* Triseliotis et al. (1997) delineate five periods in adoption practice, the second one being at the turn of the century when, in the United States and the United Kingdom in turn, adoption was legalized as we know it today. In the third phase, coinciding with the post-World War II years, adoption practice was prevalently about finding "the perfect baby" for the "perfect couple" to raise as their own. The medical advances, societal transformations and changing social attitudes that occurred in this period (the availability of contraception and the legalization of abortion, changing attitudes to illegitimacy changes in the composition and types of family structures), gradually led to the reduction in the number of infants being relinquished for adoption and a corresponding increase in children being received into foster care, often from backgrounds of abuse and neglect; Triseliotis et al. identified this as the fourth period when, increasingly, adoption became of older children from the care system rather than infants, as a growing number of children were being placed in care, including children with special needs, mental or physical disabilities, children from different ethnic backgrounds, as well as groups of siblings. A growing awareness of the detrimental impact on children of living a life in care that was unstable and uncertain lead to a shift, in the 1970s, towards a more child-centered approach where the primary objective became the long-term welfare of the children to be achieved through permanent placements (Triseliotis et al., 1997; Hindle and Shulman, 2008; Thomas, 2013).

The fifth period began in the latter part of the twentieth century with three further significant changes in adoption practice, namely the increase of inter-country adoption, the acceptance of a wider range of potential adopters (including single parents, same-sex parents, re-constituted families, and extended family members), and a trend towards more open adoption. With a growing awareness of the psychological importance of knowing one's own origins and heritage the promotion of openness *about* and *in* adoption is now embedded in good adoption practice. Adoptive parents thus may be

encouraged to develop a plan for ongoing contact with birth parents following the adoption finalization (Hindle and Shulman, 2008; Thomas, 2013).

In 1990 Parker underlined that the profound changes in the institution of adoption had brought new challenges for social services and adoptive parents:

> In the past it has been assumed that having adopted a baby or infant with the agreement of the birth parents, and with all contact having been discontinued and secrecy preserved, the adopters could be left to raise the child as they would a child born to them: that is, without any special services needing to be provided. Such an assumption is no longer tenable. (Parker, op.cit. p.5, quoted in Thomas, 2013)

With these trends adoption has become all the more complex, revealing the at times competing needs of children and the needs of adults seeking to adopt a child (Hindle and Schulman, 2008 p.3). Interestingly, Hoksbergen and Ter Laak's (2005) research into the changing attitudes and motivations of adoptive parents in Europe and the Untied States reveals significant national differences in adoption patterns and parental attitudes. Their study shows that whilst in most European countries inter-country adoption have come to constitute the vast majority of adoption placements, with very few domestic infant adoptions or late adoptions from foster care occurring, in the United Kingdom and in the United States the majority of adoptions are of children from the care system.

From a theoretical perspective, it was in 1964 that, in his seminal study about adoption, *Shared Fate: A sociological examination of adoptive family life*, American sociologist David Kirk (1964), made one of the earliest efforts to conceptualize "adoptive kinship". Two of his theories have been particularly influential in sociological thinking around adoption: the concept of "role handicaps", which refers to the unique challenges that adoptive parents are confronted with and the notion of the importance in adoptive families of their attitude around difference in relation to biological families; Kirk identified the tendency in adoption to either reject or acknowledge difference. He emphasized that both tendencies emerge from the strains of adoptive kinship and involve complex patterns of motivations and evaluations of adoptive parenthood, but he found that the acknowledgement of differences tended to be linked to better outcomes.

Kirk's study represented the first major theoretical effort to conceptualize adoptive family life. As well as helping to normalize many of the adjustment difficulties among adoptees and adoptive parents Kirk's theory was of critical importance in opening up the adoption process and was influential in the move towards open adoption placements (Brodzinsky and Schechter, 1990). Kirk's later work on "adoption kinship" (1981) emphasized that the practice and meaning of adoption must be understood in the context of the attitudes, values, beliefs, rules and knowledge that govern a society. Kirk argued that as these basic societal phenomena change over time, the practice and meaning of adoption are also likely to change. He posited that these changes influence the attitudes and coping behavior of adoptive parents and, ultimately, the psychological adjustment of adopted children.

In *The Psychology of Adoption* Brodzinsky and Schechter (Eds., 1990) argue that historically mental health professionals paid little attention to the psychological sequelae of adoption because of the prevailing view of adoption as a successful solution to the problems of all three parties in the adoption triangle: an unwanted pregnancy for the birthparents, the problem of infertility and childlessness in prospective adoptive parents, and the problem of a state of homelessness for the child. In this view it was assumed that adoption allowed all parties involved to live "happily ever after". Questioning this assumption Brodzinsky and Shechter (op.cit.) ask whether, in fact, the experience of adoption itself or factors related to adoption place these individuals, but especially the child, at risk of various psychological problems.

Fifteen years later, in a subsequent collection of international research into adoption - Brodzinsky and Palacios (2005) point to a growth in academic research on adopted children and their parents, and register a change from an emphasis on "risk' and pathology to an emphasis on resilience and positive adaptation in adoption. The research gathered in their volume is intended to illustrate this shift. An example is child psychiatrist Michael Rutter's chapter, "Adverse Preadoption Experiences and Psychological Outcomes" (in op.cit., Chapter 4, pp.67 - 92), where he gives an overview of the empirical research indicating that, despite early adversity, many of higher-risk adoptees have a relatively good psychological outcome, and concludes that "studies have shown remarkable recovery following removal from stressful depriving environments and placement in a good-quality adoptive family" (p.89). Another

example is a chapter giving an attachment theory perspective, "Change and Continuity in Mental Representations of Attachment after Adoption" (Hodges et al., op.cit., Chapter 3, pp. 93 - 116), which reports the finding that although positive changes *were* recorded in previously maltreated adopted children two years into their adoptive placement, the research also indicates that when compared with the comparison group of non-maltreated children the original differences between them remained significant.

The impact of loss and trauma in late adopted children

As has been indicated above, in Britain, many adopted children enter their new families after experiences of maltreatment or neglect in their birth families and a subsequent period in public care in which they may move through a series of placements. The fact remains that these experiences can constitute multiple traumas and losses for these children, with long-lasting consequences on their emotional, cognitive and social functioning, as well as having a major impact on their relationships and development within their adoptive families.

From the first half of the twentieth century, psychoanalytic theory has emphasised the structuring role of early childhood experience and primary relationships in development (Freud, 1905 and 1923; Klein, 1959; Winnicott, 1965). Later research discovered the adverse effects of institutionalization and separation from attachment figures, particularly in the context of maternal deprivation (Burlingham & Freud, 1942; Bowlby, 1951, 1969, 1973 and 1980). More recent discoveries about infant development (Stern, 1998), combined with advances in neuroscience (Perry, 1995; Siegel, 1999; Shore, 2003), have confirmed and shed new light on the intuitions and observations of early psychoanalysis and attachment theory: that the parent-infant relationship and the kind of care received in the first two years of life is crucial to the development of the individual (Gerhardt, 2004; Music, 2009) and their future ability to form attachments.

There is much psychoanalytically informed writing about the special needs of *children* who have been removed from their birth families and are in alternative care. Two key books describing and gathering examples of individual case studies and therapeutic interventions emerging out of the Tavistock Fostering and Adoption Workshop need highlighting: the first is Boston and Szur's (1983) ground breaking book on *Psychotherapy with Severely Deprived Children*; the second, representing a more

multidisciplinary stance, is *Creating New families: Therapeutic Approaches to Fostering, Adoption and Kinship Care* by Kendrick et al. (2006). In addition to these volumes there are numerous papers, many of them published in *The Journal of Child Psychotherapy*, describing various aspects of psychoanalytic understanding and technique with such children in the work of child psychotherapists such as Henry [Williams] (1974), Emanuel (1984), Hindle (2000), Hunter [Smallbone] (2001) and Lanyado (2004). In these writings a clear distinction tends *not* to be made between fostered and adopted children on the basis that both groups of children bear the psychological damage of past trauma, loss and deprivation.

Writing at a time when there was a concerted drive by the British government to increase the number of adoptions from care, following the implementation of the Adoption and Children's Act (2002), Hodges et al. (2005, op.cit.) underline how *children who are adopted from care face more challenges*, and are more challenging, than the general population of children in foster care because they are those children with more *difficult histories both before and after being placed in care* of the local authorities. This is because the majority have in all likelihood a) entered care because of higher levels of abuse, neglect, or risk, b) been removed from their birth parents under emergency protection orders, indicating the severity of concerns for their safety, and c) experienced successive moves whilst in foster care, sometimes more than six (PIU, 2000). Predictably, given these adversities, this population of children is at a high risk of mental health problems. A survey carried out by the Department of Health in the UK around that time reported that 42 percent of 5 to 10-year-olds in care showed mental health problems compared to 8 percent of those living in private households, conduct disorders being the most common, followed by emotional disorders and hyperactivity. Hodges et al. (2005, op.cit.) point out that the survey did not take into account post-traumatic symptoms or difficulties in forming attachments and relationships which are often co-morbid difficulties frequently reported to post-adoption services and clinically, so that the official figures may be an underestimation of the degree of the difficulties experienced by these children.

What about the adoptive parents of children with these difficulties? As Hodges et al reflect (2005, op.cit., p. 96) it has been shown that children *can* make remarkable improvements in adoptive families, however the demands these children place on

adoptive parents are great and can put families under considerable strain (Parker, 1999; Livingston Smith & Howard, 1999). Quinton (2012) underlines that changes in the pattern and purpose of adoption have also meant radical changes in the parenting skills needed by adopters. With this in mind questions arise about what is required of adopters who take on *siblings.* Sibling groups are often part of this late adopted population of children: they spend more time in care than single children, are often identified as having 'special needs' and are considered 'hard to place'. The majority of sibling groups adopted will have been in care for *varying* lengths of time (some sibling pairs may be a sub-group of a larger sibling group; or part of complex families including step, or half-siblings, etc.), most of whom will have suffered neglect and/or abuse.

When the needs of the individual child are so great one is lead to ask what the expectations of adopters might be when they adopt more than one child at once and, specifically, when they adopt a sibling pair.

Psychoanalytic studies of adoption

The Anna Freud Centre in London has historically been a centre of psychoanalytic research into adoption since the Hampstead Nurseries (1941). In the late 70s the Study Group on Adopted Children, begun under Maria Berger's chairmanship, focused on the study of *the inner world* of the adopted child, their thoughts and fantasies about their adoption, about their biological parents, and the reasons for their adoption (Berger, 1979). The studies drew on the experiences of a group of therapists each of whom was treating an adopted child, but also drew on previous research by Barbara Tizard (Tizard, 1977). Summarising the thinking behind the work of the group, in 1981 Berger wrote:

> Our emphasis on the 'inner' world of the child has arisen from our conviction that, in order to learn how to cope with the many problems which adoption can present to the community and to those concerned, it is important to get beyond the outward signs of the adopted child's adjustment or maladjustment, and to know more of how he feels about himself and his situation. […] In the course of our work we have noted a profound effect of adoption on the child's sense of identity, on his self representation and self-esteem. We have also noted the need on the part of the child to maintain or establish some links with his past. (1981, Bulletin Anna Freud Centre 4:292)

One of the striking points noted by the group at the time was the fact that the children they had thus far studied (seven), and others in the clinic, had had their first names

changed. The group of psychotherapists was made to wonder what made it necessary for the adopted parents to change their child's first name. Was it because, wanting to feel that the child was their own, they wished to 'christen' it, or did they hope to obliterate the child's ties with his origins? They found this was in contrast to the children, who in their analysis often talked about their former names[3].

Jill Hodges (1984) also drew from her clinical experience of adopted children when she identified two crucial questions governing all adopted children's thinking: "Who were my first parents, what were they like?" and, "Why did they give me up?" Hodges' study of adoption continued in the 80s, in collaboration with Tizard, focusing on children who spent their earliest years in residential nurseries before being adopted (1989). Hodges' research has gradually gone on to incorporate attachment theory, an important development for adoption practice as attachment theory has offered an empirical way of looking at and measuring *the quality of relationships* and attachment patterns in children *and* adults, developing different assessment tools[4]. Hodges examined the effect of maternal deprivation on adopted children (Hodges, 1989) and then with Steele, Kaniuk and others went on to utilize attachment theory to explore *the impact of adoptive mothers' states of mind on their adopted children* (Hodges et al., 2003). In further studies the concept of *internal working models* was used to look at the impact of adoption on adopted children's "mental representations of attachment", to measure the extent to which adoption can positively influence the children's internal representations and enhance their ability to form enduring attachments (Hodges et al, 2005). This work has continued to be developed and recently a large, longitudinal and intergenerational study on previously maltreated children who were adopted in latency explored how old mental representations are carried into the new adoptive relationships. What emerged was that old internal models stand side by side newly formed models of relating, rather than the new displacing the old (Steele et al., 2010). The research ultimately aims to develop measures to chart relationships that can facilitate or inhibit trust, growth and development with implications for the possibility of *assessing prospective adopters* in terms of the quality of their attachment patterns.

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[3] Presumably the Anna Freud Centre group was working at a time when adoption was still prevalently closed.
[4] Primarily the Adult Attachment Interview Protocol (AAI) developed by George, Kaplan & Main (1985); the Child Attachment Interview (CAI) developed by Target, Fonagy & Goetz (2003) and the Story Stem Assessment Profile (SSAP) developed by Hodges and Hillman(2004)

Of particular relevance to my research are the writings of J.P. Brinich who applied psychoanalytic theory to the exploration of some the psychological implications and psychodynamics of *adoptive parenthood*, first in his chapter "Adoption from the inside Out: A Psychoanalytic Perspective" (in Brodzinsky and Schlechter eds. 1990) and then in the paper "Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Adoption and Ambivalence" (1995).   In the former, Brinich begins by considering what motivates us to become parents and, drawing on Freud's *On Narcissism* (1914), the author reflects on parenthood's important defensive, gratifying, reparative, and "creatively sublimated psychological functions" (p.44). Again with Freud (1920), Brinich contends that parenthood is partly a defense against the aggressive impulses and trends in us all and partly a defense against the anxiety stimulated in us when we are reminded of our own mortality (op.cit. p. 44). In other words, we take refuge in our children as they serve a significant narcissistic function. In adoptive parenthood the opportunity of finding narcissistic satisfaction or refuge in the child is fundamentally challenged. Brinich posits that to understand adoption intra-psychically, two facts must be taken into account: that the adopted child was not wanted or could not be looked after by his parents, and that the adoptive parents did not want to or were unable to conceive or bear children themselves. Brinich argues that ultimately the task faced by adoptive parents is that of mourning their own fantasied unborn child and to change their adopted child - an unwanted or relinquished child - into a wanted child, not only in the mind of the child but also within their own thoughts.

In his second paper (op.cit. 1995) Brinich argues that adoption fantasies and myths are important vehicles for the expression of *normal* child–parent and parent–child ambivalences. He also argues that the conflicts of ambivalence which are highlighted in adoptees and their parents (both biological and adoptive) exist in *all* parent–child relationships. With reference to the Oedipus myth, Brinich contends that the tendency to focus on the adopted child's intrapsychic struggles, allowing (biological and adoptive) parental intrapsychic struggles to remain in the background, is reminiscent of Freud's focus on Oedipus and his relative neglect of Laius and Jocasta, Polybus and Merope. (his adoptive parents).   Recalling Winnicott's (1958) dictum that "There is no such thing as a baby" (p. 99), with which he emphasized that babies cannot be understood without reference to their caretakers, Brinich posit that the (aggressive as well as loving) fantasies and impulses of children cannot be understood without reference to the

reciprocal fantasies and impulses of their parents. Thus in his paper Brinich not only argues for the normative aspects of adoptive parent-child relationships but also reminds us that the adopted child's (unconscious and conscious) impulses - like the birth child's - have to be understood in relation to his parents' intrapsychic impulses. The added complexity, of course, is that the adopted child has to negotiate his experience and mental representations of two sets of parents.

A more recent collection, *The Emotional Experience of Adoption: a psychoanalytic perspective* (Hindle & Shulman eds. 2008) brings together writings from a diverse theoretical and professional base, although most of the contributions describe psychoanalytically framed clinical work with adopted children and their families. Three chapters are of particular relevance to my study as they focus on the psychological and emotional tasks faced by adoptive parents. Drawing on Kleinian object-relations theory Rustin holds that participants in adoption have multiple internal and external families to keep in mind and to integrate (Rustin, op.cit. pp.77-89). Cairns, who is a social worker, explores the impact of trauma and adversity on both the children and their adoptive parents and, proposing secondary traumatic stress as a model for what often happens in adoptive families, she examines the destructive impact of secondary trauma on adopters' parenting capacities (Cairns, op.cit. pp.90-98). In her chapter, Sprince affirms that adopters, who may not have any experience of parenting and are even less likely to have expertise in working with victims of trauma and abuse, should be provided with support from the network "as a matter of necessity from the start and over many subsequent years." (op.cit. p.100). With reference to clinical examples she illustrates how "the fantasy of a new beginning" and the hope of creating a 'forever' family through adoption can lead to a systemic denial of the continued presence of the dispossessed birth parents in the internal worlds of adopted children (Sprince, op.cit., p.99-114). In these chapters professionals in the field of adoption are alerted to the emotional complexity and potentially traumatizing impact of adoption on adoptive parents. The need for more thinking about ways of preparing prospective adopters to the realities of adopting children from care, as well as the need of ongoing post-adoption support is clearly stated, because as Sprince writes:

> [...] the preparation of prospective adopters comes before the experience itself,
> not in conjunction with it, and this is an intrinsic difficulty. [...] Many adoptive
> parents have acknowledged [...] how unable they were to take in what was said

Notably, so far, sibling adoption does not appear as a distinct object of study in the literature, this despite evidence that children in foster care are slightly more likely to have siblings than the general population (about 85 % of looked after children in the UK have at least one sibling compared to 80% of the general population) and that a significant proportion of adoptions are of siblings.

Literature on siblings and sibling relationships

In the last thirty years there has been a steady output of research on siblings, suggesting a growing impetus to better understand sibling relationships and their impact on the individual and society. Nonetheless, as I will show, there has persisted a perception that siblings have been a neglected topic. In the field of adult psychoanalysis it has been a particularly contested subject as it has been argued that both the influence of siblings in our development and their role in our internal world have been obscured. In the following section I give an overview of the literature on siblings, firstly from a psychoanalytic perspective, starting with Freud, Klein and Anna Freud's discoveries about siblings and then outlining the debate, over the past three decades, about the neglect of sibling relationships in adult psychoanalysis; secondly I give a summary of the extensive research into sibling relationships carried out by Judy Dunn and others in the field of developmental psychology; thirdly, I review the literature giving a child psychotherapy view of siblings and sibling relationships .

Psychoanalytic literature on siblings

Freud was emphatic both about the importance of siblings in early childhood and about their enduring impact into adulthood. Through his research into the unconscious and unconscious processes Freud shed new light on sibling relationships evidencing the intensely rivalrous feelings and hatred that can exist between brothers and sisters and postulating the universality of ambivalence in sibling relationships:

I do not know why we presuppose that the relation must be a loving one; for
instances of hostility between adult brothers and sisters force themselves

upon everyone's experience and we can often establish the fact that the disunity originated in childhood or has always existed […] Children are completely egoistic; they feel their needs intensely and strive ruthlessly to satisfy them – especially as against rivals, other children, and *first and foremost as against brothers and sisters*. (1900, p. 250, author's italics)

Such propositions countered the prevailing 19th century view of innocent and idealized love between siblings. Freud went on to theorise about the significance of the birth of a sibling in a child's development, arguing that it constitutes a traumatic event in the life of a child. In Freud's account the first-born perceives the new baby as an intruder in the family home and in his relationship with mother:

But what the child begrudges the unwanted intruder and rival is not only the suckling but all the other signs of maternal care. It feels that it has been dethroned, despoiled, prejudiced in its rights; it casts a jealous hatred upon the new baby and develops a grievance against the faithless mother […] (1933, p.123)

The threat of being displaced and the feelings of betrayal are so great that the child wishes the baby dead (1910; 1916-7; 1933):

When other children appear on the scene the Oedipus complex is enlarged into a family complex. This, with fresh support from the egoistic sense of injury, gives ground for receiving the new brothers and sisters with repugnance and for unhesitatingly getting rid of them by a wish. (1916-17, p.333f)

Freud viewed the trauma of the birth of a sibling to also have a developmental influence, confronting the child with questions about his own origin and with the reality of his parents' sexual relationship; Freud conceptualizes sibling relationships in relation to the Oedipus complex and understands them as playing a part in children's sexual development (1905; 1916-17). Freud also asserted the reverberation of early sibling relationships into adulthood (1900; 1914):

[…] psycho-analysis has taught us that the individual's emotional attitudes to other people, which are of such extreme importance to his later behaviour, are already established at an unexpectedly early age […] The people to whom he is in this way fixed are his parents and his brothers and sisters. [1914, p. 243].

Klein's writing about brothers and sisters, like Freud's, is embedded in the accounts she gives of her clinical work. Differently to Freud, however, her thinking about sibling relationships emerged out of her direct observations of and psychoanalyses with *children* rather than adults. Klein's theories about siblings included the impact of the

birth of a new siblings', the primal scene, the predicament of the only child, the role of siblings in early infantile-maternal relations in the resolution (or not) of the Oedipus complex, and finally their role in the development of an individual's future relationships and capacity for love in adult life (Sherwin-White, 2014).

In her first book, *The Psychoanalysis of Children* (1932) Klein's accounts of the analyses she conducted with numerous children, whose age spanned childhood from infancy to pre-teens and adolescents, show how very alive sibling issues were in the consulting room and how powerfully ambivalent their feelings could be. She frequently observed her young patients' death-wishing fantasies towards their siblings' pre and post birth - and their consequent suffering from guilt and anxiety.   In a number of her cases she also observed that it was the birth of a sibling that triggered her patient's neuroses [op.cit. 1932 (Rita), p.4 n1, (Ruth), pp. 27 n.1, 29, (Trude) p.5)]. As well as reigniting oedipal conflicts, the arrival of a new sibling presents the infant child with other basic challenges such as having to undergo weaning, thus losing exclusive access to mother's breast as well her undivided attention. In this Klein's views tally with Freud's understanding of the catastrophe that the arrival of a sibling may represent for a young child.   However Klein arguably placed more emphasis on the positive developmental role siblings can play for each other (Coles, 2003) by enabling the working through of intensely ambivalent feelings towards the development of loving sibling relationships and a capacity for friendship:

> The child is also intensely jealous of brothers and sisters, in so far as they are rivals for their parent's love. He also loves them, however, and this again in this connection strong conflicts between aggressive impulses and feelings of love are aroused. This leads to feelings of guilt and again to wishes to make good: a mixture of feelings which has an important bearing not only on our relations with brothers and sisters but, since relations to people in general are modeled on the same pattern, also on our social attitude and on feelings of love and guilt and the wishes to male good later in life (Klein, 1937, p.310, quoted in Hindle and Sherwin White, 2014).

More controversially, Klein (op.cit. pp. 196-197) posited the normality of intra-sibling sexual activity between children which, she considered to be usually triggered by the child witnessing parental intercourse and induced by the resulting pressure from oedipal excitation. Klein viewed sibling sexual relations as a way for a young child gradually to be able to face the direct oedipal conflict with their parent by reducing fear, anxiety and guilt, thus helping them to move towards a heterosexual position.

According to Klein's view the harmfulness of child sibling relationships depends on their being abusive and sadistic.

Like Freud, Klein too understood that early sibling relationships continue to reverberate in our adult relationships and found sibling issues in her work with adult patients (1959, p. 258). She drew attention to the intergenerational aspects of sibling relationships and how they may influence parents' attitudes towards their children. As a child grows into adolescence, for example:

> [A mother's] attitude to her older children will be more or less influenced by her attitude to her brothers and sisters, cousin's etc. … in the past. Certain difficulties in these past relationships may easily interfere with her feelings for her own child, especially if it develops reactions and traits which tend to stir these difficulties in her (1937, p.318)

Anna Freud viewed the mother to have a catalytic role in mediating the child's relationship to his or her siblings. She and her colleagues developed their understanding of sibling relationships from the longitudinal observations afforded by their work with children temporarily separated from their families during the war at the Hampstead War Nurseries in London, and from their work with a group of six children liberated from the Terezin concentration camp, who had lost their mothers as infants, and who were brought to the country house of Bulldogs Bank. From these experiences they saw that the formation of a strong attachment to a mother (or mother substitute at the Hampstead War Nurseries) or to a peer (in the Bulldogs Bank children) bound the child's aggression enabling the child to manage sibling relationships and, eventually to develop other social relationships (Pretorious, 2014).

Anna Freud and Sophie Dann give a comprehensive summary of their developmental theory of sibling relationships elaborated through their experimental work with children in groups:

> According to the results of child analysis and reconstruction from the analysis of adults, the child's relationship to his brothers and sisters is subordinated to his relationship with his parents, is, in fact, a function of it. Siblings are normally accessories to the parents, their relationship to them being governed by attitudes of rivalry, envy, jealousy, and competition for the love of the parents. Aggression, which is inhibited towards the parents, is expressed freely toward brothers and sisters; sexual wishes which cannot become manifest in the Oedipal relationship are lived out, passively or actively, with elder or younger brothers and sisters. The underlying relationship with siblings is thus a negative one (dating from infancy when all siblings are merely rivals for mother's love),

with an overlay of positive feelings when siblings are used for the discharge of libidinal trends deflected from the parents. When the relations between the children of one family become finally, manifestly positive, they do so […] on the basis of their common identification with the parents […] The child's first approach to the idea of justice is made during these developments of the brother-sister relationship, when the claim to be favoured oneself is changed to the demand that no one should be favoured i.e., that there should be equal rights for everybody. […] these first relationships to the brothers and sisters become important factors in determining the individual's social attitudes. (A.Freud and Dann, 1951, p.166, quoted by Pretorious, in Hindle and Sherwin-White, 2014).

Thus, Anna Freud was emphatic about the primacy of the role of the parents to which sibling relationships are subordinate: through the binding of infantile aggression, the development of the capacity for ambivalence and identification with the parents, the child can progress developmentally to form a group of siblings. This prototypical family complex forms the blueprint for the child's social functioning.

The place of siblings in psychoanalysis: a contested subject

It was about forty years later that one of the first books dedicated to the comprehensive and systematic study of sibling relationships one and their place in the development and psychology of the individual , was published - in the United States: *The Sibling Bond* (1982, republished in 1997) by Stephen Bank and Michael Khan. Both psychoanalytically informed clinical practitioners, the authors felt the questions that arose in their clinical work about their patients' siblings relationships could not be answered with existing research and theory. Bank and Kahn's claim was that thinking about siblings had *suffered* from the legacy of Freudian psychoanalysis which focused on sibling rivalry for the love of a parent during childhood (Freud, 1900, 1916, 1933; Obendorf, 1929; Levy, 1937). They attribute this emphasis on rivalry on the biography and personal psychology of psychoanalysis's founding father[5] and argue that, mirroring the role Freud had in his own family constellation, psychoanalysis has said little about the larger family context which affects the way brothers and sisters conduct their relationships[6].

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[5] One of many siblings in a complex, re-constituted family, Freud was the first-born in his father's second marriage and, as he himself indicated, was his mother's favourite.   His parents' second child, Freud's baby brother, died when Freud was nineteen months old, an event which he acknowledged as very formative. Biographical accounts suggest that Freud enjoyed a privileged position as his mother's first-born male child and that he exercised powers that came with this primacy of place, remaining quite separate from his younger siblings - four sisters and one brother

[6] The authors cite Alfred Adler (1959) as the only neo-Freudian to discuss sibling influences at any length with a focus on the influence of birth-order on how the personality unfolds.

Bank and Kahn identified three areas of need in the study of siblings: research where intimate familiarity with siblings was gained over time to obtain a longitudinal view as well as in depth insights; studies examining sibling relationships and parent relationship simultaneously; and studies conducted of siblings in crisis situations, "when the deep structures and meanings of a sibling relationship can be brought to the surface" (ibid. p.8). Their book, motivated by a clinical imperative, was the result of eight years of research into sibling relationships amalgamating diverse research methods and includes clinical case studies.

Bank and Kahn examine the nature of the bonds that exist between siblings across the lifespan, arguing that the influence siblings exert on one another may persist or alter, wax and wane, over the course of a lifetime. The authors propose that sibling bonds may be sustained by identification and loyalties but also by aggression; rivalrous siblings who hate each other can be considered 'bound' if their identities have any influence on each other. They hold that to understand many of the satisfactions in sibling relationships we have to understand how one sibling's behaviour and self-image are unconsciously fitted to the identity of another. One important contributing factor to the strength of the bond between siblings is what Bank and Kahn conceptualise as that of 'sibling access' in childhood. Low access siblings lack a sense of shared history, they have not needed one another nor have their *parents* needed them to need each other; the inverse is true of high access siblings. The earlier access begins and the more prolonged it is, the more intense will be the sibling relationship when it is stressed by issues of family breakdown, separation, death and social comparison in later life (op.cit. pp. 9-10).

A year later in a review of the psychoanalytic literature on siblings, Colonna and Newman (1983) found that, compared to the abundance of literature on the parent-child relationship, there was a surprising scarcity of writing on sibling relationships. In particular they pointed to the puzzling absence of "Sibling" in the index of Freud's *Standard Edition* (1974) and that "Brothers and sisters" and "relations between" had only 5 entries between them. This seemed all the more strange as Freud referred to the significance of siblings across his writings - in his work on children's sexual development (Freud,1905: 227-228; 1908: 212; 1912-13:17; 1916-17: 335) in

connection to his theory of the Oedipus complex (1916-17: 333f, 333-335), in his dream analysis (Freud, 1900: 250- 252; 1916-17: 153), his applied papers and his self-analysis (Freud, 1900a: 424, 483), and most prominently through his clinical observations of adult patients. (as in Freud's famous case studies e.g.; Dora, 1905: 51; Little Hans, 1909a: 6-8, 11, 66-9; "The Ratman", 1909b: 184, 207f, 264; and "The Wolfman" 1918: 22).

Colonna and Newman argued that the sparseness of subsequent published literature on sibling relationships did not reflect what "every analyst of both children and adults knows […] that siblings play an important role in the life of those who have them" and that "many hours are devoted to this theme in the analyses of patients" (op.cit., p.305). The authors suggested that due to the centrality given to the Oedipus complex in Freud's theories, sibling relationships had come to be viewed as 'second editions' of the parent relationships, with implications for how sibling transferences were traditionally seen and interpreted compared to parent transferences in the analytic situation resulting in a lack of writing on the sibling transference.

Colonna and Newman's article was one of six psychoanalytic studies about siblings published in the same volume of *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* (Vol.38, 1983) by a group of psychoanalysts closely affiliated to Anna Freud, the Yale Study Group. These include studies on development-promoting aspects of sibling relationships (Provence and Solnit); on the mutual influences of parents and siblings (Kris and Ritvo); about the importance of the sibling experience (Neubauer); and an examination of how a second pregnancy can revive the mother's sibling experience, with implications for her relationship with the first-born child (Abarbanel).

Five years later an issue of *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* was dedicated to the subject of siblings (1988, Vol 8, Issue 1). The issue gathers articles which discuss psychoanalytic perspectives on sibling relationships (Agger), observational findings about siblings in early childhood (Parens), the developmental role of siblings in pre-adolescents (Kernberg and Richards) clinical perspectives on the internalization of siblings as encountered in late adolescent analyses (Balsam), and the sibling as an internal object and its transferences (Graham).

In her article Agger (1988, op.cit) affirms that unconscious sibling processes exert an influence from the very beginning of a child's development. She argues that although the mother is usually the first love object and the immediate source for identification and early learning, the existence of actual siblings as well as internal sibling representations within the mother's psyche exert a sizeable effect upon the child's ego development from the start. On the other hand, Graham (1988, op.cit.), asserts that in psychoanalysis there has been an over-emphasis on the effects of the primary relationship with the parents and the tendency to relegate the sibling to a "real object" model only. He attributes the difficulty of studying sibling relationships to a "contempt of familiarity" and, quoting Segal (1957), argues that the "imminence of personal, familial, organizational, and clinical associations to the topic make it difficult to reflect upon it spontaneously with sufficient detachment" (Graham, 1988, op.cit. p. 88). Further he suggests that "the impingement on our professional working selves of our own or others' sibling behaviors in our homes, clinics, psychoanalytic societies, or wider professional communities has left the familiarity and the vastness of the topic caught in defensive collusion between experience and theory" (ibid. p. 88).

Still more recently, writing from a theoretical perspective, in her first work on the impact of sibling relationships on the individual and in society *Madmen and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria* (2000), and then in the book that followed *Siblings: Sex and Violence* (2003), Juliet Mitchell forcefully claims that:

> Sibling relationships are the great omission in psychoanalytic observation
> and theory - its practice as set out by Freud and all subsequent psychoanalytic
> theorists, militates against seeing their importance (2000, p.23-24).

Mitchell argues that sibling relationships have been subsumed into the Oedipus complex because of a concerted denial of their importance by Freud and in the theories that followed:

> Freud's (and all subsequent psychoanalytic) emphasis on the
> intergenerational Oedipus complex indicates a massive repression of the
> significance of all the love and hate of sibling relationships and their heirs in
> marital affinity and friendships. (ibid., p.70)

Mitchell affirms that our understanding of psychic and social relationships has privileged vertical interaction, "lines of ascent and descent […] between parents and children" (2013, p.2) - in the 19th century between child and father, in the twentieth

century the mother-child interaction - to the detriment of our understanding of lateral relationships such as those between siblings. Mitchell's theoretical proposition is to invert the traditional psychoanalytic view that love and hate derive from the parental relationships and are subsequently transferred to the siblings, and to give primacy to the initial awareness of the presence of the siblings which produces " a catastrophic psychosocial situation of displacement" (2000, p.22) and which in turn triggers *a regression to* parental relationships that did not have those psychic implications until this moment.

In her book *The Importance of Sibling Relationships in Psychoanalysis* - also published in 2003 - Prophecy Coles endorses Mitchell's claim that siblings have been omitted from psychoanalytic theory and that they have been relegated to an insignificant place in the internal world (ibid., p.51). She writes:

> Psychoanalytic theory seems to have colluded with the wish to be the only child […] Siblings are scarcely mentioned in the literature and the concept of a sibling transference does not appear in any of the psychoanalytic dictionaries. In some ways the concentration on the oedipal triad is a more comfortable position. (2003, p.2)

One of the questions Coles raises is whether we fear the power of sibling relationships and asks if in fact they are more passionate than parental relationships. Coles refers to her clinical experiences of sibling transference in the consulting room in which she noted that a particularly harsh superego seemed often to be rooted in early experiences of being cared for by a harsh older sibling whose primitive feelings, unlike an adult parent, would not have been tempered by the restraints of maturity.

In 2006, in her volume entitled *Sibling Relationships*, a collection of essays on siblings from a range of theoretical perspectives, Coles states that there was *still* no general acceptance that our relationships with our siblings help to structure our psychic world. Coles advocates for a cross-disciplinary approach and in her volume gathers writings that consider siblings from sociological, historical, literary and psychoanalytic points of view. Echoing previous writers, in her socio-historic contribution to the above volume Davidoff reflects: "Despite the centrality of this relationship, both historically and in contemporary life, it remains strangely neglected, relegated to a fragmentary footnote of the historical record" (op.cit. 18)

The study of sibling relationships in developmental psychology

In contrast to the perceived neglect of siblings in psychoanalysis, in the field of *developmental psychology*, Judy Dunn has made sibling relationships the focus of much of her research and writing. Having conducted several longitudinal studies both in the US and UK Dunn has written, co-written and edited numerous books, her work spanning three decades (1982, 1985, 1990, 1992, 1993, 2004, 2014). With a focus on determining the factors contributing to the development of personality Dunn held that whilst the general assumption in the field of psychology, as in psychoanalysis, was that it is children's relationships with their parents that are of overwhelming importance to their development, the influence of brothers and sisters in childhood needs also to be considered to properly understand the development of personality (1985). Ten years into her research Dunn noted a persistent delay in systematic research into siblings, and argued that this seemed at odds with a growing interest by clinician and systems theorists in the part that siblings play in family relationships (1992).

Through both quantitative and qualitative studies Dunn and her colleagues amassed detailed information about siblings and other family relationships by tracing, and describing, the connections and points of mutual influence between the individuals, the couples and the groups that can exist within families. Three questions persistently informed Dunn's subsequent research: How do the experiences of a childhood spent with brothers and sisters influence the way in which children develop? Why should some siblings get along so well, and others fight and quarrel with such hostility? And why do brothers and sisters, who share 50% of their genetic make-up, differ so much from one another? (1985; 2004). Dunn reflected that:

> Growing up within the same family can have very different meanings for
> siblings: for one child the family may include someone who arouses irritation
> and takes parental attention and love; for the other there is someone to
> admire, care about, and learn from. Further, differences in how the children
> behave toward one another may be closely linked to differences in how
> parents treat the different children, which may be either a cause or a
> consequence of the siblings' behaviour (1985. pp.)

Dunn has brought into focus and described the patterns of interdependence and influence between different relationships within the family. Two findings put forward by Dunn (2004; 2014) might exemplify the kinds of evidence her research has generated: firstly, that the arrival of a new baby is associated with increased problems

for the firstborn children and with marked, and permanent, changes in the relationship between the older child and mother (Dunn & Kendrick, 1982a); secondly, that differential parent-child relationships are linked with more conflicted sibling relationships, with higher levels of aggression and behavioural problems in the less favoured sibling; evidence highlights how important to children the relationship between parents and the other sibling is. Ultimately Dunn's conclusion is that each of the many variables possible in family relationships is likely to have some influence on the development of the child. She proposes moving from looking for global characterizations of sibling relationships towards studying "those experiences that are specific to each child within the family" as developmental studies , she stresses "are helping to clarify how experiences within the "same" family are likely to influence the development of differences between siblings" (2014, p.75). Siblings have different experiences from each other in the same family, and these differences are developmentally significant.

Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy perspectives on siblings

In 2007, in a riposte to Mitchell and Coles who so strongly, though differently, argued that Freudian psychology had "militated against" seeing the importance of siblings, Sherwin-White published her article "Freud on Brothers and Sisters: a neglected topic" in the *Journal of Child Psychotherapy* (Vol. 33:4-20). Here Sherwin-White, a child and adolescent psychotherapist, sets out to demonstrate that far from omitting or underplaying brother-sister psychology in emotional development or as primary internal objects, Freud thought about the "power and the passions involved" across his theoretical writings, his case studies (as cited above) and his personal correspondence, recognizing and acknowledging their clinical importance throughout. Sherwin-White contends that both in the index of the Standard Edition (1974), which lists only the references to brothers and sisters, and in Mitchell's and Coles' work, Freud's references to siblings have been 'cherry-picked'. The consequence, she argues, is that his work on siblings has been "misrepresented and marginalized, in a way that has become institutionalized."

Writing about siblings from a Child Psychotherapy view, in the same journal, Margaret Rustin (2007) asserts that siblinghood has had an important place in child psychotherapy thinking and practice for many decades as clinical experience with

children "repeatedly reveals the vital significance of real, lost and imagined siblings" (2007, Vol. 33: p.22). She reflects that the centrality of Infant Observation in British Child Psychotherapy trainings (Sternberg, 2005) ensures "that exposure to the existential importance of siblings is a core part of a child psychotherapist's state of mind" (op.cit. p. 23). Furthermore, sibling issues are an experiential aspect in their development as child psychotherapists , in that relationships with peers - and therefore sibling dynamics - are a key component of the lengthy training process. Rustin argues that sibling issues are a theme in much of a child psychotherapists practice, through joint work with colleagues (sometimes from other disciplines), through the developing tradition of group work within child psychotherapy (Canham and Emanuel, 2000) in work with "replacement" children when a lost sibling remains unmourned in the mother's mind (Reid, 2003), and lastly in child psychotherapists' work with looked after children and the issue of whether and how to place siblings together, which has been the focus of Hindle's (2007) research reported in the same journal (and discussed in more detail below).

With specific reference to Klein's work and the discoveries made through infant and young child observations (Bick, 1968; Houzel, 2001; Briggs, 2002), and by giving clinical examples of her own work with children, Rustin goes on to delineate the key ways in which siblings have been observed to impact on children's internal and external worlds. Three main themes that emerge are: firstly, that for the child who has been mother's baby, the birth of another baby means losing "one's known position in the family and the world" and that the feelings of displacement that ensue for child are therefore of an existential order (op.cit. p.25). Secondly, Rustin, in line with Klein's theories, claims the existence of siblings as "a preconception awaiting its realization"; siblings - she asserts - are always present in the mind, whether existing in external reality or not (op.cit. p. 28). Thirdly, Rustin posits that siblings have an inner relationship to the parental couple that provides *the context for* the sibling relationship; thus. in contrast to Mitchell and Coles, she affirms that sibling relationships cannot be independent of the Oedipal dimension.

With this account Rustin sets out to show that, in contrast to psychoanalysts working primarily with adults, child and adolescent psychotherapists see sibling issues as permeating their thinking and their clinical practice. Nonetheless, there remains a

conundrum as there is a surprising absence of explicitly published work on siblings in the *Journal of Child Psychotherapy*; siblings per se do not appear as the focus of any papers and are not highlighted in 'key words', until the 2007 issue as reviewed above.

In an effort to redress this omission, I suggest, most recently Hindle and Sherwin-White (Eds., 2014) have published a volume entitled *Sibling Matters*, which gathers papers exploring siblinghood from a variety of theoretical perspectives. This book constitutes a comprehensive collection of theoretical, research, and clinical work grappling with the complexities of sibling relationships and exploring different facets of sibling life. As well as presenting accounts of the work on siblings by Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, it demonstrates the ways in which infant observation and child and adolescent psychotherapy have shed further light on sibling relationships through different points in the life cycle, whilst also showing the important contributions to our understanding of siblings made by developmental research, systemic therapy and attachment theory. Of the latter, the paper presenting an attachment perspective on siblings (Kriss, Steele and Steele, 2014) is of particular baring, as it presents the beginnings of a research into *the dynamic interaction* between *parent-child attachment and sibling relationships*.

Literature on siblings in adoption

Social work literature

In the 1970s and 80s numerous papers were published on the issue of assessing siblings for placement in fostering and adoption practice; whether to place siblings together or apart is a challenging question frequently faced by adoption social workers[7]. However, the first *systematic* study of siblings in practice was Wedge and Mantle's study (1991) which drew attention to how the number of possible interactions suddenly escalates with the introduction of siblings into a new family. The authors show how even in cases where a sibling pair joins a previously childless couple the possible two-way interactions increases from one to six, and the possible three-way interactions from nought to four. Nonetheless, Wedge and Mantle highlighted, the process of decision-making in relation to sibling placement often seemed arbitrary and uninformed.

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[7] For example: Forbes, L.M. , 1977; Jones, M. and Niblett, R., 1985; Rushton, A. et al, 1989

Kosonen's article (1994), published in *Adoption and Fostering* the periodical of the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), reviews the literature to elucidate some of the factors influencing the development of sibling relationships and their importance to the children in question. These include: the quality of parent-child relationships and early attachment; the emotional climate in the family, family stress and conflict; neglect and parental unavailability; the impact of abuse on the abused and non-abused children; differential parental treatment; the impact of a non-shared environment; and high 'access to siblings'. Kosonen stresses the complexity of the interaction of these factors which, research indicates, is correlational rather than causal.

In 1999, the anthology *We are family: sibling relationships in placement and beyond* (Mullendar, A. ed.) brought together a range of social-work research studies around the question of separating or keeping groups of brothers and sisters together. Still, the anthology highlighted the enormity of the decisions social workers take about separation and contact and argued that decision-making was ad-hoc, resource-led and adult-centred resulting in permanence frequently involving separation from siblings. It concluded that practice was not keeping pace with research and that little was known about siblings and the importance of that relationship.

It was not until 2001 that a more longitudinal study specifically on sibling relationships in adoption was carried out. Entitled *Siblings in Late Permanent Placements* (Rushton, et al.)[8], it followed a sample of 133 children placed with 72 new families in middle childhood and explored the outcomes for jointly or singly placed children, as well as those for children placed with families who already had birth children. The study set out to collect data about the quality of the sibling relationship and its impact on the outcome of the placement by interviewing parents, children and social workers firstly at three months and then at one year after the initial placement. The study found evidence of a good deal of thought being given to keeping siblings together and that separation of singly placed children was usually because of individual needs. Around three-quarters of placements were classified as having had a satisfactory or good outcome at a year. Not surprisingly, factors most strongly related to placement stability were the children's interaction style with both new parents and each other. Siblings placed together showed

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[8] The research came out of the Maudsley Family Research Studies at the Institute of Psychiatry in London.

higher levels of conflict and less warmth than children in the general population. The study also found that specialist help for sibling relationship problems was rare and tended to be offered for children and parents separately rather than in the form of family systems and relationship work.

This Maudsley study was designed as a quantitative piece of research to inform social work practice and decision-making. In her book Mullander (1999) had argued that findings emerging from sampling and surveying in quantitative research can "tend to have a 'so what' feeling about them because only the general (and often fairly obvious) is measurable in this way, not the infinite gradations of perceptions and narratives that are yielded by qualitative research" (p.11). This experiential, "lived" dimension was missing from the Maudsley study and it was therefore only partially informative.

Perhaps it is because of this difficulty of capturing and engaging with the multifaceted and multidimensional reality of sibling relationships that in his book, *Sibling Relationships: Theory and Issues for Practice*, Sanders (2004) contends that sibling relationships remain a missing dimension in family work despite their pervasiveness. Sanders argues that the complexities of siblinghood had only recently begun to be recognized and sets out to trace what he describes as the developing sophistication of our understanding about siblings, giving an overview of different theoretical and research perspectives, including the psychoanalytic one, with the aim of helping family work professionals think in greater depth about sibling relationships in their practice.

As I reviewed the literature above at the outset of this project it emerged that sibling adoption had not yet been researched from *a qualitative point of view* neither from the children's nor from the adoptive parents' perspective. However, whilst I have been working on the present study a book has been published by BAAF, the first in the UK, that examines sibling adoption from the perspective of adopters and of staff in adoption agencies. *Adopting Large Sibling Groups* (Saunders and Selwyn, 2011) is based on the input of 14 adoption agencies (five local authorities and nine voluntary adoption agencies) as well as 37 sibling group adopters from England, Wales and the Isle of Man. Adopters describe their experiences of the adoption process from recruitment, assessment and preparation to matching, introductions, placement and support. The

study explores the motivation of sibling-group adopters and the rewards and challenges of adopting a large sibling group. Social work staff explain their approaches and policies and reveal wide variations in practice.

Saunders and Selwyn's study reveals some of the systemic obstacles to sibling-group adoption including the extent to which adopters' experiences depend on the resources and practices of the adoption agency through which they adopt - local authority or private agency - as well as personal attitudes of individual social workers to sibling adoption. Three of their findings stand out: firstly that budget management issues and the complicated bureaucratic processes of pursuing sibling-group adoptions act as deterrents for professionals working in local authority adoption agencies; secondly, that sibling-group adopters experienced pessimistic attitudes and prejudice against sibling-group adoption during the adoption process; thirdly, that although most sibling-group adopters said that the financial support package provided by the children's authority was the most important part of the support package, for those struggling with children's very challenging behaviour emotional and practical support and therapeutic interventions were also essential. Worryingly, many sibling-group adopters said they had to fight to obtain the necessary support for their children[9]. Nonetheless, Saunders and Selwyn conclude that adoptive families represent the best chance of securing a better future for many large sibling groups, and they should be valued, encouraged and given all the support they need, especially in the first year of placement. However, in the interviews I conducted with adopters for the present study - adopters of sibling *pairs* - it emerged that during their pre-adoption preparation process little thought had been given to what adopting a sibling-pair would entail or to what it would mean to become the parents of children with a pre-established sibling relationship which, in the case of the children in my research sample, had developed in a context of parental neglect and/or abuse and multiple foster placements and separations.

Psychoanalytic Literature on Siblings who are Fostered or Adopted
Within this body of psychoanalytic writing on siblings I have found only three psychoanalytic studies of siblings in the contexts of adoption or foster care.

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[9] In this context the adequacy of CAMHS was questioned, both in terms of its ability to respond to the urgent needs of adoptive families and in terms of the CAMHS professionals understanding of adoption issues.

The first is a clinical paper by Salo (1990) that charts the psychotherapy of a boy (Mark) who, adopted aged 10 from a foster home. where he had lived for 7 years with his two siblings, was traumatically separated from his siblings when each was individually placed. Mark's adoptive parents hoped that Mark could be a brother to their previously adopted another son. Salo concluded that the importance of Mark's relationships with his brother and sister had been overlooked although he had clearly voiced his wish not to be separated from his brother and sisters, and that for a long time, as well as the significant transracial issues (Mark was Nigerian and his adoptive parents were white middle-class,) this stood in the way of his becoming attached to his adoptive parents and brother.

The second is Hindle's doctoral thesis (2000a), *An Intensive Assessment of a Small sample of Siblings Paced Together in Foster Care*, which she has presented in a number of subsequent papers (2000b; 2001; 2007). Her clinical research set out to address the tendency for those caring for or working with such children to underestimate the children's meaning to each other and emphasized the importance of assessing the children's perspectives. Hindle identified two predominant themes: firstly, cumulative trauma which pointed to the pervasive nature of the children's early experiences as manifest through their presentation and play; secondly, relatedness and belonging between the siblings, which highlighted aspects of the children's shared memories and experiences. Hindle found that *psychotherapeutic* assessments gave access to what previously had seemed difficult to describe and inaccessible about the referred children's sibling relationship. The assessments highlighted the importance of the sibling relationship to the children's sense of self and this helped the systems surrounding each sibling group to be more emotionally responsive to their needs. Hindle's research raised questions as to whether more could be done to mediate or facilitate sibling relationships for who children who have suffered early deprivation or abuse and the need for further research into this area was proposed.

The third is Smallbone's paper "Brothers and Sisters in Care" in the recently published collection of writing about siblings edited by Hindle and Sherwin-White (2014, op.cit.), in which she reflects on her experiences of clinical work with siblings in foster care. Smallbone holds that the wide spread of individual histories and individual sensibilities

of young people in care should warn practitioners not to make too many assumptions. Using clinical vignettes as examples Smallbone shows how the hope that fostered children can preserve and use their attachments to their siblings positively has its difficulties. She argues that sometimes siblings can impede each other's development or present with a level of aggression towards each other that makes home life intolerable. For children whose background is traumatic and abusive, she warns, siblings can be a reminder of difficult circumstances or lead to repetition of earlier abusive relationships. Sometimes, Smallbone warns, there can be a misplaced loyalty in practitioners to the notion of brotherly or sisterly love, when the siblings are locked into a culture of sadism and perversion imported from the family of origin. In these cases separating family members, including siblings, is the only available way of leaving that culture behind. I would argue that these same issues sometimes apply to siblings who are *adopted* together, even though their relationship may have been previously assessed.

Conclusion

The growing interest in siblings (in the media, in social policy, in adoption practice and in psychoanalytic writing), suggests a shift of focus, or at least in emphasis, in thinking about family and familial relationships. The reasons for the recent turn to siblings are complex and beyond the scope of this study but, as has been shown, there are now growing social pressures in fostering adoption practice to maintain the sibling relationship in the search of new family arrangements when biological families breakdown. The literature shows that sociological studies have long linked the changing attitudes, motivations, value orientation and coping behaviours of adoptive parents with societal phenomena (Kirk, 1964 and 1981; Hoksbergen and Teer Lark, 2005); the turn towards siblings may be one such social phenomena influencing adoptive parents in their choices, motivations and coping mechanisms. However, whilst parental experiences in adoption have been taken into account in the literature, until recently this has almost exclusively been in relation to one adopted child: the adoptive family has preponderantly been researched and theorized in terms of the only child with the exception of Saunders and Selwyn's (op.cit., 2011) research which, though informative, does not capture the quality of the research subjects' lived experience.

This literature review has highlighted the sense of inadequacy in existing literature on sibling relationships and the shortage of literature on siblings *in* adoption, with a particular dearth of studies exploring the experience of sibling adopters, as research has focused on assessment of sibling relationships before placement. Furthermore, this review traces how despite a growing literature on siblinghood in the general population there is a persistent narrative of omission or inadequacy underscoring the psychoanalytic literature on siblings. The gaps in existing literature confirm the need for a qualitative study to further enhance our understanding of siblings in adoption as well as the need for a more detailed exploration of adoptive parents' perspective, to allow the complexities and emotional depth of the personal lived experiences to come to light so as to learn more about the meaning and significance of sibling adoption for those who embark on it. Furthermore, the review reveals the need to gain further insight into the psychological significance and meaning of siblings *for adults*, in other words of adults' relationship to children's sibling relationships. By considering what may be underlying the enduring claim that sibling relationships have been a neglected subject in psychoanalysis it may be possible to reach a hypothesis as to why there appears to be a pervasive difficulty in grappling with and focusing on the complexities of sibling relationships and their meaning to adults - parents (biological and adoptive), clinicians, social workers - as manifest in the research but also in clinical and social-work practice.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study is qualitative research academically situated within the arena of psychosocial studies. I have used face-to-face interviews as the main method of gathering data, and have combined both narrative and thematic analyses of the respondents' accounts. This methodology aims to integrate the dual contexts from which my study has emerged, and the dual perspectives informing it. Thus, whilst the impetus to find out more about the experience of adopting siblings arose out of clinical considerations deriving from my experiences as a trainee child and adolescent psychotherapist, the present study is epistemologically positioned with the psychosocial[10] - recognizing my specific situatedness as researcher, acknowledging the difference between therapeutic and research frameworks, roles and responsibilities, and allowing for different possibilities of meaning-making in the interpretation of the data.

Qualitative research and the psychosocial

In qualitative research particular life experiences are valued as exemplars and limited claims are made as to the generalizability of the findings, which are recognized as open to interpretation (Gower, 2011). Qualitative research methods are open both to relational experience - as in that of the interview encounter - and to multiple readings of the same phenomenon. In the case of the present study for example, whilst a thematic analysis of the interview texts allowed the delineation of recurring themes in the respondents' talk about siblings, a narrative analysis of the same texts illuminated the different personal meaning of the adoption experience for the respondents and, within that, the different understanding and significance they brought to the fact of having adopted siblings.

By taking a psychosocial approach I am placing this research in a field of study that problematizes how the human subject is theorized, by questioning the separation of the social and psychological, the external and the internal dimension of experience. Frosh

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[10] Broadly speaking psychosocial theories draw on social constructionist epistemology, which asks that when we carry out research we take a critical stance to taken-for-granted knowledge, that we consider its historical and cultural specificity and that we recognize that knowledge is sustained by social processes ie: communities come to an agreement about how to make and what constitutes knowledge.

and Baraitser (2008) describe contemporary psychosocial studies as "a critical approach interested in articulating a place of ''suture'' between these elements; in psychosocial research, they state, the focus is on

> […] conceptualizing and researching a type of subject that is both social and psychological, which is constituted in and through its social formations, yet is still granted agency and internality. (op. cit. p.349)

Internality and externality are not denied, rather Frosh and Baraitser argue that the psychosocial position is a way of asserting that "you cannot have one without the other [*and that*] they are two sides of the same thing," (op. cit. p.349). In this view, bringing together the psychological and the social without postulating them as distinct spheres is where the work lies. Their suggestion is contrasting the psychological-social, internal world-external world dualism upon which psychoanalysis is predicated with a more classic psychoanalytic notion of "psychic reality". They argue that "the psychic" may be a more psychosocial concept:

> [...] in the sense that it figures something that is never totally "internal". Psychic reality is what the subject lives in; this replaces an abstracted opposition of the "outer" as against the "inner" with a conceptualization of the "psychic" as that which stands in for both. (op. cit. p.354)

This proposition is based on an interpretation of Laplanche and Pontalis's definition of "psychic reality" as being "bound up with the Freudian hypothesis about unconscious processes" that not only take no account of external reality but also" replace it with a psychical one'' (1967, p.363). Frosh and Baraitser argue that psychic reality is already hybrid and in that way cannot be considered as either 'in' or 'out'.

That psychoanalytic thinking can be productively combined with other theoretical approaches in the study of personal experience has been amply debated and ultimately, I believe, demonstrated (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Devi and Fenn, 2012; Donmall, 2013; Robson, 2014), despite its difficulties and pitfalls (Frosh, 2007; Frosh and Baraitser, 2008). As Frosh suggests, it is the tension that exists between differing epistemological stances that is interesting and to be maintained:

> Qualitative research lives in the tension between, on the one hand, a deconstructionist framework in which the human subject is understood as positioned in and through competing discourses and, on the other, a humanistic framework in which the integrity of the subject is taken to be both a starting point - and the end point of analysis. (Frosh, 2007)

Psychoanalysis can contribute to psychosocial research by enriching interpretative understanding of personal narratives, particularly those arising out of interview situations, by throwing light on:

> […] the psychological processes, or perhaps the conscious and unconscious ''reasons'' behind a specific individual's investment in any rhetorical or discursive position. This may offer a more complete (because more individualized as well as emotion-inflected) interpretive re-description of interview material with helpful links to clinical perceptions and practices. (Frosh and Baraitser, op. cit. p. 351)

Interviewing as a way of doing research

I have chosen to make the texts generated from the interview conversations the object of study. In so doing, together with a long line of researchers and theorists, I am claiming that interviews are a legitimate way of generating data (Mishler, 1986; Kvale, 1996; Frosh and Emerson, 2004; Willig, 2012); implicit to this is the claim that personal experience counts as data - in all its subjectivity - and that talk gives at least partial access to an other's experience.

In *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative*, Mishler (1986) problematizes interviewing by opening up the method to critical analysis. His definition rests squarely on a concept of interviewing as a form of discourse between speakers. He holds that questioning and answering are ways of speaking that are grounded in and dependent on culturally shared and often tacit assumptions about how to express and understand beliefs, experiences, feelings and intentions. Mishler refers to this shared language or knowledge as ordinary language competence (op. cit. p.7). An understanding of the interview as discourse views it as "the cultural patterning of situationally relevant talk"; interviews are seen as particular types of speech situations that are normatively grounded and culturally shared by the interviewer and interviewee.

In his book *Interviews* Steinar Kvale (1996) posits that:

> The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences, to uncover their lived worlds […]. (op. cit. p.1)

Kvale conceptualizes the qualitative research interview as a 'construction site of knowledge' where researcher interviewer and respondent co-constructs knowledge by means of the interview conversation (op. cit. p.2). As Kvale puts it, in qualitative research interviews "the basic subject matter is no longer objective data to be quantified, but meaningful relations to be interpreted" (op. cit. p. 11). In his consideration of the similarities and differences between psychoanalytic knowledge production and qualitative research Kvale distinguishes the therapeutic interview from the research interview underlining that:

> […] the purpose of the therapeutic interview is the facilitation of changes in the patient, and the knowledge acquired form the individual patient is a means for instigating personality changes […] The qualitative research interview is a construction site of knowledge production; its purpose is to obtain knowledge of the phenomena investigated and any changes in the interviewed subject is a side effect. (op. cit. p.78)

Nonetheless, Kvale suggests, it is possible for research interviewers to learn from the modes of questioning *and interpreting* (my italics) developed in therapeutic interviews.

Why Narrative analysis?

Hollway and Jefferson (2000), Treacher and Katz, (2000; 2001) and Frosh and Emerson, (2004) in different ways have combined psychoanalytic theories and psychology with contemporary narrative analysis to explore how individuals use narrative forms of discourse to make sense of their experience.

Based on psychoanalytic epistemology, the narrative research method developed by Hollway and Jefferson combines clinical concepts and qualitative methods of enquiry. Starting with a view of the research relationship as central to the co-production of data and conceptualising both researcher and researched as anxious, defended subjects "who are subject to projections and introjections of ideas and feelings coming from the other person" Hollway and Jefferson affirm the availability of unconscious dynamics for interpretation in narrative research. Thus they posit the validity of free-association as a research tool, see the interviewer as providing recognition and containment in the research relationship, and assume transference and countertransference as active between interviewer and interviewee. These clinical tools are applied, reflexively, in the interpretation of the data.

In *Critical Narrative Analysis in Psychology* (2004) Frosh and Emerson's argument for the utility of narrative analysis includes the claim that "intense scrutiny of individual accounts is an activity worthy of research attention" (op. cit. p.10). Such detailed narrative analysis is founded on the detailed investigation of very small numbers of research 'subjects', whose process of accounting and making sense of their experience is seen as being of intrinsic interest rather than as sources of generalizations. Frosh and Emerson posit that the application of a critical narrative analysis in psychology is linked with psychoanalysis by the assumption that the important issues in people's lives are highly specific, however strongly they might also relate to the social dimension. Hence, in the framework proposed by Emerson and Frosh

> […] the 'psychosocial' approach means attending to the very specific location of any
> particular subject at the junction of social and personal investments and concerns. (op. cit.
> p. 11)

It is because of the possibility it affords of attending in detail to the specific experiences of individuals that I turned to narrative analysis as my methodological approach. This decision also stemmed from the fact that contemporary narrative theory chimed both with my personal experience and my professional practice as a trainee child and adolescent psychotherapist, which lead me to believe that research participants would naturally turn to narrative forms of talk in telling me about their experience.

In *Making Stories* (2001) Bruner posits that stories and story-telling pervade our daily lives; we use stories, he argues, to make sense of the world and ourselves in the world. In particular, Bruner states:

> We know that narrative in all its forms is a dialectic between what was
> expected and what came to pass. For there to be a story, something
> unforeseen must happen. (Bruner, 2001, p.15)

A crucial catalyst for story-telling, in this understanding of the uses of narrative, is therefore the unexpected. I would posit that intrinsic to adoption is a profound rupture with what is, arguably, the canonical or expected course of events in human development, in family life and, ultimately, in self-identity. For all parties personally involved in adoption - whether it be the birth-parents who are not able adequately to look after their children and are obliged to relinquish their parental responsibility over them, the adoptive parents who were not able to have their own biological children, or

the adopted children who are removed from their birth-parents - at the heart of the adoption is a rupture from the normative, 'to be expected' life trajectory. Adoption proceeds, for all those concerned, from a place of loss; it is a traumatic life event that requires huge psychological adjustments for all those involved.

Bruner also posits that we turn to storytelling in our negotiation of what he terms "the dialectic of the established and the possible" (op. cit. p.13):

> The canonical and the possible are forever in dialectical tension with each other. And this tension especially impels and afflicts […] life. For tales from life – autobiography, self-referent narrative generally ("self-making') – have as their purpose to keep the two manageably together, past and possible, in an endless dialectic. (op. cit. p.14)

Whilst adoption may come out of a history of loss and/or trauma what impels this social practice is a sense of hope and possibility; the hope is that the life-stories of the protagonists of adoption can be rectified and given a happy ending through the creation of a new family unit - 'the forever family' (Houghton, 2007). In this sense infertile couples turning to adoption as a means of having a family and becoming parents might be seen as taking their story into their own hands and turning the impossible into the possible; this might also be construed as an act of authorship, a taking control of the plot and so, of the story they can tell.

What we know about the realities of adoption may make us circumspect about thinking about adoption stories in terms of 'happy-ever-after' stories however I would suggest that, through adoption, there is an attempt to give a more conventional shape and structure to lives gone awry. In so doing the unspeakable is made speakable: experiences that can be talked about as stories that can be told, and heard:

> […] for it is the conventionalization of narrative that converts individual experience into collective coin, which can be circulated […] on a base wider than the merely interpersonal one. (op. cit. p.15)

At the same time Bruner reminds us that:

> Great narrative is an invitation to problem finding, not a lesson in problem solving. It is deeply about plight, about the road rather than about the inn to which it leads. (op. cit. p.20)

What interests the listener or the audience is not so much the resolution, but the 'how' of the story, the conflicts, the trials and tribulations. Indeed, Bruner reflects, we are

suspicious of stories that are too neat or well told as they smack of 'ulteriority' (op. cit. p.5).

Riessman is another narrative theorist who, coming to qualitative research from a background in psychology and clinical social work, developed a particular interest in narrative when she found that "individuals recapitulated and reinterpreted their lives through story telling" (1993, p.vi). In first approaching therapeutic conversations for analysis Riessman grappled with a fundamental technical - but also ethical - question: how to approach long stretches of talk that took the form of narrative accounts without fragmenting them into thematic categories or dissecting them. Riessman's question chimed with my own reluctance to tamper with the integrity of my research respondents' narrative accounts which motivated my decision to adopt a method of transcription and analysis that would not subject their narratives to extraneous categorization or coding (see Chapter 4). In line with Bruner, Riessman holds that a primary way individuals make sense of experience - especially difficult life transitions and trauma - is by casting it in narrative form. When we narrate we create plots from disordered experience and

> […] precisely because they are essential meaning-making structures, narratives must be preserved not fractured, by investigators, who must respect respondents' ways of constructing meaning and analyzing how it is accomplished. (op. cit. p. 4)

At the same time Riessman posits that research is inevitably another form of story telling as we put our research materials into a particular order, "constructing texts in particular contexts" (op. cit. p.1).

Contrasting narrative studies to academic practices founded on positivist claims to realism, Riessman underlines that in narrative analysis language is understood as "deeply constitutive of reality": informants' stories, she argues, "[…] do not mirror a 'world out there'. They are constructed, creatively authored, rhetorical, replete with assumptions, and interpretative " (op. cit. p.5). Because narrative approaches give prominence to human agency and imagination, they lend themselves to studies of subjectivity and identity. Bruner similarly affirmed the use of narrative in 'self' construction and Murray (2003) talks about the 'narrative identity' we create in the stories we tell for both others and ourselves. This view of narrative informed my first

examination of the research participants' accounts, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

What then is a narrative?

Riessman (2008) states that there is no binding theory of narrative but rather great conceptual diversity, with disagreement about the precise definition of narrative (1993). She advocates for the drawing of some boundaries around the concept as, she states: "all talk and text is not narrative" (2008, p.5).

Riessman presents different definitions of narrative along a continuum of applications, from "the very restrictive" definition of social linguistics, in which narrative refers to a discreet unit of discourse, an extended answer by a research participant to a single questions, topically centered and temporally organized. At the other end of the continuum she places applications in social history and anthropology, where narrative can refer to an entire life story woven from threads of diverse material, including interviews, observations and documents. In the middle "of this continuum of working definitions" are applications in psychology and sociology research where:

> […] personal narrative encompasses long sections of talk-extended accounts
> of lives in context that develop over the course of single or multiple research
> interviews or therapeutic conversations. (op. cit. p.6)

With the research interview in mind, Riessman offers her own working definition of oral storytelling as a section of talk in which:

> A speaker connects events into a sequence that is consequential for later
> action and for the meanings that the speaker wants listeners to take away
> from the story. Events perceived by the speaker as important are selected,
> organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful to a particular audience
> (op. cit. p. 3)

Having previously made a distinction between story and narrative, postulating that a story is only one of several kinds of narrative with others such as hypothetical and habitual narratives, more recently she has come to use the terms 'story' and 'narrative' interchangeably according to contemporary conventions.

As is described in the next chapter, in the present study, I use the terms narrative and story interchangeably, understanding its uses and functions in the terms described both by Bruner and Riessman.

Adoption narratives

In their article *Narrative and Fantasy in Adoption*, Amal Treacher and Ilan Katz (2001) bring together contemporary narrative theory and psychoanalytic theory of fantasy to understand some of the issues around the self, the family and identity that arise in adoption. The authors draw on Kirk's work on social systems of thought and "shared fate" theory in adoptive families (1959, 1964), on Ricoeur (1991,1992) and Bruner's theories (1983) on the construction of identity through narrative, and Freudian and Kleinian theories about defensive and creative uses of memory and narrative.

Treacher and Katz propose an examination of the emotional interplay between individual and family narratives, fantasy, myths and meta-narratives. They posit narrative as "the attempt to put thoughts, fantasies and events into words, and to make a coherent account of lived experience" (2001, p. 20). Underpinning their theoretical understanding is the view that fantasy is both conscious and unconscious and can involve gratification of wishes - material and emotional, fantasies of aggression, accomplishment and reparation. Alongside this viewpoint they also contend "that narratives and myths can trap those concerned " (op.cit. p. 21) and that there is a profound inter-relationship between myths held within individuals and families, and "those held and reinforced by the wider social context" (ie. meta-narratives).

Treacher and Katz claim that the dynamics of narrative and fantasy tend to be bypassed within much theoretical work in the field of adoption. Whilst recognizing that myths and narratives are not unique to adoption they posit that for those involved in adoption, the fragmented nature of normal life is multiplied considerably and therefore the importance of narrative is even greater. Treacher and Katz suggest that:

> The narrative identity perspective offers a way of understanding the nature of
> adoption, the difficult emotions that it involves and how these are expressed
> - or not - within discourses that are formed both socially and personally. (op.
> cit. p.27)

Whilst recognizing that narratives produced are only ever partial solutions they posit that a fluid and contradictory understanding of identity and narratives offers the possibility for the development of a perspective in which it is possible to face the contradictions, complexity and pain of adoption.

From transcription to analysis

Through transcription speech is given visual representation and interview conversations are turned into texts. How interviews are transcribed has to be carefully approached as this determines the form of the interview texts to be analysed. Implicit is the immediate work of interpreting by the researcher (Mishler, 1986, 1991; Kvale, 1996; Gower, 2011):

> How a phrase is heard; how a sentence is punctuated; which pieces of text are highlighted; which noises are abandoned - all become central to the interpretations of meaning which are ultimately presented (Gower, 2011, p.114).

Riessman (2008) states that the way the speech is displayed reflects theoretical commitments. For example, narrative scholars keep a story intact, treating extended accounts analytically as units and theorising from the cases themselves rather than using themes across various cases. Attention is given to how and why a particular event is storied and/or what a narrator achieves by sharing the story in that way; the effect on the listener is examined.

Gee's more linguistic approach to narrative analysis of text looks at how a narrative is *spoken* in units (1986; 1991). Gee holds that we all plan speech in units which, on analysis, are identifiable as idea units, lines, stanzas and strophes; in Gee's framework these constitute the building blocks of spoken narrative. For an analysis of this kind the text is transcribed to give visual representation to this understanding of how narratives are constructed in speech. In the development of their critical analytic approach, Emerson and Frosh (2004) adopted Gee's structural framework recognizing that his close examination of how speech is put together both "rescued meaning"; and gave access to the rhythm of the respondent's talk. The aim informing Emerson and Frosh's critical narrative methodology was to work closely with texts so the original narrator's meaning-making is privileged and not appropriated through "top-down interpretations" (op. cit. p.21). Whilst Emerson and Frosh saw in Gee's propositions "a basis for fine-grained bottom-up narrative analysis across extended stretches of spoken text" (op. cit. p.39) concerned not to strip the narrative from its context' they included the interviewer in their transcription for analysis, thus acknowledging the relational and co-constructive nature of the narrative work undertaken in interviews.

As is delineated in the next chapter in the present study applied three stages of transcription and adopted a combination of analytic methods drawing on Riessman, Gee and Emerson and Frosh's approaches as I examined the respondents accounts firstly in terms of their broad narrative sweep - the respondents' two interviews ultimately considered as two parts of the same narrative - and then zoomed in on two shorter narrative sections for a more detailed analysis of the narrative work the respondents engaged in.

4. METHOD

In this chapter I describe the methods employed in the study, focusing on the steps taken at each stage of the research: from research design and data collection to data analysis. The ethical considerations informing and influencing my approach to the research will also be discussed at this juncture.

1. The research design

The primary aim of the research being that of gaining insight into a very specific human experience - that of adopters' lived experience of adopting and parenting siblings, specifically sibling pairs - methodologically it was conceived from the outset as a qualitative empirical study. The research was then designed to reflect its two-fold focus on a) finding out about the quality of these personal experiences and b) analyzing how respondents talked about their experiences. Using the interview format as the primary research method, as the object of study was not only the content but also 'the how" of the talk, the interviews were developed as semi-structured protocols to allow research participants to talk as freely as possible about their experiences whilst covering four main areas:

1) The decision to adopt siblings
2) The process of adaption to the children and to the role of parents
3) Their views of their children's siblings relationship
4) The impact of the experience on them as individuals and as a couple

The aim and hope was to encourage the respondents to use narrative forms of discourse to 'tell their story' in whatever way or form they wished.

Given the above methodological decisions, and the time and space constraints of the present study, the research sample had to be small. My hope was to interview adoptive parents as a couple. The inclusion criteria at this initial stage was that participants would be: heterosexual couples who were childless prior to adopting and who had adopted a sibling pair of different ages a maximum of six/seven years previously. Full and half-sibling pairs were included but not step-siblings; the gender or ethnicity of the siblings was not specified. The original sampling criteria were intended to limit the

variables in the participant group so I did not include single adopters or gay/lesbian adopters or adopters of children with severe psychical disabilities.[11] As I did not seek NHS ethical approval I would not be recruiting from a CAMHS or NHS setting.

I decided to interview no more than five couples on the basis that these would furnish sufficient material for the purpose of this study. This was consonant with qualitative approaches where individual cases are studied for their value as exemplars and not with a view to finding patterns and commonalities, or making generalizations; it also would allow for participants to be interviewed more than once; furthermore it would allow for a detailed textual analysis of the interview texts.

Both the interview schedules and the research sample (the measures) underwent some modifications during the planning stages of the research; the process is described below.

2. Collecting the data

2.1. Developing the measures.

The final interview schedule was developed in four stages. Several modifications were made following the experience of doing the pilot interview and then the first research interview, as they highlighted the need to fine-tune the interview schedule in alignment with the focus of my research question, whilst allowing a more gradual approach to interviewing to make space a) to establish a research relationship (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p.45) with the research participants and b) for the interviewees to acclimatize to the interview situation and to respond to my questions at their own pace and discretion.

 The first interview schedule

The first interview schedule was largely informed by Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson's research design as presented in *Doing Qualitative research Differently: free association, narrative and interview method* (2000). Given my own psychotherapeutic

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[11] I aimed to limit the research to a standard family constellation where the children did not have additional physical disabilities requiring particular care so as to be able to focus on the challenges and rewards of sibling-pair adoption *per se*. I considered that other variables would bring other issues and questions into play.

background Hollway and Jefferson's psychoanalytic informed qualitative method felt consonant with my position as researcher, and seemed to offer a fruitful research method integrating psychoanalytic and psychosocial modes of enquiry.

Holloway and Jefferson developed an interview design involving two interviews with each research subject. In the first the interviewer follows a pre-established interview protocol with a set of questions worded so as to elicit narrative talk about the subject of enquiry (in Hollway and Jefferson's case the fear of crime); in the second tailor-made questions are formulated to address issues emerging from the first accounts, and focusing on areas in the narratives where there appeared to be tension or conflict as suggested by "contradictions, avoidances or hesitations" (op. cit. p.43). More closed questions might follow to establish factual or demographic information considered necessary for contextualization and comparisons across the sample.

I devised my first interview schedule according to this model keeping two priorities in mind: that the questions address the subject of my enquiry (by covering the four areas of the adoption experience that I had identified) and that interviewees be given the opportunity to use storied forms of talk. I used this interview schedule as the protocol for the pilot interview (see Appendix 3a, p.139). As I discuss below this first schedule raised some ethical as well as procedural issues.

Ethical considerations
In their articles on narrative and fantasy in adoption Treacher and Katz (2000; 2001) highlight that by definition adoption entails some degree of "loss, anger and confusion for all those involved". In addition, they argue, adoption touches the most basic personal and cultural issues surrounding the self and the family, making it impossible to discuss adoption without arousing deep emotions. This has ethical implications for any qualitative research on adoption that hopes to address the complexities of the experience whether it is of the adopted children, the adoptive parents or the birth parents.

At the planning stage of the research I had to consider that the interview questions about the experience of adopting and parenting siblings may inadvertently cause distress, touching on issues that could feel very personal and painful for the participant. These could include: experiences of loss around infertility or difficulties experienced

around childbearing; experiences of intrusion, inadequacy and coercion in the selection process and preparation for adoption; possible ambivalence around the adoption for both or one of the children; difficult/painful memories related to interviewees' own childhood experiences may arise; conflicts within the couple that have arisen since adoption.

Mindful of the personal and sensitive nature of the subject I was researching, and considering both the participants' potential vulnerability and my own anxiety in the interview situation, I was aware that the interviews would require sensitivity towards the participants and clarity of focus. To help participants feel at ease in the interviews I would try, as far possible, to conduct the interviews at a time and place convenient to them. Further, whilst I would have an estimated duration for the interviews, this would be flexible to accommodate the participants' situation and emotional capacity, and differences in the unfolding of each interview encounter.

Procedure

Ethics approval was gained from Birkbeck University of London. Participants were given information about the research (Appendix 1) and also asked to sign a consent form (Appendix 2). This required participants to sign that they had been informed about the nature of this study and had willingly consented to taking part. They also signed that they understood that the content would be kept confidential, that they were over 16 and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

At the first meeting with each set of participants I introduced myself clarifying my position as academic researcher; explained the rationale of my study, the focus of the research and the aims of the interview; explained the interview process and stated that they could pause or stop the interviews at any point; invited the participants to respond to my questions as they wished, saying as little or as much as they felt comfortable. I explained that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed but that due care would be taken to preserve the confidentiality of their material by removing any identifying information in the interviews such as their names or references to specific localities by storing any tapes or transcripts securely. Finally, with each participant I discussed what emotional support was available for them in the event that they should find the interview experience distressing. If they had nothing in place I would give them

information about the British Association of Psychotherapists, which would be able to provide them with support[12]. I made clear from the outset that they could withdraw from the project at any time.

The Pilot Interview

I carried out the pilot interview with a parent-couple - Anthony and Rose - who, seven years previously, had adopted two sisters (aged four and five at the time of placement). The girls were approaching their teens at the time of interviewing. I had social though not close connections with the family.

In our preliminary phone conversations, both Anthony and Rose expressed a keen interest in participating in research they felt might increase awareness of the issues faced by adopters. They were both interested that I was exploring the adoptive parents' viewpoint but they also told me that if I had contacted them any earlier into the adoption, when things felt less hopeful, they may not have agreed to being interviewed. They thought the seven-year point – a period longer than the time the girls had spent with their birth mother – was a key time. It seemed that the couple only felt able to participate in such a project now that they could look back at a "dark time" (their words), from a happier position.

The interview took place at the couple's home, in the middle of the day. This was possible for them as they worked together and from home. Before starting the interview I followed the procedure described above (p. 55). I told them the interview would last between an hour and an hour and a half but that they could stop the process at any point. I had eight questions planned but thought that if all the areas were not covered in the first interview they could slide to the second interview. At the beginning of the interview I stated that the questions were for them to answer ''as they liked"; I also said something to the effect that I was interested in the "story" of their experience.

The interview, in fact, lasted two hours. In this time I asked four questions from my protocol (Appendix 3a) but the fifth area was covered by the couple 'in and between' their talk. During the interview I found myself feeling less a research

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[12] I also had an information sheet to offer about the support services available to them.

interviewer than a listener/spectator in a story-telling performance. I also felt unsure the texts that were being generated were the right kind of texts for the purpose of my research project as, particularly Anthony's narratives, were long, convoluted and sometimes tangential. After an hour and a half I didn't know how to bring the interview to a close: the couple seemed to need more time whilst also conveying that the interview was an emotionally draining process (Anthony broke into tears at one point). The phrasing of my open questions intended to elicit narrative accounts, seemed to encourage the telling of their story in all its convoluted and unprocessed complexity. The interview produced very rich and complex narrative accounts encompassing childhood experiences, family histories and many sub-plots. On the one hand I felt the time constraint was too limiting and on the other that my open, narrative question approach had been emotionally uncontaining. The complexity of Anthony and Rose's experience and the feelings they were grappling with could not be adequately encompassed in one interview but I decided not to do a second interview with this parent-couple who had already given me so much, but with whom I thought I lost sight of the focus of my study - siblings. For these reasons I decided not to include the material in the research.

The pilot interview was a very useful experience: it informed some of the methodological decisions I delineate below and it sharpened the focus of my questions. I realised I had to modify my protocol and re-think what the purpose of the two interviews would be in order for the interview experience and the narratives it would generate to be more manageable both for the interviewees and myself, particularly with the time, space and scale constraints of the study.

I was also confronted with a number of procedural/technical issues related to the differences between research and therapeutic interviews. The pilot interview had brought me face-to-face with a) the rawness of the day-to-day struggle adoptive parents may be dealing with, even those who feel things are going well, b) the arguably traumatic nature of their experience, and c) the possibility that participants may not yet have processed their experience and that in talking about it are confronted with upsetting memories. The pilot experience left me with two interesting questions: is all adoption experience traumatic or is it just difficult? And were the emotional challenges

experienced by Anthony and Rose a function of having adopted siblings or were they intrinsic to all adoption?

The questionnaire

In order to gather and collate some basic information about the sibling relationships in the families of the parent couple and of their adoptive children I prepared a simple questionnaire for the participants to complete. I considered this might provide some additional information about the parents' and the children's sibling relationships in their birth families that may not arise in the interviews but I planned to present the questionnaire as optional. Three out of four sets of participants completed the questionnaire (Appendix 3b, p.140). I collated the demographic information in two tables (Appendix 6, p.143)

Refining the interview schedule

The pilot interview experience instigated some amendments to the interview schedule and a change of approach to interviewing.

The change of approach involved the decision to make the first interview very open, and to approach it as an opportunity for the participating couple and myself to meet each other, for me to give a brief explanation of my project and for us to discuss any queries the participants might have about me, issues about confidentiality, the purpose of the project etc. In this design my opening question would be aimed at allowing participants to tell me what they wanted about their life as a family by making it a very open-ended question such as: 'Tell me about your life', which could be followed by a prompt elaborating the question. Once I felt that the interviewee(s)' response to my opening questions had come to a natural conclusion I could turn to the interview protocol.

On re-examining the protocol used in the pilot interview I realised that Q1 (Appendix 3a, p.139) - "Can you tell me about how you came to adopt" – was ethically problematical as it required interviewees to address their experiences of loss around infertility or difficult experiences around childbearing, when this was not the focus of

the study[13].   Furthermore Q7 - "Has the adoption brought up issues from your childhood" - seemed clumsy and out of place in a research context. It seemed more appropriate to allow such links to occur naturally through the interview exchange, and only if made by the interviewee spontaneously.   Following these considerations I removed these questions from the interview schedule, reducing the total number of planned questions to five (Appendix 4, p.141). The formulation of these questions would vary according to if or how my areas of focus had been touched on in the participants' first account.   As my questions were framed so as to remain quite open I hoped so to allow interviewees - whom I expected to interview as parent-couples - to respond in ways that they were comfortable with and to allow them to tell me as much or as little as they wish.

With this interview design the general aim of the first interview would be to elicit accounts of the participants' family life, and possibly of earlier experiences from the beginning of the adoption. The concern here was partly to allow for differences in the parent-couple's accounts and the resulting interaction/dynamic between the couple as they responded to these differences.

The second interview could be more structured, with a series of relatively open questions aimed at encouraging narratives on the main areas I wanted to cover but also picking up on points in the first transcription text that I wanted the couple to elaborate on.   Importantly, a three-week interval between the first and second interview would allow time for an initial transcription and analytical reading of the first interview conversation to identify where the contradictions, avoidances or hesitations might indicate areas to follow up in the second interview.

This was the interview schedule (Appendix 4, p.141) that I used with my first research participants, Susan and Gordon.

Including reflexivity
The third version of the interview schedule emerged out of my experience of interviewing Susan and Gordon. In my interviews with this parent-couple, Hollway and

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[13] In retrospect I thought this may have been a factor affecting the heightened emotional 'temperature' in the pilot interview which I opened with this question.

Jefferson's notion of the anxious and defended […] researcher and research subject seemed very much in action as we negotiated our respective positions in relation to each other in the interview encounter and as they - as interviewees - worked out what they could/couldn't say and what to present to me as they tried to make and give sense of their experience with their two adopted children.   In retrospect one of the things I realised was difficult to address was their ambivalence about being interviewed.   At this stage of the research I had not made space within the interview protocol for interviewees to reflect about the interview experience with me but, as I brought the second interview to a close, Gordon and Susan made some comments that raised my awareness of their mixed feelings about being interviewed and how strenuous an experience it had been for them.

This informed my decision to begin the second interview with a question that would allow interviewees to feedback on their experience of the first interview, and reflect on any impact it might have had on them in the time between interviews, ie. How did the interview leave them feeling? Had it provoked any further thoughts or conversations? (Appendix 5, p.142)

2.2. Recruiting participants

I planned to recruit research participants through private adoption agencies, post-adoption services, word-of-mouth and through the Adoption UK on-line noticeboard. By not recruiting participants from a clinical context I hoped to get a range of research subjects but also to be able to gain insight into adoptive families where the issues grappled with would not be extreme, pathological or requiring clinical/social intervention. Particularly following the pilot experience I expected a degree of self-selection to take place[14].

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[14] If couples were in contact with their adoption and using their post-adoption services, such as parenting groups and/or this might indicate that they were experiencing some difficulties in the adoption that were leading them to still seek help.   On the other hand couples coming forward might be willing to be interviewed because there was enough stability in the family for them to be ready to reflect on their experience. In both cases I expected there would be a high degree of emotional and personal investment in the subject.

Taking stock

Difficulties in recruiting participants delayed the project. My original plan – as outlined above - was to interview couples together in order to be able to allow for possibilities of joint – similar and differing – sense-making of the experience between the couple within the interview event/situation and therefore to allow for difference to emerge from within the couple's shared experience of adoption. However, the difficulty I had in recruiting couples obliged me to re-consider this restriction particularly since interest in participating was expressed by individuals whose partner could not also be present. This clearly pointed to there being a number of significant obstacles – both on logistical and emotional levels – to couples coming forward. In response to this impasse I extended the interview sample by a) not limiting my interviews to couples as long as individuals coming forward adopted as part of a couple and b) extending the age-range of the adopted children. It could be argued that the reticence of adoptive parents to be interviewed as couples is in itself significant data and an important communication about a difficulty experienced at the interface between private family life and the social, semi-public sphere which the interview situation may represent.

The final research sample:

The research sample consisted of two couples and two individual participants, one woman and one man. All participants were in a heterosexual couple and had adopted a sibling pair as per the criteria for participation. However, the age-range of the participants' children was wider than planned in the original criteria, as is the 'age' of the adoptive family, with one participant having adopted twelve years previously being the mother of now adolescent children. As the aim of the research was to look at individual and subjective experiences for their intrinsic value rather than to draw conclusions through finding commonalities in the experiences of a homogenous sample, I considered that these variations would not risk invalidating any findings.

The interview subjects shared a history of infertility with the experience of not having been able to conceive, either naturally or through IVF; the fact of not being able to have birth children being mentioned spontaneously by all four sets of interviewees. Other commonalities that emerged through the recruiting process were that all the participants were middle-aged, White-British, middle-class professional, features they also had in common with the researcher/interviewer. A further characteristic shared by a number of

participants, though not all, was that prior to adopting their own children they had worked with children and/or adoption professionally, whether through education, pediatrics, social work or mental health. Additionally half of the participants were either involved with or expressed an interest in research and/or writing about adoption themselves; indeed, one participant was in the process of writing a book about her adoption experience and had a blog[15].

2.3 Doing the interviews

As stated above I conducted two interviews with each set of participants with an interval of no more than three weeks between interviews. Interviews were recorded and I kept a research diary where I wrote some process notes and reflections about the interview experience. In doing the interviews I used the interview schedule as a guide to the interview whilst remaining open to the natural unfolding of the interview as a conversation. This ensured that the same broad areas of the experience of adopting siblings were talked about by all the respondents; these were: their decision to adopt siblings, their process of adaption to the children and to the role of parents, their views of their children's sibling relationship and the impact of the experience on them as individuals and as a couple. If one of these areas was talked about spontaneously by the respondents, or was embedded or woven into their accounts, the interview question was not posed, allowing the respondents' narratives to be the point of access to these experiences.

3. Analysing the data

3.1. Transcribing the interviews: an interpretative process

The first step towards analysing the data was the transcription process. My interest in how narratives work and the work that narratives do (Mishler, 1995) goes hand in hand with an understanding of personal narrative as co-constructed through 'subject to subject meaning-making' (Emerson and Frosh). As these authors point out this position is based on contemporary social science assumptions about knowledge as contextual, the inevitability of interpretation and the validity of subjective knowledge. Mishler (1989; 1991), Gergen (1994), Riessman (1993; 2008) and others, assert that

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[15] I consider the impact of this on me as a researcher and how it influenced the interview interchange with Susan and Gordon in the following chapter.

transcription is theory driven, that it reflects the assumptions of the researcher, is an interpretative practice and an analytical process. Transcribing speech into text involves making choices, ie. what to include or exclude from the text, how much detail to include and thus make available for interpretation.

This view of transcription remembers the researcher as a subject who, in the act of listening to the interview conversation and transcribing it into text, is involved in meaning-making and interpreting. I would argue that this view dovetails with relational and psychoanalytic theoretical perspectives and techniques that utilise the feelings and responses of the psychotherapist to interpret the interchange between therapist and patient: the psychotherapist or psychoanalyst includes him/herself in the interpretation of the material. Here too, context is essential to knowledge. My approach to transcription reflects my intention to situate this research within a social constructionist frame that also recognises the relational aspect of interview-based research, in which there is room to consider interviewer and interviewee as having a psychic reality as well as a recognition that unconscious processes play a part in human interaction. To show the joint discursive, relational, or co-constructive work involved in the emergence of personal narratives during the interview, I included myself as interviewer in the transcripts thus making my interactions with the respondents an integral part of the narrative analysis.

There were three stages of transcription:

A)   Following an initial transcription of the interview conversations into raw text, I listened to each interview again several times adding the hesitations, repetitions, fillers, unclear words, pauses and incomplete sentences into the transcription. As I intended firstly to analyse each respondent's interview texts as a whole narrative, I was concerned not to fragment the text and to make it visually uncluttered. Thus I decided not try to transcribe the modulations of the voice (pitch glides, tone or changes in volume). In transcribing my interviews with couples I was interested in making visible how the couple spoke in relation to each other as they co-constructed their narrative, responding to each other as well as to me. Here I paid particular attention to represent how the respondents took turns (including the points in which they interrupted or handed over the talk), the non-verbal utterances and locutions they used to comment on, punctuate or encourage their partner's account, making their contribution visible on the page.

B)   After converting the interview conversation into text, and numbering the lines, further readings of the text allowed me to identify the different narratives emerging across the interviews, deciding their beginning and end, giving them headings and sub-headings taken from the interview text itself (see Appendices 7A-D, pp. 144-168). This part of the process was a way of organizing the text so as to make visible the sequencing and interweaving of stories and themes within the broader narrative as they emerged during the interview, so that they were more immediately accessible to me. Through this process I sought to maintain to make the content of the whole interview easily accessible and available: the result of this textual work was a kind of index of narratives.

C)   To undertake a more detailed analysis of the narrative work engaged in by the interviewees I adopted Gee's (1991) approach to transcription which he conceived to bring into evidence the micro-components of narrative discourse. As I discuss in more detail below I undertook this more detailed work with just two narrative sections selected from interviews with different participants.

3.2. A three-step approach to analysing the data: applying narrative and thematic methods

My first approach to analysing the data was informed by my experience of the uniqueness of the research relationship that I established with each set of respondents, my feeling that the interview texts were inseparable from the context in which they were generated and by my sense that in each set of interviews there was a narrative thrust, that is, a dominant narrative or story that the respondents wanted to tell (and which I contributed to). I felt very strongly that to do justice to the rich personal accounts that the respondents gave of their experiences I had to consider them in their entirety, as extended narratives.   To this end I engaged in multiple readings of the transcribed interview texts, shifting from a micro to a macro perspective, from examining grammar, phraseology and linguistic tropes used by the respondents to stepping back to get an overview of the interview.   Governing my analysis was what I saw as the recurring theme(s) weaving through the interviewees' response to my questions, what they seemed to be doing with their narratives, how they positioned themselves as psychosocial subjects, what kind of narrative identity they constructed and what I thought I was left with after each interview.   In this process analysis and interpretation went together: whilst I did not make systematic use of the psychoanalytic

countertransference as an interpretative tool, I would claim that I inevitably brought my subjectivity as researcher to bear in my close reading of the material and that this included my feelings before, during and after the interviews.

The second approach was to draw out what the respondents said about siblings: for this I conducted a thematic analysis across the interviews. This part of the analysis was topic-based and involved scanning the interview texts for points in the interview conversation where the focus was explicitly on this subject. Whilst the respondents' narratives contained many other themes[16], my readings here were focused on selecting data pertaining directly to the subject of my research: the parental experience of adopting and then living with, and being the adoptive parents of, a sibling pair. I found eighteen themes, which are discussed in the next chapter.

My third approach to the material was to undertake a detailed narrative analysis of two shorter narrative sections selected from interviews with two different sets of respondents: Susan and Gordon, the first couple I interviewed, and Keith, whom I interviewed on his own. I purposefully chose one example from an interview with a couple and one from an interview with an individual in order to consider the influence on the material generated of the different interview relationships set up by the triadic or dyadic interaction. As I was applying Gee's narrative method I adopted his terminology and his repertoire of tasks: firstly, I selected the narrative from the raw interview text which had been transcribed just to identify the different speakers; secondly, I re-transcribed the narrative part a) inserting line breaks to indicate the pacing of the respondents speech around phrases, pauses and hesitations b) including fillers, repetitions, hesitations and interruptions and c) beginning to identify the units in the narrative; thirdly, I conducted a close examination of how the narrative was constructed by identifying its constituent parts - the units or building blocks of the narrative - according to Gee's analytic approach of arranging text in lines, stanzas and strophes: the stanzas are constituted by a group of lines with a common theme, particular point of view or argument; the strophe is formed by a pair or group of related stanzas. To each narrative part, strophe and stanza I gave a heading according to what I took to be the organizing idea or argument of each unit. I have chosen to apply Gee's arrangement of text in verse form as this method of analysis gives access to the rhythm of the talk as well as to the succession of ideas in the narrative.

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[16] See Chapter 6 for a discussion of these "contextual" themes.

5. FINDINGS

In this chapter I present my findings as they emerged through the three stages of the research: firstly I describe my experience of doing the four sets of interviews, give an overview of what the respondents talked about and present my preliminary understanding of the dominant narratives in the respondents' talk about their adoption experience; secondly I present the findings that emerged from a thematic analysis of the accounts the participants gave of adopting and parenting siblings; thirdly I look at the findings that emerged from a narrative analysis of discreet sections of the interview texts which focused on siblings.

1. Talking about adoption: The experience of doing the interviews

Despite the constant of the interview schedule, which ensured that the respondents talked about the same broad areas of their adoption experience, something very different happened in each set of interviews. The experience of conducting the interviews highlighted the interview meeting as a context-bound event - specifically located in time and space and determined by the social practice and conventions of research interviewing - and revealed how even in the brief and task-focused research relationship (developed both in the process of setting up and in the unfolding of the interviews) a complex web of conscious and unconscious assumptions comes into play between interviewee(s) and interviewer, as argued by Mishler (1986), Kvale (1996) and Emerson and Frosh (2004). The material available for analysis was partly determined by these factors, as well as by the peculiarities of the individual interview subjects (their age, sex, family history and professional identity), and by the number of respondents in the interview: two sets of interviews were conducted with an individual respondent, as only one person of the parent couple was able to participate in the interviews, and two interviews were conducted with two respondents. Consequently some of the texts generated were the product of a dyadic interaction and others of a triadic interaction, a factor that, as will be discussed below, had a significant impact on the quality of the respondents' talk and on how they constructed their narratives. There were also

variations in the setting and timing of the interviews and in their backstory; that is, how the participants were recruited and how the participants made room in their daily lives to take part in the research.

I interviewed each set of participants twice following the procedure and method described in Chapter 4.

The brief accounts of the four sets of interviews that follow, given in the order in which they took place, illustrate how some of these factors came into play in the interview encounters. I give an overview of each interview and then put forward what I felt to be the central or dominant communication of each of the participants' narratives, as encapsulated by statements they made during the interview conversation. I also offer my first impression of what each participant was doing *with* and *through* the interview situation, reflecting on my own responses to each of the interviews and my sense of what story 'I was left with' after the interview encounters.

1.1 Susan and Gordon

I was put in touch with Susan and Gordon by a publisher friend who had been contacted by Susan's literary agent in relation to a book she was writing about her experience of adopting her two children. From this I assumed that as an interviewee Susan would be someone accustomed to reflecting about and 'storying' her experience: a research participant already aware of her authorial voice.

We agreed to meet mid-week, over a lunch-time when Gordon could come home from work and the children, Joseph and Sally, would be at school. As I was travelling by train from London, and the family lived in a rural area, Susan offered to collect me from the station; she also provided lunch. The couple's hospitality and the logistical issues they had negotiated to be able to be interviewed together emphasized Susan and Gordon's generosity in undertaking to participate in my research, a feeling enhanced by my awareness that Susan was authoring a book about her adoption experience. These factors may have contributed to my tentativeness with Susan and Gordon with whom I was particularly mindful not to cross any emotional boundaries.

A peculiarity of my interviews with this parent couple was that in both the encounters there were periods of time before and after the interviews when I was alone with Susan, and the conversation about adoption continued outside the framework of the interview. This confronted me with the dilemma of how or if to include the material that came out of these more impromptu and spontaneous conversations, particularly since it was here that Susan was at her most animated, conveying a profound sense of grievance about the absence of systematic post-adoption support for children like Sally and Joseph and giving voice to a politicized side of her that the interviews did not fully bring out. I have tried to resolve this by entitling the two interview texts with statements made by Susan that seemed to best capture her voice.

For the sequence of narratives and sub-narratives drawn from the interview texts see Appendix 7A (pp. 144-150)

1.1.1 Interview 1: "Nothing prepares you for the reality of what it's like"

The first interview lasted fifty minutes, and was briefer than I expected, perhaps because of a general awareness of time pressure and my own caution and anxiety about the emotional demands I might be placing on Susan and Gordon through the interview process, and anxiety perhaps heightened by the fact that this was my first interview. I felt the conversation to be somewhat restrained and guarded, with Susan and Gordon choosing their words very carefully as they gauged what they wanted or felt able to say; however, the transcription process and a first reading of the interview text revealed that nonetheless our conversation had generated rich and complex material.

To my opening question about what they could tell me about their life as a family at the present time, Gordon replied that they had just been through a difficult period because of the emotional impact on their son Joseph of his transition to secondary school. Gordon speculated about whether the difficulties they encountered with the transition were specific to adoption or part of normal development. As Gordon and Susan talked in this opening part of the interview they conveyed that whilst they were telling me about the present challenges, this was in the context of long-standing difficulties for Joseph. Gordon said that the difference was that now, seven years into the adoption, they felt better equipped to manage their children's difficulties. Susan went on to explain that they had recently chanced on the right kind of specialist help: a social

worker who had finally given them a kind of 'tool kit' which had given them the confidence to take control when situations escalated and Joseph needed restraining, something they had feared doing before.

When the parent-couple's responses to my opening question seemed to come to a natural end I moved the focus of the interview into thinking about the siblings' relationship, at which point Susan and Gordon talked about the intensity of the competitiveness between Joseph and Sally and about their contrasting behaviour, describing Joseph as more demonstrative and inclined to act-out and Sally as having a worrying tendency to internalize her feelings and withdraw. They commented that both children had outbursts after which, in their own ways, they were flooded with shame. Both parents felt that although Joseph was the more difficult to manage Sally was perhaps the more worrying in the long term because they found her harder to reach: "It might be a ticking time bomb", Gordon said about their daughter.

My next, somewhat tentative, question about the constellation of relationships within the family unit led to a section of talk in which the couple carefully negotiated how to speak of both children's much more intense attachment to Susan. At this point, perhaps due to my own anxiety, I asked a question that I thought would open the possibility of telling me a story: the question about their decision to adopt siblings. Here Gordon talked about his feeling that two siblings made a family complete, linking this to his own family experience of being one of two siblings. However, when asked about their previous thoughts about what parenting siblings would entail Susan talked about underestimating the demands of adopting siblings 'on every level' and feeling that there was a real discrepancy between the reality of the experience and the information given to them in the pre-adoption training.

In remembering 'the early days' of the siblings' adoption, Susan gave an account of both children's need to be babied and in particular Joseph's need for intense mothering and the playing of baby games; she linked this to the siblings' treatment by their birth mother who had favoured Sally and had been uninterested in Joseph. In the process of remembering the first two years with their adopted children, the intensity with which they attached to their adoptive mother and how all-consuming parenting them had been,

Gordon expressed his regret at having returned to work too soon and commented on the inadequacy of statutory paternity leave for adopters.

From this first encounter an interesting difference emerged in the way the couple talked about their experiences of adoption. Gordon had a tendency to normalize their experiences, whereas Susan placed a greater emphasis on the extra-ordinary emotional demands of adoption. Their language was also different, Gordon seemingly more inclined to use commonplaces and figures of speech ("When the chips are down they'll stick together like glue", "There is no silver bullet"). However, it was a statement made by Susan - "Nothing prepares you for the reality of what it's like" - that stayed with me after the encounter and that, after an examination of the interview text and re-listening to the recording, seemed most accurately to encapsulate the thrust of this parent couple's narrative in the first interview.

1.1.2. Interview 2: " I've now got adoption glasses on and the whole world looks different"

In the first interview Susan had hinted at their dilemma around how much to tell people about the realities of adoption, and the difficulty of talking to people who 'don't appreciate the situation'. It became clear in this second interview that for these adoptive parents, negotiating the dilemma about how or if to talk to others about the daily realities of parenting their children was a significant aspect of their experience and one in which Susan and Gordon's needs differed, the former voicing a sense of isolation and her need for 'a few more people to talk to' and the latter expressing his wish to maintain 'a group of friends who weren't always second-guessing' what he was going through.

When I encouraged further reflection on their experience of parenting siblings, Susan and Gordon said that the specific emotional demands and consequences of sibling adoption were not discussed in their pre-adoption process. Susan talked about the all-consuming and desperate intensity of the children's competitiveness for her attention and nurturing and then told me about how they had had to learn to recognize, and talk to the children about the limits of their own resources as parents. But it was when talking about the interface with other people, outside their small family unit, that the interview conversation changed tenor: from being together in giving *me* an account of their

parenting experiences, Susan and Gordon entered a discussion *with each other* around what could helpfully be shared with others about the realities of their family life. Their agreed conclusion seemed to be that very little could be shared with those not directly involved with adoption because, Susan stated grimly, "the myth still rules that once they are placed they are fine".

Then, reflecting on the strangeness of their first encounter with the children, and the contrast between the high emotions aroused by meeting Joseph and Sally for the first time, and the form-filling required by a new set of social workers, Gordon conveyed his indignation about how this moment - which he described as being the equivalent of the birth of their children - was spoiled by the reminder, to the last, of the bureaucratic processes through which their family had come into being.

Susan and Gordon talked poignantly about their different experiences of taking on their parent identities, from the 'terrifying' experience of having two children to take care of and feeling they didn't know how to parent, to a sense for Susan of 'appearing out of nowhere as a parent' in the public domain. They also spoke about how, in the early phase of the adoption, they experienced Joseph and Sally's birth-parents as a real threat; here Susan told the story of when she unwittingly allowed herself to be photographed with the children for a local newspaper and how this allowed their birth-parents to locate them, leading to a frightening time of hearing about the birth-parents' threats against them and their renewed attempts to have the adoption order revoked. The couple's narrative conveyed how their newly formed adoptive family was a very fragile entity.

At the end of the second interview, although at this stage in my research I had not included a reflective question about their experience of the interview in the interview schedule, Susan and Gordon spontaneously communicated their ambivalence about the interview process and the strain the interviews had put them under, firstly by turning the attention on me and jokingly expressing some suspicion as to my motivation, asking if I was in fact thinking of adopting myself, and then describing the process of talking about their experience as 'bloodletting'. This graphically rendered the painfulness of talking about their adoption experience and their sense of their being a certain self-sacrifice

involved, as well as perhaps an idea of talking being something of a purging process. It was a visually powerful, somewhat violent metaphor that Gordon had used.

On analysis I realized that the recurring theme in these respondents' talk - that of their conflict around what they felt could or couldn't be talked about with those outside of adoption was played out in their interviews. Whilst I had warmed to this parent couple, grateful maybe for their willingness to engage and, as a new researcher, relieved at the narrative work they did despite the rawness of their feelings, I felt they had remained guarded. Possibly for Susan, who was authoring a book about her adoption experience and thinking about a readership, there was an additional question about ownership of her experience/material. Again it was something Susan said that resonated for me after the interview and seemed most clearly to communicate the transformative impact that the adoption experience had had on her: "I've now got adoption glasses on and the whole world looks different." Perhaps this chimed with me who, as a new researcher and trainee child psychotherapist, was also looking at the world through different lenses.

1.2. Cate

I was put in touch with Cate through work colleagues, fellow therapists who had worked with her and knew her to be the adoptive mother of a sibling pair and someone interested in research.   Cate did indeed show interest in participating and conveyed her commitment to research on adoption: she had completed research on the subject and before adopting herself had been professionally involved in adoption as a social worker. Cate participated on her own; in our communications to arrange the interviews she let me know that as well as being by nature somebody who didn't like talking about personal experiences, her husband was finding their now adolescent sons difficult, which made it all the more unlikely that he would want to be interviewed. Of the four parent couples in the present study, Cate and Mike were the only ones with teenage children (Appendix 6, p. 129); Cate was the interviewee with the longest adoption experience, having seen her adopted sons through their early years, middle childhood and now adolescence. At the time of interviewing Chris and Tom were respectively seventeen and fifteen years old and both involved in making contact with their birth fathers.

Cate chose to come to my workplace to be interviewed, a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) she was familiar with in a professional capacity; the interviews took place in one of the consulting rooms, a setting we were both familiar with and which leant a certain neutrality to the encounter.

For the sequence of narratives and sub-narratives drawn from Cate's interview texts see Appendix 7B (pp. 151-156).

1.2.1 Interview 1: " I feel like I have had to be a mum and dad to the boys"

Cate's initial response to my opening questions about how life was as a family for them at the present time was to want to put the present into context: the boys had always been challenging but had become even more so in the last year. Cate explained that was partly due to what was happening in the boys' education: the eldest and cleverest of the two brothers, Chris, having 'given up education', whilst the youngest, Tom, had been moved from a mainstream school to a pupil referral unit and wanted to leave school altogether like his brother. She also told me, by way of context, that she had always had a close relationship with the boys, that as the only woman in the family she had always had a mediating role between the boys and their adoptive father and that being 'in the business' of families and adoption had not made parenting her own adoptive children any easier.

When I encouraged Cate to think about her experience of adopting siblings, she talked about how she experienced the siblings' differences. She had found Chris easier to warm to and to parent from the beginning of the adoption, whereas she had always found Tom harder work and more emotionally intense. Cate concluded this train of thought with the understanding she felt she had reached over the years that the brothers' apparently contrasting behaviours were intimately connected ("two sides of the same coin").

Cate talked of starting out in the process of adoption not only with the intention of adopting two siblings but also of wanting to adopt boys; she attributed this to there being 'a story' in her family of boys having a better deal. Further, in her narrative one of the surprises that came with her sons growing into adolescence was that rather than their adoptive father's relationship with them becoming more important her role had

extended to taking on what she had previously perceived as more fatherly functions such as boundary setting and 'having certain conversations with them'. Indeed, much of Cate's thinking about adopting and parenting the two brothers – as captured in the title of this section – was around the roles she felt it had entailed for her as their adoptive mother, how this had been negotiated within the parent couple relationship and how it had impacted on her self-identity. Cate talked of having drawn strength from this experience, whilst she had seen her husband lose confidence and his relationship with their sons deteriorate.

Cate described a surprising, even paradoxical development in her adoption story, as in thinking back to her and Mike's first meeting with the children, Cate remembered her nervousness in contrast to the apparent ease with which her husband had encountered the children and her feelings of jealousy at the time. Now, in view of Mike's negative response to the challenges of his sons' adolescence, Cate seemed to wonder about her husband's original commitment to the children and to the adoption. The longitudinal perspective afforded by Cate's twelve-year experience as an adoptive mother allowed her narrative to include memories of family life with Chris and Tom at pre-school age when her husband was 'very interested in them' and when Chris was Tom's main 'attachment figure'; her experience of managing and supporting them through primary school where both brothers had difficulties; how she had advocated for them both - but particularly Chris - in the face of repeated exclusions. She then came full circle back to the present, which she described as "a strange moment" of having to learn to step back as the mother of now adolescent boys.

1.2.2. Interview 2: " I can be a lot stronger than I ever thought I could be"

As by now I had introduced a reflective question at the beginning of the second interview - "Have you had any thoughts about the first interview, how you felt about it, since we met?" - Cate was able to talk about her feelings about the first interview. In her response Cate conveyed that she had enjoyed the experience of the interview, partly because she never tired of talking about her sons and partly because she found it therapeutic to think retrospectively "about the kind of journey we've been through together."

Cate then briefly returned to talking about the personal challenge she currently faced with her loss of influence in her adolescent boys' lives and having to 'step back', implicitly conveying her sense of loss.   I then took Cate back to thinking about the experience of parenting siblings and the impact on her of her sons' sibling relationship. Cate talked about what it meant to "manage the two of them", including her assumptions about sibling rivalry and the change in their relationship as they had grown up. She talked about the actual daily challenge of meeting the boys' different needs, how her role in their relationship had changed and about how her understanding of the differences between the boys had also shifted over the years, particularly with regard to the brothers' different forms of aggression.

Cate located the main challenge in parenting the siblings over the years in managing the "difference between them".   One of the differences that seems to have had an organizing influence on her understanding of the boys is their different intellectual abilities: "Chris is the bright one; Tom's not so bright" Cate said, as a statement of fact. The story that followed about Tom's persistently negative outlook, his defiance at home, and the more intense relationship she had with him - "an emotional rollercoaster" - concluded with Cate's returning to the painful reality of Tom's recent transfer to a pupil referral unit.   Later in the interview, Cate described how Chris's challenging behaviour was mostly located at school, and gave a detailed account of the very active role she took in fighting for her children "in the outside world", particularly in confronting the Head Teacher and challenging the school's policy of exclusion in her sons' case. Cate implied that this showed a lack of understanding of her two sons' profound emotional difficulties: "I gave her a book I had in my bag about attachment and separation."

Cate's account of her experience of parenting the siblings deemphasized emonstrated her roles as their advocate, as referee and as arbiter, both inside and outside the home setting.   The acuteness of the present crisis, which she located in the escalation of negativity between Tom and her husband, was revealed when she stated "Mike's got to the stage where he feels Tom has got to go": the integrity/survival of the adoptive family was at risk. This statement was made within the context of a number of themes which wove through the interview conversation: that of Mike (and others) attributing greater competence and expertise to Cate because of her professional knowledge; that of

the brothers' active search for their respective birth fathers and, in Chris' case, his actual contact with his birth dad; and that of the influence of Mike and Cate's respective family experiences as children on their parenting, their couple relationship and on the family dynamics ("It's a mirror image"; "We are trying to work out how we manage things with the experience we both had").

Cate's ease and familiarity with the process of reflecting and talking with someone about personal experiences was present in the interview encounters from the outset. This is apparent in the interview texts where Cate's talk is more fluid and her narratives more continuous than in Susan and Gordon's material, having required less prompting from me during our interview conversation. I would attribute the fluidity of Cate's talk firstly to the fact that the interchange was between two rather than three people, making for a relationally (or psychodynamically) less complex interview encounter. Secondly, in this set of interviews interviewer and respondent shared a familiarity with the clinical and the consulting room setting, which as a work environment was a reasonably neutral territory for both of us. Thirdly, both of us had experience in research and therapeutic interviewing and implicitly recognized our shared knowledge of therapeutic discourse and practice (although with different theoretical frameworks and clinical specialisms). All these factors along with our common gender, similar age and professional identities made for an interview encounter where the balance of power was relatively evenly distributed. The impact on the interview conversation was that I was perhaps a less questioning interlocutor, but was more firmly in a listening role. In addition Cate's own reflexivity and self-questioning meant that perhaps I took what she said more at face value during the interview encounter. All the above contributed to an interchange where Cate had longer uninterrupted goes at talking, producing longer stretches of more or less fluent text. A further factor contributing to this was that Cate came alone to be interviewed. Without her husband with whom to negotiate the interview situation and check or compare her responses against, the authoring of Cate's narratives went more or less unchecked (except for her own self-checking and self-correcting), with just one other, the interviewer, witnessing and participating in the construction of her narratives. This perhaps was also what allowed the broad narrative of Cate's story to have one of individual empowerment: as captured in the section title the story Cate tells of her experience as an adoptive mother is of discovering personal resources she 'didn't know she had.'

1.3 Deborah and Alastair

Deborah contacted me in response to one of the 'calls for research participants' I had placed on various adoption and parenting websites; she was the only one of the research participants who had actively sought an opportunity to participate in research. Deborah was keen to be interviewed, but initially it seemed unlikely that she and her husband Alastair could participate together because of work and child-care commitments. However, in the time it took to arrange the first interview their circumstances changed and it became possible for Deborah and Alastair to participate as a parent couple. The interviews took place in their home, at the kitchen table, the first mid-week and the second on a weekend when one of the children was at home.

For Alastair and Deborah, as with Susan and Gordon, I had a journey to make to conduct the interviews. I travelled by train to the coastal town where Deborah and Alastair had recently moved. In both cases the fact that I had to travel to relatively unknown territory to meet my research subjects, seemed to give a particular edge to these interview encounters. Further, for Deborah and Alastair's interviews I made my own way from the station to their house and back; as well as affording me a sense of the geography of their town, this made for a more 'boundaried' interview experience as there was little opportunity for conversation outside the research interview framework leaving me with the impression - whether true or not - that Alastair and Deborah got to say everything they wanted to say in the interview conversation. It also meant that I only saw these participants as a parent couple, as I was not on my own with either of them at any point.

Before starting the first interview Alastair asked about the source of my interest in adoption, wanting, I sensed, to identify my motivation and to get a measure of me as a researcher/interviewer. In these initial exchanges I learned that Alastair had some experience of research himself and was involved in education, and that Deborah was a pediatrician: both had a professional interest and expertise in children.

For the sequence of narratives and sub-narratives drawn from Alastair and Deborah's interview texts see Appendix 7C (pp. 157 - 162).

1.3.1 Interview 1: "There's two of us and there's two of them"

The first interview with Deborah and Alastair's unfolded in three main parts: in the first Alastair and Deborah talked about the adoption process, and spoke of their different feelings about adopting older children and Deborah's feelings about not having had younger children ("I still had the worry that I would have the longing for a much younger one, but I never did"); in the second they talked about the children's experiences with their birth family and some aspects of life post-adoption for them as adoptive parents; in the third, broadly, they spoke about their two children Rob and Ali - individually and in their sibling relationship. In reading the interview text two sections of clearly storied talk emerged where together the parent couple gave chronologically organized and emotionally charged accounts of an experience: one about the matching process, when a "definite emotional bonding" to the children happened even before meeting them, the other about the children's removal from their birth parents by the police - an event not experienced by the couple first-hand but learned about through the documentation about the children's early life made available to them, and now re-told as part of their adoption story. It was Alastair who followed this account with the point that they were living with the consequences of the protracted neglect their adoptive children had been exposed to.

The interview title "There's two of us and there's two of them" was Deborah's one-sentence reply to my opening question intended to elicit an account of their life as a family at the time of the interview. Deborah's apparently simple statement was echoed by Alastair - "Two of us, two of them" - and followed by a succinct story from Deborah about how they adopted Rob and Ali five years previously just before Christmas. In just a few lines Deborah conveyed the anxious excitement leading up to the adoption as they juggled conflicting pressures (on the one hand for the placement to happen before Christmas and on the other the general opinion that Christmas was a bad time to move children) and different deadlines, "Builders' deadlines and children deadlines". In the interview I found Deborah's sentence striking, for its apparent simplicity and the possibilities for interpretation. With this binary sentence structure Deborah was giving me a neat introductory account of the making of her family, a story that she concluded in a similar vein: "They moved three weeks before Christmas, and they love Christmas". Alastair then interjected that they "did want to adopt a sibling

pair", deliberately bringing the talk to what he understood to be the focus of my research, but also communicating that things had turned out as they wanted.

In the interview I experienced a slight unease at the apparent simplicity and tightness of the account this parent-couple was giving me. I was aware of a sense of proficiency and of narrative economy particularly in Deborah's talk and felt that careful analysis would require to tease out the more hidden narratives embedded in these adopters' talk. Through later analysis what emerged as a recurring narrative in Alastair and Deborah's account of their adoption experience was that of having had to fight to get what they needed to build and secure their adoptive family, but of feeling personally well-equipped to engage and succeed in that fight. As they talked of different interactions with the process and systems in adoption and adoption practice, Deborah's professional identity and expertise as a pediatrician, though not explicitly asserted, was understood as an advantage, and the couple's combined sense of agency emerged at different points in the interview: in Deborah's explanation to her husband about the catch-all meaning of the phrase "hard-to-place"; in Alastair's reference to having insisted on a referral to CAMHS for Rob; in Deborah's story of feeling vindicated when they obtained a diagnosis of ADHD for their daughter and in her account of how she chose to delay their legal adoption of the children to extend the period of post-adoption support knowing, she explained, that "once you have adopted you are cut adrift".

Half way through the interview, after we had spent some time talking about the children's difficulties and progress over time, Deborah brought our focus to their life as a family in the present, with a statement that asserted their prevailing feeling of being a family in an ordinary kind of way: "The first and foremost bit is, we are a family". This seemed to be the main communication she wanted me to take away with me, rather than the particular challenges the faced with their adoptive children.

1.3.2. Interview 2: "We are a family and it's great"
In the first interview Alastair and Deborah presented themselves as couple used to talking about their adoption experience and who felt quite at ease with being interviewed: Deborah had stated at different points that they loved talking about themselves. I was therefore surprised, at the opening of the second interview, when in answer to my question about how they felt about the first interview and if it had

prompted any further thoughts, Deborah communicated that it had been a pleasant enough experience, but that they had not thought or talked about it since. To me this suggested that whilst the interview had been emotionally manageable for them, they had got little out of it. Whilst feeling disappointed by Deborah's feedback I wondered whether in my anxiety I had not been probing enough with my questions or whether I had responded to the parent-couple's anxiety by reigning in my inquisitiveness - or scepticism - about some of the accounts they gave me. For example, I did not enquire about the couple's medicalised understanding of their children's difficulties or probe further when Alastair hinted at his scepticism about psychotherapeutic approaches.

Alastair's response to my reflexive question added another dimension as it transpired that despite my email exchange with Deborah between them the couple had forgotten about the second meeting and that it had provoked a disagreement between them around how they balanced work and family life. The reflexive question had brought up an aspect of their couple relationship as well as their life as a family that had not explicitly been talked about in the interview. I wondered also whether the interview had been more anxiety provoking for Deborah and Alastair than they realized and if they had managed that anxiety by defensively limiting their emotional investment in the interview encounter.

Thus the second interview began with some tension between the couple, which I decided to steer us away from by asking Alastair and Deborah to tell me more about a subject we had touched on at the end of the first interview: their move from London to the coast. Together they constructed a narrative about their reasons for moving, adapting to change and enjoying the benefits of being closer to their extended family. The tone of the talk became one of ease as if they were repeating a well-known, or canonical narrative about moving house and its ordinary difficulties ("We are still bedding down"). In this context Deborah referred again to 'a helpful letter', which she had already referred to in the first interview - a letter composed by their adoption agency for other family members, explaining the adoption and how to handle their relationship with the children sensitively, which led her into telling me again about the family wedding they took the children to in the early days of their life as a family. These seemed comforting stories to tell.

Having established that they had gone into adoption aware of the potential difficulties ("With our eyes open"), Alastair then qualified this by saying "Being aware of the challenges doesn't always help you", which gave the couple an opening to talk about the more difficult aspects of living with their adopted children. They emphatically linked the challenges they faced now to the children's past. Alastair re-told what was clearly a haunting story for this parent couple, and perhaps for Alastair in particular: that of the children's early suffering, their birth parents' incapacity to look after them and the failure of the system to acknowledge this and take timely action in the interest of the children. Alastair's account communicated the sense of a system that isn't transparent or honest with prospective adoptive parents about the full extent of the damage that has been done to the children. Returning to the story of not knowing that Rob and Ali were registered as "hard to place" children, Alastair spoke about his experience of being kept in the dark. Here, as at certain other points of the interview conversation, the couple's accounts of the experiences seem to differ slightly; Deborah's talk seemed generally to communicate more of a sense of being in the know.

In these adoptive parents' account an acknowledged area of difference was in how the children's behaviour affected them. This was initially only briefly touched on and in their characteristically 'neat' phraseology: "You were surprised by how cross you get; I'm surprised by how cross you get." It was only in the last part of the second interview, the couple having - I felt - fully asserted their sense of agency in their experience of adoption (and therefore in the authoring or construction of their own adoption story as they lived it), that I was able to ask Alastair and Deborah to tell me about the emotional implications for them of adopting siblings. At this point Deborah talked candidly about the shock of the practical and emotional demands on her of providing adequately for both of her very needy children: the struggle to give each of them enough individual time, which was what they most craved from her ("mummy time"), and the panic this had induced in her.

In our two interview encounters Deborah and Alastair came across as people whose professional knowledge of child mental health and development had given them a sense of agency and competency in relation to the different institutions and practices in adoption. The couple also presented a balanced picture of a testing and challenging yet "overwhelmingly positive" experience that has validated their decision to adopt

siblings. However, there were points in the second interview when I felt that they were repeating well-rehearsed stories following pretty tight scripts. I wondered if for this parent couple the unconscious motivation for participating in the research was that of seeking both reassurance and confirmation through the repetition of a pre-constructed "positive outcome" narrative.   Deborah's concise statement "We are a family and its great!" towards the end of the second interview, though enthusiastically positive, seemed also to be signaling that I should ask no further questions so as to leave their narrative unaltered.

Interestingly, though above I identify two points where this couple's talk took a distinctly narrative turn, in my reading of Alastair and Deborah's interview texts I initially had difficulty in identifying where their talk had been more emotionally charged, where it had taken a more narrative turn and where they were working at making sense of their experiences. Much of their sense-making seemed already to have been done.   What I came to realise was that more than with other respondents' material Alastair and Deborah's interview texts elicited in me the adoption of a "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Ricoeur, 1970).

1.4 Keith

It was through a colleague that I was put in touch with Keith and his wife Sarah who were in the process of completing a long parent and child psychotherapy with her.

Keith participated in the interviews on his own as during our preparatory conversations it became apparent that it wouldn't be possible for this parent couple to participate together. The initial conversations were with Sarah, who told me about the family's busy and complicated lives juggling the demands and pressures of both running their own businesses and meeting their children's needs.   Sarah explained that it was a particularly busy time for the family as it was the end of the summer term. The accumulation of end of term events was particularly challenging for the children who became more emotionally vulnerable and volatile. The couple eventually decided that Keith would take part in the interviews on his own; we arranged to conduct them at my house, which Keith could easily reach on his way home from work in the evening. Although absent, Sarah had an impact on the interviews, as I was aware during my

encounters with Keith that the conversations I had had with her informed some of my questions.

As I prepared to interview Keith, I became aware that the fact that in this case the interviews would be taking place in my home presented me with some dilemmas around the extent to which I should leave the traces and clutter of my family life visible and available for the participant's interpretation. I felt both an impulse to protect my privacy and an ethical concern about how much of my life to expose Keith to: did I have a responsibility to limit how much my research subjects had to take in and process about me, the researcher? I wondered, for example, what impact it would have on the interview if Keith knew that I had a son. Issues that are usually central to the establishment of a psychoanalytic psychotherapeutic framework were thus raised for me when preparing to interview Keith, even though the purpose of our meeting was to conduct a research interview not a therapeutic or analytic session. A number of factors may have highlighted the potential similarity between the research interview and the therapeutic encounter: that the interviews with Keith were taking place in my home, that they would be one-to-one conversations, that we had been put in touch by a psychotherapist who had worked with the family and who was a common acquaintance. As someone familiar with therapeutic encounters Keith perhaps brought that experience to the research interviews, evoking a consonant response in myself, someone undertaking a psychotherapeutic training, who was perhaps therefore more susceptible to slipping from a research to a more therapeutic questioning/listening mode.

For the sequence of narratives and sub-narratives drawn from Keith's interview texts see Appendix 7D (pp.163 - 168).

1.4.1 Interview 1: "There were some really dark times"
Keith came to the research interviews with a story of survival to tell, a story which he framed as a journey of recovery from being on the brink of splitting apart as a family to becoming, through slow and hard (therapeutic) work, "a nice little family unit". Keith talked from a position of looking back to "a desperate and dark" time in their life as an adoptive family.

Perhaps because of my nervousness about the slippage between research and therapy my first question, "Tell me about your family … constitution", was differently worded and less open than the planned Interview Schedule question, coming out more like an assessment interview question. It prompted Keith to give me a potted history of their adoptive family. He gave me the demographic details of the siblings they had adopted, described their early years with their birth family and their time in care, and told the story of the adoption process, including the couple's going to the north of England to meet the children. He described the children's different presenting difficulties as a pair: Kieran's "acting out" more, and Julie's being more introverted. Thus the interview conversation with Keith briefly took on the quality of an assessment interview again as a consequence, perhaps, of the factors discussed above. With my second question I reverted to the Interview Schedule and asked about their life as a family at the present time. In his answer Keith talked about the present as a wonderful time for his family in contrast to the "desperate and dark" times when they "came to the precipice of near family breakdown". At this early point of the interview encounter Keith found himself unable to articulate the impact that crises had on him but voiced his need to tell the story: "I'd like to write a book about it one day!"

Partly to bring Keith out of a place where he felt lost for words to a place where he could re-find his narrative impetus, I introduced the idea of chronology and story-telling, asking him to "rewind to the beginning" and tell me the story of how they came to the decision of adopting siblings. Keith's dense narratives, his tendency at times to get lost in his story-telling, and his use of dramatization, poignantly conveyed the rawness of his feelings and the shocking nature of aspects of his adoption experience. There was a feeling throughout that there was a massive amount to tell - and still to process - from before, during and after the adoption of their children. Through the interview conversation, and as a series of linked narratives, Keith talked about the couple's failed IVF attempts and coming to terms with infertility. He then talked about how this led to his and Sarah's decision to adopt and how they agreed from the outset that they wanted to adopt siblings without being aware of the complications sibling adoption would entail. In his account Keith conveyed a sense of now having insight about how their children's early experience of abusive and neglectful parenting had impacted on them individually and on their sibling relationship, an understanding which

he attributed to the psychotherapy that he and his wife had undertaken with their eldest and most troubled, Kieran.

In this first interview two discreet narrative accounts stood out as stories about pivotal events in Keith's adoption experience: the first, which he introduced with the coda "There was a massive incident", was a detailed and fraught account of how - two years into the adoption - the difficulties in their relationship with Kieran came to a head, to the point that the placement came close to breaking down, an experience Keith described a traumatic. The second was a story about the first encounter with the children in the telling of which Keith, overwhelmed with feeling ("It still gets me"), started to cry and needed to pause his narrative[17]. Keith also gave a vivid account of the days leading up to the moment of bringing the children "into the house" ("There's no one else there; it's just you").

1.4.2 Interview 2: "We have been on a real journey"

Keith used the trope of a journey at different points in his first interview and returned to it at the beginning of the second interview, suggesting that Keith drew on this canonical narrative - so present both in literary texts and therapeutic ones - to make sense of and given shape to his experiences. Through our interview conversation and whilst responding to my questions Keith told a story of movement, growth and transformation, from a place of ignorant bliss through a period of hellish despair to a state of more realistic happiness (reminiscent of *Bildungsroman* narratives and even of Dante's *Divine Comedy* epic).

In responding to my opening reflexive question about how he found the first interview, Keith talked about valuing the opportunity it had afforded him to "look back objectively", as if now speaking from the vantage point of new understanding. Keith's response suggested that the interview interchange had given him a chance to re-evaluate moments or events in the adoption and, through the telling of their story discovering new meanings to parts of his adoption experiences.   Further, the re-thinking triggered by the interview had made him realise, he told me in acknowledgement of the focus of

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[17] This was the only point in any of the interviews (except in the pilot interview) where this happened.

my research, that he was really glad they had adopted a sibling pair, despite the challenges; he had also realised, as if for the first time, what "a pinnacle moment" seeing his two adopted children for the first time had been. Thinking about his upset at recounting that moment Keith referred to not understanding, at the time, what the implications of being "presented with a couple of personalities" would be.

It was from this retrospective position that Keith spoke for most of the second interview, giving his talk a storied quality whilst he also moved back and forth between then and now/now and then comparisons, particularly in his accounts of the changes that have taken place - in the couple relationship, in their responses to and feelings about the sibling's relationship, which he described as symbiotic, and in their relationships to the individual children. Keith told three stories which in different ways had a narrative of reparation: a story of how play helped the family bond, that of how the psychotherapy helped them to repair their relationship with Kieran and that of their difficult relationship with the children's primary school ("It was at quite a low ebb but it's grown quite strong").

In both our interview conversations Keith referred to 'loss' and 'lack' as being intrinsic to adoption and a fundamental part of their own and their children's experience; he also talked about 'trauma', both in relation to his children's pre-adoption lives and in relation to the family's post-adoption experience when they came so close to the family breaking down. Keith's talk showed that he had come to understand their experience through the psychotherapy they had undertaken, as psychoanalytic and psychodynamic ideas about unconscious processes in adoption permeated his narratives.

2. The story of adopting siblings: A thematic analysis.

A semi-structured approach to the interviews allowed respondents to tell me their story of adopting siblings relatively freely and spontaneously. All the interviews began with the same open introductory question, "Can you tell me about your life together as a family since the adoption of the children" to which the respondents responded from their particular 'situatedness' in the adoption experience, and in their response (feelings, anxieties, assumptions) to the as yet new interview situation. The interviews then unfolded according to the particular interchange and conversation that developed in each encounter but with the interview schedule questions as guiding though moveable posts across the two interviews. By referring to the Interview Schedule I ensured that at some point in their two interviews all respondents talked about their motivation in adopting siblings, their first encounters with the children and how they felt about them, the issues they expected to come up for them in adopting siblings and if they had been surprised by any issues, their children's sibling relationship, their relationships with the two children and how they felt their experience of parenting their children had affected them. As can be seen from my overview of the dominant narratives in the adopters' accounts, their experience of adopting siblings is interwoven and articulated through the broader experience of forming a family through adoption and its interface with different public domains and social settings (see Appendices 7A-7D, pp. 144 - 168). In this section I have drawn out what the respondents said specifically about their experience of adopting and parenting siblings.

The accounts that were given by the four adoptive parents/couples I interviewed vary considerably, but share areas of similarities with certain themes recurring across the interview texts. What follows is an overview of the themes that emerged about *siblings*.

2.1 Wanting to adopt a sibling pair
All four of the parents/couples interviewed talked of embarking on the adoption process with the intention of ultimately adopting two children; three of the couples wanted to adopt siblings from then outset. None of the participating parents/couples considered adopting more than two children although in most cases (three out of four of the sibling

pairs) the siblings had other half-siblings who were also in the care system (see Appendix 6, p. 143).

All the respondents considered it better for children to grow up with a sibling rather than as an only child and this was the primary motivation they gave for adopting a sibling pair. Together with this there was conveyed a sense of a long-held notion amongst the participants of a family unit consisting of four: Gordon talked of having achieved his ideal family unit by adopting a boy and a girl saying, "For me the ideal family unit is full"; Cate spoke in terms of always wanting two children because two was "the number that would fit best for me as well as hopefully for them" and she joked, "because I've only got two hands?"; Deborah described the structure of her family conveying a feeling of symmetry: "There's two of us and there's two of them"

All the parents/couples, and in particular the male participants, referred in positive terms to their own experience of being siblings both as children and in their adult relationship with their sibling(s) and their families, and of this informing their view of what constituted a family. Being an only child was implicitly, if not explicitly, referred to as disadvantageous for children. In Keith's account this is made explicit as he attributes his wife Sarah's wish to adopt siblings on her experience of being an only child, something that is referred to in other parts of the interview text as a having been problematic.

2.2 "We thought that they would always have each other"
When talking about the advantages of adopting siblings the parents/couples referred in particular to an idea that the children 'would always have each other' when things became difficult or if anything should happen to the parents or in the parental relationship; there was also an idea of siblings being a support to each other and learning from each other; they also referred to their sense that by adopting siblings rather than two individual children they would be adopting children with a shared family history, which would be both an advantage in the sibling relationship as a binding factor and easier for them as adoptive parents as they would only have to learn about, and process, one complex birth family history. Of the participants Gordon and Cate seemed to have the more clearly formulated idea of what the long-term benefits of

sibling adoption might be, particularly for the children. Cate conveyed a sense of having long-held beliefs about this as she talked:

> I always wanted to adopt two, not one, and not three. I felt that whatever happened they would have each other. I thought that that would be so important. And although they're not full siblings, they have different dads, I felt having two that are experiencing the same, would be better in their later life. (Cate, Interview1, ll. 127-132)

2.3 "The realities of adoption"

In their accounts of their experience of the adoption process the respondents did not refer to feeling pressured into adopting siblings by adoption services, although there was some indication in the material that there were either personal or external pressures to adopt two siblings at once. For example Susan and Gordon talked about how their original plan had been to adopt one child first and then a second at a later point, but that when they realized how lengthy and difficult the adoption process was they decided to adopt two in one go. With reference to "the realities of adoption" Susan conveyed how their decision was corroborated by the realization that Social Services were not considering couples that wanted a single child at the time as they had far more sibling groups to place than individual children. Keith also refers to this: "When you look at the adoption process, there are a huge amount of siblings" (Interview 1, ll.152-153). For Deborah and Alastair, on the other hand, the pressure to adopt two siblings at once seemed to come from feelings about their age and a sense of running out of time:

> At that time we were already, well I was 40, wasn't I, and you were 42, and I thought if we adopted a single, a baby at that stage and then we wanted to have another child a few years later, we were going to be pretty ancient parents. (Deborah, Interview 1, ll. 78-81)

2.4 "We were not specifically prepared for sibling issues"

In connection to the theme of wanting to adopt siblings the participants referred to the fact that prior to adoption they had not considered that adopting siblings would present them with particular difficulties or emotional challenges other than, one participant said, that it would mean "double the work, like double the washing" (Susan). The parent/couples seemed not to recall any focus being placed on the demands of parenting siblings in the preparation work leading up the adoption, although Cate, who came from a position of having professional experience in adoption, remembered expecting to have to manage sibling rivalry and aggression.

2.5 "We found out later that they were in the 'difficult to place' register"

All four sets of participants mentioned their experience of learning, after the adoption, that their children had been considered 'difficult to place' by the adoption services largely because of being a sibling pair. In several accounts there is a strong suggestion, or recurring question, about the full blown, unmitigated truth of the daily challenges faced by adopters in parenting their children - most of whom had spent some time in the care system and come to their adoptive families as 'older' children - being routinely hidden from prospective adopters in order 'not to put them off'. Cate for example learned that the two brothers she and her husband adopted had in some document been described as "unadoptable".

2.6 "We completely underestimated it on all fronts"

In all four sets of interviews the parents/couples talk of having underestimated the nature and extent of the challenges, the emotional demands and the intensity of the feelings that parenting their adopted children would bring up for them. Whilst feeling that they had learned much through the adoption preparation process, which on the whole they considered to have been thorough and well done, quoting 'attachment' as one of the things they were taught about, they also made the distinction between what they knew intellectually and the unpredictable realities of their day-to-day lived experience of parenting their children. A question that is raised in some of the participants' talk is whether the nature of the challenges is such that the impact on the parents cannot be predicted or truly prepared for.

2.7 "Reading the children's Guardian's report was grim"

The children's history prior to being adopted is very present in the respondents' accounts, whether told in detail or alluded to. The children's stories, recounted by their adoptive parents - sometimes in storied form, sometimes in fragments across the interviews - have in common early and protracted experiences of severe neglect and emotional or physical abuse by birth parents who were not capable of providing a safe and nurturing environment for their young children. The accounts indicate that following their removal from their birth families all the children experienced a period in the care system with multiple foster placements. The accounts convey the weight of a past of which the adoptive parents were not a part but that makes itself felt in the

present, in their daily lives, through the children's behaviour and their way of relating to each other, to their adoptive parents and to the demands of educational settings.

2.8 "We played babies for hours on end"

In the accounts of what it was like in the first years of the adoption, a recurring theme is that of finding that both siblings regressed and needed to be 'babied'. Alastair and Deborah remembered doing a lot of baby play with their daughter Ali, who was three when she came to them:

> Ali spent […] the first three years with us being a baby, she did a lot of baby play, absolutely masses of it. She wanted us to put nappies on her at bed time and I bought her a baby bottle and she had dummies. (Deborah, Interview 1, ll. 96 - 103)

Susan and Gordon similarly remembered how their son Joseph, who was four whilst his sister was one at the time of adoption, needed to play babies:

> He did play a lot of games when he was little about being a baby so we played babies a lot - and allowed him to do it for hours on end sometimes. (Susan, Interview 1, ll. 1288 - 1294)

In Keith's account too there is some reflection about their experience of having to provide for both siblings' need to be babied:

> […] we often end up singing lullabies and rocking [Kieran] and cuddling him and, and babying him and goo-goo gaga, and especially in the early days that all went on, you know. (Keith, Interview 2, ll. 517-519)

In Keith's account Kieran continued to need babying from time to time, although this was more pronounced in the early phase of the adoption; in Gordon and Susan's account too there is a suggestion that Joseph, who had just started secondary school, still behaved like the younger child "wanting cuddles and to be played with now." (Gordon, Interview 1, l. 1300).

In these accounts the memory of the older child's special and intense care needs seem to supersede the memory of caring for the younger child, as the latter's needs were more consonant with their chronological age and therefore more naturally given.   The accounts convey mixed feelings because whilst a certain unease seems to have been experienced by the new parents when confronted by their four or five-year-old's baby or

toddler-like needs, an unease perhaps particularly felt by the father, the fact that both children needed baby-care effectively satisfied a desire in both parents to provide that care and to have the sense of an experience of having had their adopted children as babies.

2.9 "For two years I barely existed"

On the whole providing this primary kind of care to their new children seems to have been an intense but gratifying experience; it also seems to have centred on the mother, the parent with whom the children were mostly intent on forming a bond, on whom they instantly developed a dependency, and whose attention both children craved and vied for. This was understood in terms of attachment behaviour and explained as the children's greater need to form an attachment to the mother. The desperation, urgency and intensity of the siblings' need for their adoptive mother's physical presence is a feature of the experiences talked about in three out of four accounts; two out of the three mothers I interviewed conveyed ambivalent feelings about the demands that were placed on them by their children and the impact this had on their sense of self . All four mothers in the research had either left their previous jobs or taken extended unpaid leave to look after the children.

2.10 Dad: the 'second best' adult

The accounts note a discrepancy in the relationship that formed between the children and their mother and father, largely understood as a greater need for mother as discussed above, but also partly attributed to father's absence during the day to go to work. The father thus appears somewhat sidelined in the accounts of the early days of the adoption, his comings and goings from home slowing down the bonding process with the children and making him the 'second best' adult, particularly at the children's bedtime. This was something for which the parents/couples had been prepared pre-adoption so were not surprised by, but it figures in the accounts as an on-going feature of family life and one which they still have to manage, both on a personal level and as a couple.

2.11 The siblings' contrasting behaviours: 'they are two sides of the same coin'

In the interview conversations, to varying degrees, the parents/couples' talk conveyed a preoccupation with one of the siblings over the other; in three out of four accounts it is

the older sibling who appears to be the more problematic, the more emotionally needy in the sibling pair and the one more prone to 'acting out'. The accounts suggest a striking polarization of behaviours between the siblings where the older child is described as the more emotionally volatile, uncontained, controlling and aggressive, and the younger sibling, who in three out of the four families in the research is a girl, is described as quieter, sometimes withdrawn and more prone to internalizing anxiety and distress.   In the accounts of all four sets of respondents, including Cate's, the younger sibling came to the adoption either not speaking or with speech delays and of the two siblings they seem to be the ones presenting with more marked learning difficulties.

Cate's account is the exception as, although she describes a similar contrast between the siblings' characters, where one is more internalizing of his feelings and the other is more externalizing, in her two-brother sibling pair it is the youngest brother, Tom, who presents with the more disregulated behaviours, at least in the family context. Cate describes her relationship with Tom as a rollercoaster of emotions but goes on to say that her two sons are "two sides of the same coin", denoting the two brothers' extreme closeness as well as her understanding that their contrasting behaviours are intimately related.

2.12 'Giving them individual time'

One of the experiences these adoptive parents talk about is of one sibling being more demanding than the other and taking more of their time, energy and emotional resources, so that they risk overlooking their other child - in three out of four cases the younger (female) sibling - who tended to be left 'to get on with it'.   As part of this theme the interviewees talked about the difficulty of attending to both their children's needs and how they struggled to find a way to give them equal and enough individual time and attention.   This came across as a vexed and guilt-inducing issue in the accounts and one that was also reflected in the interviews where more time was spent talking about their more overtly challenging child.

2.13 Dependence in the sibling relationship

The closeness and intimacy of the siblings' relationship is a feature of all the accounts given by the research respondents, as is the issue of the siblings' dependency on each other. What strongly emerges from the accounts is the complexity and intensity of the

sibling relationship amongst these adopted sibling pairs. The stories told by their parents describe passionate feelings and ambivalence between the siblings and reveal that, for the parents/couples interviewed, much of the work of parenting their adopted children has been in managing the sibling relationship. The sense of there being a mutual dependence between the sibling pair is clearly conveyed in three out of four interviews, with the exception of Susan and Gordon's account where the rivalrous relationship is emphasized. In the accounts given by Alastair and Deborah, and particularly by Keith, the siblings' dependency on each other is linked to their very early experience of being abandoned to themselves by the birth parents. Keith refers to his young son Kieran having taken on a parenting role in relation to his little sister, and Alastair and Deborah give a similar picture of their son Rob having to feed both himself and his younger sister at the age of three. Cate also talks of her eldest son Chris being his brother's main 'attachment figure', even after twelve years of adoption. What transpires through some of the accounts is that the parents/couples had to work to establish their parenting role, meeting with some resistance and ambivalence from their children. Keith in particular says:

> So we've, we've had a huge, a lot of our early sort of experiences with Kieran has been trying to kind of, um, convince him that he's, we're his parents, he's not Julie's parent, you know, that he can be happy and safe and he doesn't have to look after Julie and that that's not his role you know. (Interview 1, ll.215 - 219)

Keith goes on to suggest that for his children, having to adjust to a new set of parents who were going to take care of them and take on an active parenting role was on an unconscious level experienced as a threat to their pre-adoption relationship.

Some accounts also convey that the siblings' relationship could at times feel quite exclusive and excluding of the parents. (See below, pp. 106-114)

2.14 Finding ways of separating the sibling pair

Feeling the need to separate the siblings, and the difficulty of doing so, is a recurring theme in the accounts and one that is presented as somewhat of a conundrum. Keith in particular communicates a sense that he and his wife Sarah had to get between brother and sister, to create some space between them by intervening to change pre-established

ways of relating between them, and in so doing claim their role as parents. Keith describes:

> And he sometimes gets very angry with us because we intervene when he's sort of babying with Julie or trying to like, he will speak to Julie in certain ways that sometimes we just don't think is appropriate. (Interview 1, ll. 227 - 230)

The sense of needing to separate the children is motivated in the various accounts by wanting to go from thinking about the siblings as a unit to thinking about them as two distinct individuals with different needs (because of their age, gender and personality difference). Bedtime comes up as a crucial issue in the day-to-day work of creating some separateness and distinction between the siblings.

2.15 Bedtime

In the accounts the parents' efforts to stagger the pair's bedtime, with the younger child going to bed first and the older one later, serves different functions: to create the opportunity to give each child individual time, to eliminate the contest of 'who has mummy', and to acknowledge their different ages. This either meets great resistance, or if accomplished, is experienced as a big step forward. Alastair and Deborah's account describes it as a losing battle and communicates a sense of failure around it; in Keith's accounts the achievement of convincing his son Kieran to go to bed after his sister is talked about as a positive step in his development.

2.16 Giving the children separate bedrooms

The other important step talked about in the accounts is separating the children's bedrooms to give them their own space. In Alastair and Deborah's accounts and in Keith's, this emerges as having initially been motivated by the need to protect the younger child from the older sibling's attacks on her or her toys, the younger sibling often appearing as vulnerable to and the victim of the older brother's aggression. The decision of putting the children in separate bedrooms is conveyed as being a momentous and symbolically potent event in the children's lives and one towards which they were ambivalent and resistant. In Keith's account his children retain the idea of sleeping in the same bedroom as a 'treat' and is therefore sometimes allowed at weekends and called a 'sleepover'.

2.17 Play

The adopters' experience of and feelings about their children's play emerged as another important theme in their accounts of being with their sibling pair. Beyond the baby play that three out of the four sets of respondents talked about as a key feature of the early years with their adoptive children (Cate was the only respondent not to talk about this), the way the siblings played - together, with friends or with their parents - was something that three out of four sets of respondents spent some time describing and in which they showed some personal investment. Cate remembered how the siblings' temperamental differences meant that they did not play together and how that required her to play with them individually; this, rather than overt rivalry between them, was what she remembered having to manage when her now adolescent sons were little:

> […] they played in different ways. So Chris was much more imaginative and Tom was much more, I don't know, just sticking bricks on one another like that and I just had to […] so I thought I would have to manage lots of fighting and aggression, but […] what I had to manage was keeping them both entertained in different ways, that was the difference. (Cate, Interview 2, ll.94 -99)

Deborah's talk about their children's play communicated the importance that the siblings' ability to play together had for her and Alastair as parents. Even before meeting Rob and Ali they seemed to look at the photo for signs of playfulness in the siblings' relationship:

> D: They're looking at each other and cheekily laughing, and yeah, they just looked, they looked like they knew how to have fun and that they knew how to have fun together, you know, they were really [-]
> A: You know, they could share, they could share and laugh. (Deborah and Alastair, Interview 1, ll.189 -192)

This parent couple's interest and involvement in how the siblings interacted in play - which was consonant with their professional interest in child development - came through in their observations about the children's need to be in control in their games and how Rob in particular always had to be the one in charge:

> D: […] he always wants to be first and the best and have, you know, the biggest gun and the, and whenever you're playing with him, I mean he'll […] always kill Ali won't he? Whatever pretend game it is, it always involves her.

In his account Keith talked about play as a crucial part of family life and a long section of his second interview is spent talking about game playing. Keith considered the role of play in how differently he bonded with his two adoptive children. Comparing the immediacy and naturalness of playing Incy Wincy Spider with Julie, who came to them as a toddler, to the unease he felt at playing the same game with Kieran who, though aged six, was emotionally like a child of a much younger age and also liked Incy Wincy Spider. Keith thought about the greater struggle Kieran had in forming an attachment to them as his adoptive parents and in finding a place amongst his peer group.

Keith went on to talk about his love of game-playing and sports as something which he wanted to share and transmit to his children having himself grown up in a family where game-playing was encouraged together with sports, outdoor pursuits and 'the rough-and-tumble' of growing up with two brothers. Keith's personal investment in developing the love of games - "tiddly-winks, checkers, monopoly […]" - and sports, particularly in his son, clearly emerges from his account both as a source of frustration when Kieran was "fighting a lot against" him and as a source of pleasure at the time of the interview when Kieran was more accepting of what Keith had to offer him:

> […] just recently it's all become sort of like he's up for it, he's up for stuff you know, and it's so nice. It's so nice and he's brilliant at things. And it's not just he's brilliant at things, he just wants to try things (Keith, Interview 2, ll. 604-606)

Keith's focus appeared very much to be on finding ways of bonding with his son; what came through was the pleasure he could finally derive from being able to share his love of playing with him.

2.18 "Is this adoption or do all families go through this?"

Accompanying their accounts of the challenges and struggles they experienced in managing the sibling relationship and their children's extremes of feeling, there was a question voiced from time to time by the interviewees about the extent to which their experience is specific to adoption or whether in fact the vicissitudes of the children's relationship to each other and to them as parents is part of normal child development and ordinary family life. Gordon's talk is peppered with asides that convey a tendency to see their experience through a 'normalizing' prism and likens some of their dilemmas to ones faced by ordinary birth families. In contrast Susan, who identifies her children

as having special needs and as such being in a marginal position, says that she feels she has to 'wave the adoption banner' to increase social awareness of the difficulties faced by adopted children and their families; Cate describes her boys' behaviour and attitudes as within the norm for adolescents 'but more extreme' but, at the time of interviewing, her husband Mike had reached such a crisis point in his relationship with their younger son Tom that there was a felt possibility of the adoption breaking down. Alastair and Deborah talk about being ordinary parents and the ordinariness of their daily lives, the fact of being a family overriding the challenges of their children's emotional and learning difficulties. Keith's account conveys a sense of enormous relief at the sense of having achieved greater family stability and unity in the aftermath of the very real threat of the adoption breaking down. At the same time he suggests that his identity is not bound up with adoption or being an adoptive father - "I'm just a bloke" - and wonders whether his wish for his daughter to be in a higher set at school and to have friends from stable family backgrounds is an ordinary part of being a parent or if it is "social engineering" that is, part of the adoption story.

3. How stories were constructed: A Narrative Analysis

In this section I carry out a more detailed narrative analysis of two discreet *parts* of the interview texts where the focus of the talk was, in different ways, about the respondent(s) experience of their children as a sibling pair.   For this work I adopted Gee's narrative method as described in Chapters 3 and 4.

I chose narrative parts with a view to looking more closely at the narrative work the respondent(s) engaged in to *give structure to* and *make sense of* their experiences in their communication of it to me, the interviewer, in the particular context of the interview encounter (as discussed above).   I selected these particular narratives as they were both instances in the interview conversation where the respondents gave examples of what being with their two adopted children could be like.   However, I chose these texts not just for *what* was said (the story told), but for the extent to which that section of talk could go someway to exemplifying the kind of affect laden, difficult and emotionally complex narrative work that the research participants engaged in as they talked to me about their experiences: i.e. how the respondents went about constructing

or co-constructing their narratives. The sections selected point to the possible conflicts and strategies of articulation and meaning making in which people engage as they talk about personal experience.

3.1 Susan and Gordon: "Nothing prepares you for what it's like"

From "Nothing Prepares you for what it's like", the first interview with Susan and Gordon, I have selected for analysis a part of the conversation in which the couple talked about how the two siblings commanded different amounts of attention from them, and their feeling that they had unwittingly neglected their daughter Sally as she was ostensibly the less needy of the two siblings. Then, adjusting their narrative with a story about their son's recurring aggressive outbursts, a different view of Sally is given as they talk about her vulnerability in the face of her brother's rages.

The exchange took place close to the beginning of the interview and in my readings of the raw interview text emerged as the second narrative part in the interview, to which I gave the heading: "Sally has had less time and attention" (See Appendix 7A, p.139). For the raw text of this narrative part, and the transcription with line breaks see Appendix 8a (pp. 169 - 174)

3.1.1. Narrative Part: *Sally has had less time and attention*

Transcribed with line breaks, strophes and stanzas

Strophe: **She's come off the worst**

Stanza: How do you think they've managed [family life]?

```
154  OT: And um, and,
         so, so how would you say in terms of the  family life, you know,
         being at home and,
         and also for his sister, Sally?
         S:  Yeah.
         OT: Yeah.  You know, how do you think it, they've managed?
```

Stanza: He eats up time and attention

```
159  S: I would say Sally
         because, because he kind of eats up time and attention,
         she has had less time and attention
         and kind of, even as a, as a young child has toddled around on her own
                                                                a little bit.
         G: It's always been that way.
```

Stanza: We are always looking to ensure there is a balance between the two.

163 S: And that, you know, is not how I would have wanted it
       G: No, no.
       S: At all.
       G: <u>We are always looking to ensure that there's a balance between-</u>
       OT: Hmm.
       G: <u>-the two</u> I think.
       OT: Yeah.

Stanza: It's difficult

       G: <u>And it's difficult.</u>
       S: It is difficult. **She's come off the worst.**
       G: Second best.
       S: Of that. Uh-
174 G: With respect to time.
       S: Yeah.

Stanza: I think she's very able to cope

       G: I mean I think she's very able to cope.
       I mean <u>I think she has</u>-
       S: Yeah.
       G: -<u>coped very well</u>.
       S: Hmm.

Strophe: **There have been situations where she's been scared**

Stanza: We have to leap into action

179 S: But she, **there have been situations though where she's
                                        been scared**.
       G: Yeah.
       S: And felt physically threatened by him.
       G: Hmm.
       OT: Right.
       S: <u>And we have to kind of leap into action.</u>
       One of us has to manage Joseph, which often means restraining
       and the other one has to just remove her
       from the house almost isn't it?
       G: Mm
       OT: Right.
 189 S: Sometimes if it's not possible it will be to another room but you know

Stanza: It happened on Sunday evening

```
190 it happened on Sunday evening-
    G: Hmm.
    S:  -and it hadn't happened for some time so-
    G: No.
```

Stanza: It was a little bit of a surprise

```
S: -it was a little bit of a surprise-
    G: Yes, that this happened.
    S: -but he was, he was tired and-
    OT: Hmm.
    S:  -you know obviously it's the end of this half term-
    OT: Hmm.
```

Strophe: **You have to restrain Joseph and I have to take Sally out**

Stanza: When he loses control it is full-scale loss of control

```
200 S: uhm, and
    when he loses control,
    he, he's not like another child having a temper.
    It is full-scale loss of control
    so he'll be trying, he'll be thumping walls,
    kicking walls, just picking up anything he can, throwing it-
    G: Yeah.
    S: -and it would be lashing out
    at us and Sally.
    G: Hmm.
```

Stanza: She is very very clearly frightened

```
S: Um, and quite often she will try and show that she's not rattled by him
    but when it's like that
    she is very, very clearly frightened.
    G: Hmm.
209 S: So you have to sit and restrain Joseph and calm him down and
                                I have to take Sally out, you know,
    for a walk say…
    OT: Mmm
    S: Uhm
```

Stanza: It's not always (like this)

211OT: I-is that how it tends to be? Is that how you-
    S: No, sometimes-
    OT: - Do it?
    S: No.
    G: No. No, yeah.
    S: It's not always is it?
    G: I mean, when was the last time it happened?
    Months and months ago I guess.
    S: Yeah.

Stanza: It doesn't happen a lot but when it does happen it is usually big

219 G: It doesn't happen a lot. We don't want to give you the wrong
                                                    impression but -
    S: No.
    OT: Hmm. No.
    G: -when it does happen it's usually a big, you know-
    OT: Yeah.
    G: -it is usually big.

Strophe: **He's getting older, he's getting bigger**

Stanza: It is harder

227 G: I mean I can see
    particularly from this last session on Sunday
    he's getting older, he's getting bigger. The, you know, it's going to be-
    S: It is harder.
    OT: Hmm.
    G: Yeah

Stanza: They become unmanageable

231 G: I mean we've got some friends who have, are in a similar situation
    with adopted children-
    OT: Hmm.
    G: -that are a couple of years older.
    Um, Jake has had, you know,
    they, they become unmanageable.
    S: Yeah.

Stanza: That's a concern of mine

```
    G:  You can't just-
    S:  Yeah.
    G:  -go and restrain them 'cause they're too-
    OT: Right.
    G:  -physically large so that -
    S:  Yeah.
    G:  -that is always, that's always a concern of mine.
    S:   Yeah.
246 OT: Okay.
```

3.1.2. Findings

The what: This narrative is not a chronological account but one that seems to conflate present and past experience and project into the future as well. It follows the opening part of the interview, in which Gordon and Susan told me about the difficult period they had been through because of their son Joseph's transition from primary to secondary school. As can be seen Susan and Gordon begin to construct a narrative in response to my question about how the children have managed at home by telling me that Joseph consumes much of their time and attention and that consequently Sally gets less; this, they regretfully tell me, is how it has always been, Sally having always been the apparently more self-sufficient of the two siblings. Susan then goes on to talk about how Joseph can lose control and become violent ("he lashes out") and how at such times they have to take immediate action to keep everybody safe, with Gordon physically restraining Joseph and Susan taking Sally out of the house. Susan's account conveys a sense of procedure in how they go about dealing with these times of crises, partly conveying that there has been some habituation to their son's outbursts whilst also communicating the sense of danger that pervades the household. At the same time they allude to the fact that they were taken by surprise when one such outburst occurred recently. Susan and Gordon do not go into what happened, not 'storying' the recent event at this point; instead they stay with telling me 'how things are', perhaps retaining a distance from their more recent and, probably, quite shocking experience. Gordon does make allusions to the difficulty of the latest outburst for him and his awareness that it is becoming harder to physically restrain their son as he grows bigger and, bringing in

an example of how their friends' adopted children have become unmanageable in adolescence, voices his apprehension about the future.

Susan and Gordon's narrative seems principally intended to communicate that theirs is not an ordinary family and that the parenting that is required of them is not ordinary parenting.   Regularly having had to deal with extremes of uncontained emotion and aggression, their story goes, they have learned to leap into a safeguarding and risk management mode. With this narrative Susan and Gordon graphically illustrated some of the challenges they faced in parenting their sibling pair; in the context of their experience of failing to give the siblings equal time and attention the parent couple tell the story of how their life as a family is punctuated by their son's emotional crises (”sessions”) when his panic and rage cuts through the family, temporarily splintering them into two separate units: father with son, providing a physical restraint to or holding of his catastrophic distress, and mother with daughter, somewhere safe.

The how: The transcription of the interview text as described in above - with the inclusion of my interventions, of line breaks to capture the rhythm of the respondents' talk according to their phrasing of their speech, pauses, hesitations and interruptions, and of strophes and stanzas - makes the building blocks of constituent parts of the narrative more visible and within them the interplay of the parent couple's individual and joint narrative work. The sequence of strophes and stanzas below illustrates this:

Strophe 1: She's come off the worst
Stanza 1: How do you think they've managed [family life] (OT)
Stanza 2: He eats up time and attention (S)
Stanza 3: We are always looking to ensure there is a balance between the two. (G)
Stanza 4: It's difficult
Stanza 5: I think she's very able to cope (G)

Strophe 2: There have been situations where she's been scared
Stanza 1: We've had to leap into action (S)
Stanza 2: It happened on Sunday evening (S)
Stanza3: It was a little bit of a surprise (S)

Strophe 3: You have to restrain Joseph and I have to take Sally out
Stanza 1: When he loses control it is full-scale loss of control (S)
Stanza 2: She is very very clearly frightened (S)
Stanza 3: It's not always (like this) (S)
Stanza 4: It doesn't happen a lot but when it does happen it is usually big (G)

Strophe 4: He's getting older, he's getting bigger
Stanza 1: It is harder (S)
Stanza 2: They become unmanageable (G)
Stanza 3: That's a concern of mine (G)

Thus in the first strophe Susan started the narrative of Sally losing out because Joseph ate up all their time and attention and Gordon interjected with asserting that they consciously made an effort to give their time and attention to the children in equal measure; when Susan stated that Sally had "come off the worst" Gordon agreed but seemed to want to mitigate or contextualize this by telling me that Sally had coped well, implying that she had not suffered unduly.   Susan then took over the next part of the narrative (Strophe 2) by asserting, in response to Gordon's comment, that Sally did sometimes feel very frightened of her brother (although she tried not to show it) thus highlighting that Sally could also be vulnerable and in need of their protection and adding a different perspective to Gordon's depiction of Sally as a child who could cope on her own.   Still leading the thrust of the narrative, Susan went on to describe what happened when Joseph lost control and what they normally did to re-establish control (and the family's equilibrium) going over their sequence of actions both in Strophe 2 and again in Strophe 3 - the repetition in the narrative echoing, perhaps, the recurrence of Joseph's outbursts. In Strophe 4 Gordon took over the narrative and, bringing us back to the present, to Joseph's recent crises ("his last session"), alluded to how distressing and difficult it was for him to have to restrain his eleven year old son, increasingly so in fact.

Overall Susan's narrative seemed to want to highlight Sally's overlooked vulnerability and the degree to which they have to protect her from her brother. Susan was emphatic about the extremes of feeling they have to manage and through her stark description of Joseph's behaviour conveyed the sense of urgency and danger that invaded the family when Joseph had a crisis.   Gordon's narrative on the other hand seemed to be one of moderation and restraint, and there were points when he seemed to want to mitigate or qualify the powerful feelings that Susan conveyed. When I wondered how representative the story they had told me was of their family life, Gordon voiced an anxiety that I felt he was negotiating throughout the interviews: "We don't want you to get the wrong impression." However, at the end Gordon gives voice to his worry about

how it is getting harder to restrain Joseph and alludes to his fear that the power and force of his son's feelings might become unmanageable as he grows towards adolescence.

What I think becomes more apparent from an analysis of the macro-components or building blocks of this narrative part is that Susan and Gordon were individually and jointly really trying to make sense of their complex and sometimes brutal experience, not just for me but for themselves too. For example the narrative's quick shifts from present to past to recent past to future, show the parent couple engaged in a reappraisal of past and present experiences and their implications for the future; further, Susan and Gordon's different emphases and the turn-taking they engage in suggests a tension - individually and jointly negotiated - around their feelings of guilt and failure about the perceived imbalance in amounts of 'hands-on' care they give their two children; I believe one could also argue that here there was an unconscious attempt, particularly by Susan, through the process of talking itself, to redress that imbalance by bringing the focus of the narrative on to Sally - the supposedly overlooked child - as much as possible. This was perhaps what the talk was intended to do, its purpose for Susan.

3.2 Keith: "We've been on a real journey"

As the second text for analysis I have chosen an excerpt from "We've been on a real journey", the second interview with Keith. The narrative part - the fourth I identified in my readings of the second interview text (see Appendix 7D, p. 165) - has the heading "It's a narrative they play out". The text shows how in this part of the interview conversation, where I asked Keith to elaborate on a statement he had just made that the siblings tried to divide and conquer (the parent couple) if they could, Keith used different discursive strategies - including dramatization - to overcome his difficulty in giving narrative order to the multi-dimensional and immersive experience of living with his young adopted children. The exchange took place towards the beginning of the second interview, following a reflective section in which Keith had talked about his experience of the first interview and reflected on his emotionality on telling me about the first meeting with the children and how this had provoked a re-appraisal of the emotional significance for both himself and his wife of different aspects of the adoption experience. The narrative below came immediately after a short section in which Keith

talked about how the challenges of the adoption had brought them closer as a couple despite the sibling pair's divisive strategies.

For the raw text of this narrative part, and transcription with line breaks, see Appendix 8b (pp. 175 - 180).

3.2.1. Narrative Part: "It's like a narrative they play out"
With line breaks, stanzas and strophes

Strophe 1: The sibling pair are a little unit

Stanza: They work as a tag team to try to get under our skins

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191 You know, the two of them, **the sibling pair are a little unit** and they,
                                                                                    they,
    they've got
    uhm
    mechanisms
    beyond sort of
    I think
    Individual mechanisms.
193 You know, <u>they work as a tag team</u> sometimes to try to,
    to try <u>to get</u>
    <u>under our skins</u>.
    OT: Mmm

Stanza: Only in a challenging way that every child will do

K: In a way,
<u>only in a challenging way that every child will do</u>, because that's about
how you grow up isn't it, you challenge, you learn,
you see if you can do it, you push it, you learn and you go back, you sort
of absorb and
you come back and do it again, you know, but it would be,

Stanza: For a long time it was constant

<u>for a long, long time it was constant</u> sort of uhm
and
quite, quite often Kieran and Julie would get each other involved in
the scheme or whatever it was and …

Strophe 2: We hear them round the corner

Stanza: Can you remember a time?

> 200 OT: <u>Can you remember a time?</u>
>   K: A time (laughs),
>   OT: Yeah?
>   K: this is where I'm rubbish! (laughs)
>   OT: Well, it doesn't have to be,
>   does it still happen now? Is that how
>   how you work?

Stanza: "You tell mum and dad that I've hit you"

> 204 K: Yeah, we'll, we've caught, you know, **we hear them round the**
>   **corner** kind of saying "*Right you tell them, you tell them that I've hit you*
>   *uhm*
>   *and*
>   *uhm I'll show them a mark on my*" (whispering)
>   sorry, I'm whispering, I don't need to whisper, do I! You tell them that
> I've-
>   OT: It won't come out in the transcript, but I'll-
> 209 K: Yeah, it'll be like,
>   OT: Yeah
>   K: "<u>You tell mum and dad that I've hit you</u>,
>   uhm
>   I'll
>   go,
>   uhm,
>   you slap yourself now give yourself a mark and then I'll put a strangle
>   mark

Stanza: This used to happen to us

> 214 K: It's sort of like a, ***it's like a narrative that they play out***,
>   OT: Mmm
>   K: you know,
>   and do you know what, I think it's, I think it's,
>   it's that, but do you know what
>   <u>this used to happen to us</u> or this has happened to us,
>   let's see if it,
>   let's see how they're going to react when we tell them it's happened and –
>   there's a lot of that goes on

Strophe 3: Here we go again

Stanza: It happens so often

> 219 OT: And how does
>   how does that make you feel when you hear that or how
>   perhaps there's been a - ?
>   K: Bloody angry! (laughs) No, not angry, but, not at all, that's the wrong
>   word, just like oh! (laughs)
>   Sometimes you just think-
>   OT: What, **here we go again**, or?
>   K: Yeah, because it happens so often you're just like ah! (laughs)

Stanza: At first we just would be, almost distraught

> 225 OT: Mmm, so now you respond differently
>   K: Yeah
>   OT: to how you responded?
>   K: No yeah, when we responded at first we just would be,
>   you know,
>   um,
>   a little bit like almost distraught and be like oh my goodness, you know,
>   and we would probably,

Strophe 4: There were constant themes of being given away

Stanza: Because of his attachment he was trying to reaffirm that he was not
loved and not wanted

>   a lot of what happened I think with Kieran was he,
> 229 because of his attachment he was trying to reaffirm that he was
>   useless and
>   not loved and not wanted and that we actually wanted to get rid of him.
>   I mean its only

Stanza: It's only recently that he's accepted that he's ours

>   I think it's only recently, in the last year that he's accepted that he's
> ours,   he's
>   permanent, he's
>   not going to be,
>   you know, **there was constant themes of being given away**, given
>   back, taken
>   away,
>   taken back and …

Strophe 5: It wasn't funny back then

Stanza: He wants to present you with these scenarios to just test and see
how you are going to react

> 234 I think he wanted, <u>he wants to present you with these scenarios</u>
>   to, to, <u>to just test and see</u>
>   <u>how are you going to react</u>, are you going to take him away, does he need do
>   we
>   really
>   love him,
>   can he trust us,
>   you know. And but it was,
>   so, you know,

Stanza: "You've set this one up!"

>   there'd be,
>   there'd be lots of like "Ahh!" screams, you know, "Ahh, Julie's,"
>   you know,
>   "strangling me, oh, Julie's
> 239 pushed me out of bed!" And then there'd be Julie running in the room
>   crying going, "Oh he's done this to me." And so, you know, even now we
>   know sometimes,
>   we're like "All right, okay, come on, you've,
>   you've, <u>you've set this one up!</u>".
>   OT: The two of you.
>   K: (Laughs) Yeah, yeah! Set this one up and it is quite funny but,
>   you know,

Stanza: At first we'd panic

> 244 **it wasn't funny back then**. It was sort of, we'd react really,
>   OT: Right
>   K: we'd be like oh how do we get through, you know, we'd sort of try and
>   sit them down, talk them through it
>   and we'd, we'd,we'd
>   do a lot of, you know.
>   I think
>   <u>at first we'd panic,</u>

Strophe 6: Now it's different

Stanza: You're always drawn towards the little cute girl in that relationship

>   but we didn't quite know, we'd sort of tell him off,
>   he'd go crazy.
>   248 We'd, we'd comfort Julie because we were always,
>   it's terrible<u>, you're always drawn towards the, the little cute girl</u>, you know,
>   <u>in that relationship</u>. It's really difficult and it shouldn't always be but I
>   don't know why we were

Stanza: It was difficult sometimes to take his side

> Kieran was this five-year old boy, you know, and he comes at age five,
>   going
> on to six,
> quite aggressive. You know, <u>it was difficult sometimes</u>
> <u>to</u>
> <u>take his side</u> you know and that's quite,

Stanza: I hate the fact that it was like that when I look back

> 254 you know, <u>I hate the fact that it was like that when I look back</u>, you   know.
>   Julie always got the
>   more
>   kind of emotional response I think.
>   **Now it's different**
>   and now, now we realise that Kieran was just
>   crying out for that.

3.2.2. Findings

The what: In this section Keith brings to life an aspect of the sibling relationship and the quality of their interaction with each other as a pair and in relation to the parent couple. Keith had previously demonstrated that he thought of his lived experience in narrative terms; here too he talked about his insight into the sibling dynamics in terms of narrative, proposing that the siblings had a shared story of their early experiences, a story they had both internalised and that now came out in the conflicts they constantly enacted together. Keith's talk showed that, possibly informed by the psychotherapeutic work he had undertaken, he actively engaged in interpreting and finding meaning in the sibling's behaviours; the understanding he had reached was that what drove them was an expectation that their early experiences would be repeated.

Keith's own story in this part of the interview was about how the siblings' behaviour as a pair impacted on Sarah and him as a parent-couple and how over time, through gaining insight into the meaning of the siblings' behaviour, their reactions to the children's enactments changed. As part of this narrative Keith talked about the uncomfortable reality of having been drawn more towards one child than to the other, something he speaks about with regret ("I hate the fact that it was like that when I look back" Strophe

6, Stanza 3). However, true to the overall thrust of his adoption experience as a story of going from chaos and confusion to insight - here too Keith tells of how through gaining a better understanding of the meaning of his son's aggressive and provoking behaviour he was able to recalibrate his feelings towards both his children.

The how: As the sole respondent in the interview Keith did not have a partner with whom to share the narrative work or negotiate the interview situation, something which he referred to at different points in the interviews ("It's not fair that Sarah isn't here"). One of the consequences was that, with the interviewer as his only interlocutor, Keith had longer goes at talking, producing longer stretches of uninterrupted text. Nonetheless, Keith was a very animated respondent and in his speech evoked different voices, often using direct speech and dramatization in the telling of his story. This was a device that he seemed to make use of to evoke the heightened feelings and hurly-burly provoked by the children's enactments; equally however, dramatization seemed to be Keith's way of sidestepping the difficulty he sometimes encountered in telling the story sequentially and with the distance required for narration ("This is where I am rubbish!" Strophe 2, Stanza 1). It was in response to Keith's struggle to word parts of his experience - moments where words failed him - that I sometimes intervened, interpreting some of his non-verbal gestures and his affect, or completing unfinished sentences ("What, here we go again?" Strophe 3, Stanza 1). Thus, as interviewer I contributed to the construction of Keith's narrative, not just by asking the next question but also by interpreting, ("So now you respond differently to how you responded?" Strophe 3, Stanza 2) and, occasionally, filling in the gaps.

With this text I applied the same method of narrative analysis as with Susan and Gordon's text: having firstly raised the narrative and circumscribing that part from the raw interview text (Appendix 8b, A, pp. 175 - 177) I re-transcribed the part with line breaks, inserted to capture the rhythm of the ebb and flow of Keith's speech (Appendix 8b, B, pp, 177-180) which was characterised by stretches of fast talk where he didn't seem to pause for breath, alternated with more halting sections, with repetitions, re-phrasing and self-correction, or with long pauses where Keith searched for his words. It seems to me that the transcription shows how Keith was working hard to convey the *quality* of his lived experience as well as trying to give narrative shape to it, and there was a sense in which he embodied the experience in the telling, as if re-living the drama

of it from the inside and identifying with the characters (as indicated by his whispering for example), rather than talking from the more distanced position of a narrator.

The subsequent division of the narrative into strophes and stanzas brought the narrative thread in Keith's talk into relief whilst also revealing how his narrative work encompassed contradictions, digressions, and different positionings:

Strophe 1: The sibling pair are a little unit
Stanza 1: They work as a tag team (K)
Stanza 2: Only in a challenging way that every child will do (K)
Stanza 3: For a long time it was constant (K)

Strophe 2: We hear them round the corner
Stanza 1: Can you remember a time? (OT)
Stanza 2: "You tell mum and dad that I've hit you" (K)
Stanza 3: This used to happen to us (K)

Strophe 3: Here we go again
Stanza 1: It happens so often (K)
Stanza 2: At first we just would be, almost distraught (K)

Strophe 4: There were constant themes of being given away
Stanza 1: Because of his attachment he was trying to reaffirm that he was not loved and not wanted (K)
Stanza 2: It's only recently that he's accepted that he's ours (K)

Strophe 5: It wasn't funny back then
Stanza 1: He wants to present you with these scenarios to just test and see how you are going to react (K)
Stanza 2: "You've set this one up!" (K)
Stanza 3: At first we'd panic (K)

Strophe 6: Now it's different
Stanza 1: You're always drawn to the cute little girl in that relationship (K)
Stanza 2: It was difficult sometimes to take his side (K)
Stanza 3: I hate the fact that it was like that when I look back (K)

The strophe headings show how the narrative begins in the present, with Keith describing the sibling pair as operating like a unit or a tag team rather than as individuals, and with Keith playing out what the children sound like when they are plotting or scheming and how as a parent-couple they tend to respond now (Strophes 1, 2 and 3). There is then a shift of the narrative into the past (indicated by the headings for Strophes 4 and 5) where Keith talks about what the themes of the sibling pair's

enactments *used to be*, with a commentary about Kieran's attachment pattern, how that led him to seek to repeat and provoke rejection, and how alarming this was for them as adoptive parents in the beginning ("At first we'd panic"). With the last strophe (6) Keith returns to the present; here he establishes that they respond to Kieran differently now ("Now it's different") and looks back to how difficult it was for them in the past to feel sympathetic towards Kieran, a boy and the older, more outwardly disturbed of the siblings, compared to the younger, "cute little girl". Keith conveys a sense of inevitability about this, but concludes the narrative with an expression of his regret at the thought of their lack of understanding of Kieran's behaviour in the early years of the adoption and how this lead to a tendency, perhaps, of scapegoating him thus depriving him further of the love he craved.

Whilst the organisation of Keith's narrative into strophes highlights the time sequence in his talk, the stanzas show the complexity and diversity of his speech and how as a narrator he is pulled in different directions. For example it can be seen how Keith shifts between on the one hand wanting to communicate the strange intensity of his sibling's relationship, and on the other a wish to normalise it by suggesting that they do what "any child will do" to test their parents (Strophe 1, Stanza 2).   Further, as well as seamlessly moving between present and past - Keith also moves between different modes of talk and registers, shifting between discursive (Strophe 1), dramatic (Strophe 2), humorous (Strophe 2,3, and 5) and reflective talk (Strophe 6). I would suggest that what this shows is how hard it was for Keith, who was still very much immersed in the nitty-gritty of the constantly challenging experience of parenting his two young adoptive children, to construct a coherent narrative about it.

6. DISCUSSION

Of the context

That sibling relationships are important in childhood has, to my knowledge, never been openly disputed. However, as has been discussed, the full extent of their influence on human and social development, and their importance in the adult psyche, has. In modern western society, across the academic disciplines and in social practice, the most formative relationship for the human subject has, undoubtedly, been considered to be the one with parents, which has been conceptualized as the vertical relationship (Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003). As I have delineated, in the last thirty years greater attention has been paid to the developmental influence of siblings, their importance in adulthood, and - in psychoanalysis - the influence of internalized childhood sibling relationships on adult relationships. Mitchell has argued for a paradigm shift by positing the psychic centrality of sibling (lateral) relationships and the founding structure of lateral anxiety: "Siblings are essential in any social structure and […] are the psyche's major elements." (ibid., p.1).

Changes in adoption policy seem to reflect a general re-evaluation of sibling relationships: whilst sibling adoption still constitute the minority of adoption (30% nationally), there is a trend towards trying to place brothers and sisters together to preserve the sibling relationship. There are many bureaucratic obstacles to this, as well as ambivalence on the part of professionals and prospective adopters. Studies have shown that if sibling groups are separated when going into care they are less likely to be placed together in adoptive placements (Hindle; Selwyn and Saunders, 2011). Figures from the Adoption Register for England (2011- 2014) indicate that whilst between 20 and 30% of prospective adopters would consider adopting up to two children, the percentages for larger groups are much lower (between 1 and 3%). From the professionals' perspective Saunders and Selwyn's research study (2011) strongly suggests that adoption practitioners are themselves resistant to facilitating adoptions of large *sibling groups*: older children, sibling groups, *and* indeed sibling pairs, are classified as 'hard to place'.

At the outset of this project I was surprised to find that the issue of the challenges of sibling adoption seemed not to have been studied, particularly in terms of the psychological demands the sibling relationship might place on adoptive parents and how this might affect their parenting capacity; it seemed to me that what was not being considered was the impact of the sibling relationship on the adoptive parents. The question arises whether the growing pressures in adoption and fostering to keep siblings together requires glossing over the psychological complexity and emotional challenges of the task of parenting siblings, particularly when the children bear the psychological scars of early neglect, abuse and trauma as we know many adopted children do (Hodges et al, 2003; Rutter, 2005; Miller, 2008; Edwards, 2008)

Of the psychosocial perspective

The present study offers a psychosocial perspective on adopters' accounts of siblings in adoption: from this perspective personal experiences are viewed as emerging from, and deeply embedded in, a particular social and discursive context. At the same time this study understands the human subject as having a psychic reality where both conscious and unconscious processes are at work, with fantasy and defensive processes precluding certain dimensions of experience from being known, constantly disturbing the integrity of the human subject by limiting or altering what is accessible for conscious knowledge and can be put into words. (Freud, 1914 and 1923; Laplanche, 1999; Mitchell, 2000). Narrative discourse offers the research subject a way round these limitations.

In my first examination of the research subjects' accounts I was informed by narrative theory's understanding of language as constitutive of the subjects' reality and of personal identity (Riessman, 1993; Bruner, 2002; Murray, 2003). Thus I considered participants' narratives in terms of their content, but also for how they were constructed and how they were spoken (Gee, 1986; Emerson and Frosh, 2004). In so doing I traced the kinds of realities and identities the research subjects constructed *in* and *through* their adoption stories. From this process four main adoption narratives emerged: a narrative of marginalization and estrangement from dominant family and parenting discourses (Chapter 5, Susan and Gordon); a gendered narrative of individual empowerment through the experience of adopting and raising two brothers (see Chapter 5, Cate); a narrative of successfully making an 'ordinary' family through the adoption of a sibling pair (Chapter 5, Deborah and Alastair); and a narrative of trauma, survival and hope,

encapsulated by the research subject in the trope of a journey from darkness to light, in a family where the psychological disturbance of one of the siblings was so acute that the adoption was temporarily disrupted (Chapter 5, Keith).

This summary gives a glimpse of the range of psychosocial positions and the different narrative identities constructed by the four sets of adopters who participated in the study. Whilst these different narratives suggest differing experiences 'in the telling', as has been shown in the previous chapter, the adopters' accounts were articulated through a number of common themes that are not specifically about siblings but more about the formation of the adoptive family and its interface with different public domains and social settings. These include[18]:

- The interface with the adoption agency or local authority through the matching and adoption process

- The encounters and relationships with specific social workers

- The hand-over of the children by the foster-carer to the adopters

- The partiality of information given to prospective adoptive parents before the adoption

- The experience of needing, finding and/or securing post-adoption support, including therapeutic interventions

- The fractious relationship with schools and head-teachers in fighting to have the children's special needs recognized.

Interestingly, all of these issues appear as key themes in Selwyn and Saunders' (2011) research on experiences of adopting large sibling groups, where they underline "the huge inconsistency" in the standard of service and support offered by adoption agencies and how this impacts on adopters' experiences and the security of the placement (p.254). What is evident from the accounts of adopters in the present research is the extent to which the timbre of their narratives is coloured by their *varying* experiences of post-adoption support, of feeling heard and understood in the extended family and social network, and of finding a place – with their adopted children – in mainstream settings (school, friendship groups etc.).

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[18] How these themes appear within the narratives of each of the research subjects can be verified in the 'Lists of Narratives and Sub-narratives drawn from the Interview Texts' (Appendices 7A-D; pp.128 - 150).

Lousada's observation that, "the inescapable fact about adoption is that it is a bureaucratic process on the one hand, and a 'mission' of reparation on the other" (2000, p.55) captures an uncomfortable reality that the adoptive family's dependence on social systems for its existence cannot be forgotten. I propose that it was the "sense of mission" around the research subjects' individual trajectories through the generally hostile social and bureaucratic terrain of adoption, that made their personal narratives so compelling.

What is thus revealed is the interplay between individual, family and 'meta' or master narratives about self, the family and identity in relation to dominant social discourses (Treacher and Katz, 2001). In this regard, what appeared as a master narrative amongst the adopters I interviewed was that adoption was a means of *forming a family*; the emphasis being on family-making rather than an idea of gaining an intimate parent/child relationship. With family primarily in mind, the couples set out to adopt two siblings simultaneously, but *no more than two*. Here three main motivations were expressed: one of personal limits, in which all those interviewed felt they would not be able to cope with more than two siblings ("I only have two hands", Cate); one of achieving symmetry and completeness through the making of a family of four, with two parents and two children ("For me the ideal family unit is complete", Gordon); and one of reparation by providing a home for two siblings not causing any further splits ("They will always have each other").

But these narratives can only be part of the story. As Treacher and Katz (2001) have posited, narratives are only ever *partial solutions* that are contradictory and fluid, incorporating memory, fantasy and creativity and omitting parts of experience that must remain forgotten, occluded and/or unspoken (Frosh, 2007). A subsequent more detailed analysis of two sections of interview text showed that the family project is challenged from within as well as from without. This closer look at the affect-laden narrative work in which the respondents engaged when giving an account of sibling dynamics that are particularly challenging for them as parents, revealed lines of fissure, or fault lines, within the adoptive family units and along which the parent-couple and sibling-pair's relationships are tested and test each other out (Chapter 5, pp. ?). They show the workings of a persistent tension between unity and fragmentation within the family,

underscored by the threat of breakdown of the 'forever family' to which adoptive parents and children aspire.

Of new perspectives on siblings in adoption

This study focuses on the experience of couples who chose to adopt a sibling *pair*, this being the most common type of sibling adoption. By interviewing adoptive parents who had adopted several years previously, and asking them to talk about their experiences of parenting and living with their adopted sibling-pair, this study has opened up several new perspectives on siblings in adoption: it gives focus to siblings in adoption beyond assessment; it sheds light on the adoptive parents' day-to-day lived experience of parenting a sibling-pair, giving voice to their insights and feelings about the children they adopted, their sibling relationship and the challenges the siblings have confronted them with; additionally, it offers different snap-shots of life with a sibling-pair in families four, five, seven and twelve years into adoption, whilst also affording a longitudinal perspective (Appendix 6).

The siblings in their adoptive families:

The research participants' accounts of their adopted sibling pairs suggest that the key dynamics of sibling relationships identified by studies of siblings in birth families (Freud, 1900; Klein, 1932; Bank and Kahn, 1982; Dunn & Kendrick, 1982) are also the most prominent features of sibling relationships in adoption. However, in the words of two of the adopters interviewed, they are "the same but more extreme" (Cate); "the same but to a much greater intensity" (Susan). In their observations of their children's relationship four key characteristics emerged:

- Acute rivalry for parental attention and resources, and in particular for maternal attention;
- Intense ambivalence between the siblings who could display extremes of love, hate and aggression towards each other;
- Reciprocity, relatedness (Hindle, 2014) and connectedness (Dunn, 1993) between the sibling pairs who could play co-operatively, play through which they re-enacted and shared communications about their early experiences (Hindle, 2014);
- An enduring bond of mutual dependence between the siblings (Bank and Kahn, 1982): described either as an attachment relationship, or in terms of the older child's parentified role in relation to his younger sibling.

Through her work on assessing sibling relationships of children in the care system Hindle raised the question as to whether the extremes of emotion often seen between these sibling, which were so concerning for professionals, were the result of a lack of mediation of the sibling relationship in the children's birth families and suggested this should be conceived as one the deficits they suffered (Hindle, 2014, p. 228). On the other hand previous studies have found that siblings can become closer in adverse family circumstances and where deficits in parental care has made siblings turn to each other for their care needs (Bank and Kahn, 1982; Dunn, 2014). Both these points apply to the siblings in this study.

The adoptive parents' experience

What was very apparent in the accounts of all the adopters I interviewed was the impact of the children's traumatic past in their present lives. All the research subjects made reference to learning about the children's past experiences by reading social care reports as they prepared to adopt, and some expressed strong feelings about their children's biological parents showing that they had the birth family very much in mind (Rustin, 2009). Much has been written by child and adolescent psychotherapists, and neuroscientists (Music, 1999 and 2014) about the long-term impact of cumulative trauma and neglect on children's emotional, cognitive and relational development (Lanyado, 1999; Hunter-Smallbone, 1999; Smallbone, 2014; Edwards, 2008). Less has been written about the different experiences of siblings from the same family and the implications for their development (Dunn, 2014); the research subjects' accounts show that one of the main challenges for them was managing the siblings' differences. Their accounts indicate that in their experience:

a) Both siblings bear the marks of profound deficits and/or cumulative trauma (developmental delay; severe relational and attachment difficulties; difficulty in regulating emotions; regressive behaviours; severe anxiety; very low self-esteem; controlling behaviours with peers and adults; learning difficulties) *in different ways*;

b) The sibling-pair have starkly *contrasting presentations*, typically one tending towards externalizing behaviours whilst the other is more internalizing of his/her anxieties, so that one sibling is more immediately challenging for the parents than the other;

The findings show that these differences in the children place particular challenges on the parents because:

- meeting the children's different needs confronts them with their limited emotional and physical resources;

- There is an economy of shared resources at work where the parent-couple's endeavours to treat both children equally are strenuously tested, as one child tends to take up more time, energy and resources because of their more acute needs and demanding behaviours;

- There is a felt need to distinguish the individual children from the sibling-pair, for example by finding ways of giving them individual time or staggering their bedtimes, but this meets with great resistance from the siblings;

- The parents are confronted with their own responses to the two children and the difficult realization that one child is more immediately loveable and easier to care for than the other, or that they feel greater affinity with one over the other.

Studies have shown that siblings have different experiences in the same family environment, they can experience different relationships with parents and other siblings and that these differences have a significant impact on development. Differential treatment of a sibling by a parent, for example, has been shown to have a long-term adverse impact; children have been shown to be careful observers of their parents' relationship with their siblings (Dunn, 2014). In contexts of abuse and/or neglect the potential for favouritism or victimization are greater and the impact more devastating. My suggestion is that the challenges enumerated above, though arguably inherent to parenting all siblings, for adoptive parents, who live with the ghosts of the children's past, treating the siblings fairly, equally and with the same degree of loving care becomes all the more crucial. The dread of not doing so, I would suggest, is that of repeating or perpetuating experiences of neglect and emotional deprivation, and of doing further harm. Hence the reason why it was by the difficulty of sharing out their emotional resources equally that the adopters I interviewed seemed most troubled and about which they expressed sadness, guilt or a sense of failure.

<u>A longitudinal perspective:</u>

Bank and Kahn (1982) and Dunn (1993) emphasised that siblings' relationships are not static but change over time and through the children's developmental transitions. A key time of change for sibling relationships is between middle childhood and adolescence.

Through interviews the respondents had the opportunity to look back to their beginnings with the children, from the first meeting to bringing them home, to entering the world of school. The siblings in this research were prevalently of primary school age at the time of the interviews, but had arrived in the adoptive family at different stages of their development, the younger siblings generally being 'pre-schoolers', so having at least a year at home with their adoptive mother (as all the fathers took short periods of leave), while the older sibling went straight into infant or primary school. The narratives about the older siblings was generally that they had a more difficult start and less time to bond with their new mother, so that they were at a disadvantage in relation to their younger sibling. At the time of interviewing one child had recently transferred to secondary school, and another set of siblings (Cate's adolescent sons) were on the brink of leaving education, so there was a certain amount of anxious looking ahead to the future too. Thus this research sheds light on the evolving relationships between the parent-couple and their adopted children, but also on the work they had to do as adopters to establish their position as parents, *over time*. Some key relational tasks emerge from the findings presented in Chapter 5:

- There is some degree of urgency in the first years of adoption to establish a relationship with the individual children, a kind of attachment timetable that is the priority of adoptive parents;

- This is initially aided by the children's regression to an infantile state of needing primary maternal care. This means that the attachment relationship with the adoptive mother is the children's priority (possibly with difficult implications for adoptive fathers);

- The adoptive parents' need to establish their position partly involves getting between the siblings and asserting a relationship with each individual child;

- This entails a certain amount of undoing of the existing sibling relationships - developed in verticality rather than laterality in an early context of parental vacuum - to re-build it in relation to an authoritative, containing and nurturing parental relationship

(the research subjects describe meeting with resistance by the children for whom there is a degree of loss in relinquishing their previous roles);

- The parents' task becomes one of mediating the new sibling relationship;

- With the adolescent siblings in this study what we see is their separation and individuation *from each other* - as well as from their adoptive parents – expressed in the need to find their respective birth fathers (rather than the birth mother they had in common).

The experience of interviewing about siblings

Being someone working and grappling with the concept of the unconscious and its manifestations in my psychoanalytic clinical work with children and their families, a question underlying my investigation was whether there is something about the function of siblings and sibling relationships in the human psyche that makes them a subject that resists focus.   My methodological decision to approach the issue of sibling adoption by considering how siblings and sibling relationships *are talked about* in the narratives of sibling-pair adopters was partly motivated by this question.

My reading of psychoanalytic studies on siblings – from Freud to Mitchell – I found that whilst in fact there was a growing literature on brothers and sisters and sibling relationships, there persisted a view in psychoanalytic writing that sibling relationships had been excluded from theory and forgotten in adult psychoanalysis (Bank and Kahn, 1982; Graham, 1988; Mitchell, 2000 and 2003; Coles, 2003); in other words what emerged was a narrative of omission around siblings. This was a narrative that chimed with my own feelings at the outset of the project, but on the other hand it seemed to disavow the writing that had in fact been done on siblings since Freud (1900, 1908) and Klein (1932), and to ignore developmental research into siblings and the work of psychoanalytic child psychotherapists.

My reading led me to reflect on my own experience of doing research on siblings and to note my underlying feeling whilst doing the interviews that somehow, despite the focus of my questions and the respondents' efforts to respond to them, we were not getting to the heart of the matter of siblings.   This was accompanied by my sense that the affective thrust of the respondents' narratives, and what most engaged me, was elsewhere: in their personal adoption mission and not in the sibling story.   Yet this

internal experience I had as interviewer does not seem to correspond to the data I was able to gather: as the findings I present in Chapter 5 indicate, the participants *did* talk about their experience of adopting and parenting their sibling pair in some detail, and they were quite candid about some of the difficulties they encountered.

What I suggest emerges in this conundrum is something of the ambivalence towards the sibling issue that has been raised by theorists such as Graham (1988), Mitchell (2000) and Coles (2003) in relation to psychoanalytic theory and practice. They argued that the dyadic structure of psychoanalysis colludes with the persistent (unconscious) wish to be the only child, that the Oedipal triad is a more comfortable position than laterality, and that oedipal anxiety (i.e. the relationship with parents) acts as a screen for lateral anxiety. In line with Graham and Coles' propositions I would argue that the pervasive difficulty in attending to the complexities of sibling relationships in children and to how they make us feel, is an indication of our tendency, as adults, to unconsciously defend against their powerful presence in our own psychic realities. This last point might be helpfully thought about in light of Laplanche's elaboration of Freud's 'Copernican revolution' and of his diagnostic concepts of 'going-astray' and 'covering-over' (Laplanche, 1999).

In psychoanalysis the conscious self is always conceived in relation to unconscious subjectivity, a relation characterized by more or less receptivity, more or less denial and disavowal (Freud, 1895; 1915; 1916-17; 1923). Laplanche called the unconscious Freud's 'Copernican revolution" (Laplanche, 1999); in this conception the unconscious is understood as having brought about a de-centering of the human subject in relation to its own nature. Freud (1917) posited this decentering as one of the three historic blows to human narcissism. Famously, Laplanche argued that 'if Freud is his own Copernicus, he is also his own Ptolemy' (op.cit. p.60), seeing an oscillation and dialectic in Freud's work between a decentering – in his stated aims – and a recurring re-centering of the human subject. Laplanche contributes a diagnostic interpretation of this oscillation as a wandering or going-astray (*fourvoiement*) of Freudian thought (Laplanche, 1980-7; 1993; 1999). In his introduction to *Essays on Otherness*, Fletcher (1999, p.3) summarises Laplanche's theory:

These wanderings astray are magnetized and drawn by the object of inquiry even when they lead to an impasse. The covering over and occlusion of the discovery of the radical otherness of the unconscious and of sexuality in Freud's thought, Laplanche suggests, trace out the movements of just such a covering over in the human subject itself.

My tentative proposition here is that there is something intrinsic to sibling relationships and how they continue to operate in and on the adult psyche that induces a 'going-astray' from and a 'covering over' of the object. Whilst it may be true that the radical potential of sibling relationships (Mitchell, 2003) is a dimension of 'laterality' that is collectively – culturally and historically – suppressed and covered over, my suggestion is that what is occluded from thought, and what is missing in readily available discourses, is the profound and enduring existential and narcissistic threat that real and fantasied siblings pose to the individual's sense of security, self-identity, and value in the family, the group, and any social milieu.

An evaluation of the study

Within the parameters of its small scale I believe this study achieves what it set out to do. By using qualitative interviews with a small sample of participants as the method of investigation, I was able to gather rich and detailed accounts of what it is like to adopt and parent a sibling pair. My interview design and methodological approach to the interview material, which involved three stages of analysis and combined narrative and thematic methods, allowed a systematic investigation of adopters' subjective experience through a fine-grained analysis of their accounts.

My questions required the interviewees to focus on their lived experience and observations of their adopted children's sibling relationship, and how it impacted on them as parents, with as backdrop their adoption experience as a whole. Their narratives told of complex and personally difficult experiences that were profoundly challenging and rewarding in unexpected ways.

As I interviewed only four sets of adopters – six research participants in total - I was able to approach each of them like individual case studies, whilst remaining within the boundaries of the research (rather than therapeutic) aims and deliberately not applying the interpretative tools of the psychoanalytic consulting room (e.g. history taking, transference and countertransference interpretations in light of that history) to the

research interview texts. Nonetheless I carried out a detailed and thorough analysis of the interview texts, which had been carefully transcribed following repeated listening of the interview recordings. In my analysis I was mindful to stay close to the texts; I used the recordings to inform my readings of the texts by checking the affect that was communicated in the respondents' speech.

As a qualitative study this research makes limited claims on the generalizability of its findings although a thematic analysis of their accounts about siblings allowed the delineation of recurring themes in the adopters' narratives. What this study does is bring into evidence the different personal meanings of adopting siblings for the research subjects, highlighting the different subjectivities that are communicated through the narratives. The researcher's subjectivity is also acknowledged as coming into play and so the findings are recognized as context-bound, relational and open to interpretation. However, the systematic, three-tier approach to analyzing the data ensured a thorough contextualization of the findings and the possibility of cross-referencing and testing them across the interviews. The material provided in the appendices is intended to aid in this.

Finally, my theoretical proposition about what we do to siblings in our minds and why they seem to go missing on their way "from experience to theory" (Graham, 1988; Mitchell, 2000)), emerged out of my reflexivity as researcher: the process of thinking reflexively about what I brought to the research process (Frosh and Baraitser, 2008) and trying to keep an "honest gaze" on my impact on the interview encounters and the research subjects' meaning-making activities, as well as on my own attitudes to the object of study.

Implications for further research and practice

There is much scope for further research on the subject of sibling relationships and siblings in adoption.

Research respondents frequently raised the question about the extent to which their experience differed to that of birth-families and this could be usefully investigated in more detail; other interesting differences to explore would be between sibling-pair adoption and that of individual children on the one hand and larger sibling groups on the

other. Further investigations could bring differences and commonalities in sharper focus by including comparison groups: birth families, individual adoptions and large sibling-group adoptions. Selwyn and Saunders (2011, p.255) quote an interesting finding that in the US four or more siblings are less likely to disrupt than adoptions of smaller numbers (Smith *et al*, 2006); this is a surprising finding that, if followed up and corroborated by research in this country, would have important implications for practice. In addition, research involving direct interviews with brothers and sisters in adoption, through the different developmental stages, with parallel interviews of adoptive parents, could shed light on the different experiences and perceptions of the sibling relationship for children and their adult care-givers.

Implications of the study for service delivery

That long-term post adoption support is necessary was an opinion voiced by all the adopters in this research. This is a long-held view often repeated in legislation and social-work and clinical literature alike. There remains a big gap between the need for support and what help is actually available. The participants of the present research conveyed disparate experiences that were contextual (geographical, local authority v. independent adoption agency) rather than needs related; there was a sense of chanciness and luck for those who found the help they needed. This suggests a persistent scarcity or inaccessibility of post-adoption support, and points to the need not only for further research into what kind of post-adoption support adoptive families find most beneficial at different points in their adoption, but for a re-think about the points of access for that support. The research also raised questions about what CAMHS can effectively offer adoptive families, whose needs can be acute and urgent, as there can often be a very long wait before families and children in crisis receive the intervention they need. Selwyn and Saunders (2011, p.255) suggest that adoption agencies should ensure that they have at least one attachment specialist of their own in the team to support their families.

Implications of the study for clinical practice

For Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy this research has implications for the dyadic model of working towards further extending already existing child/parent therapeutic models (which started with a focus on the mother/child relationship but increasingly includes both parents and siblings too) to psychotherapy with just the siblings together.

Family therapy obviously has a longer tradition of working with different constellations of family members together (Barnes, 2014); a comparative study of clinical practices with siblings would be an interesting line of research. The concept that seemed most meaningful to the adopters in this research was that of attachment, as they all reported to have learned about attachment in their pre-adoption preparation process. This suggests that clinical research and practice could develop ways of applying attachment theory to the facilitation of sibling relationships within the context of adoptive families (and foster placements).

In general the research points to the fact that proactive ways of working with sibling issues should be developed both by clinicians and family workers. The focus of the work with siblings might be their shared and different experiences in their families of origin, and a sense of identity and knowledge about their birth families. Therapeutic interventions should aim to counteract the potentially negative early influences and to support adoptive parents in the work of mediating the sibling relationship in order to help children foster positive aspects of their relationship with their sibling.

The main implication for practice that emerges from this research is the need for professionals to be more aware of the complexity and subtlety of the issues and implications of adopting siblings, including those psychological aspects that are difficult to contemplate, so that prospective adopters can in turn be better prepared *and* supported. This is a tall order for, as has been demonstrated, our feelings about siblings can get in the way.

Conclusion

In his essay "Disintegrating qualitative research" Frosh (2007), argues that what postmodernism adds to the Freudian notion of the decentred subject is that this 'decentering' can never be reversed, because:

> […] the human subject is never whole, is always riven with partial drives, social discourses that frame available modes of experience, ways of being that are contradictory that reflect the shifting allegiances of power as they play across the body and the mind.

Further,

> Because the riven subject cannot be seen as a whole, there is no external point from which the true story of the subject can be told. (p.638).

Frosh reminds us that in Laplanche's formulation the properly analytic vector is questioning of narrative structures and the ideas connected to them; it is suspicious of the impulse to make a coherent narrative out of a subject's chaotic accounts (Laplanche, 2003). For there are many powerful and significant psychological experiences that cannot be captured in narrative or that cannot be put into words as language – like narrative - is partial, limiting and involves a process of exclusion.

In this study I have engaged in the very processes I have critiqued: there is still a striving to get to the subject and to make sense of the subject. Language is what we have at our disposal and narrative is one of the linguistic strategies we can adopt to put our experiences into words. There are experiences, predicaments and feelings that elude words; words and language can be inadequate, producing gaps and distortions. It may be that the ambiguities, ambivalences and passions within which sibling relationships lie preclude their full recognition and expression. I would suggest this is one of the reasons that the full emotional and psychological implications for adopters taking on siblings have not been properly acknowledged. Nonetheless, as I have demonstrated, theoreticians, policy makers, practitioners and clinicians working with families in mind have endeavoured, and continue to endeavour, to know and understand more about what siblings really mean to us, both in childhood and as adults. The complexities and ambiguities of sibling relationships and the feelings they might elicit in us are uncomfortable to work with, particularly when (arguably for good reasons) there is a push for speedy decision-making. The challenge for those working with siblings whether therapeutically, in placement work or, indeed, in a parental role, is to strive to engage with the issues in a thoughtful way.

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APPENDICES

Information sheet given to participants

Title of Study: The experience of adopting siblings: challenges and satisfactions of adopting a sibling pair.

The study is being done as part of a Doctorate in Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy in the Department of Psychosocial Studies, Birkbeck, University of London. The study has received ethical approval.

My study aims to explore the range of experiences and aspects involved in adopting siblings, with particular focus on what it was like to become the parents of two children at once. The study will consider the process of adoption and the challenges and satisfactions there have been in the development of your relationships with your children over the years that the family has been together.

Participating in the project would mean you and your partner taking part in two interviews. The interviews will take about one hour and they would take place within 2 or 3 weeks of each other. The interviews would not involve your children and I would not need to meet them.

If you agree to participate we will agree a convenient time and place for me to interview you on two separate occasions. You will be free to stop the interview and withdraw at any time.

A code will be attached to your data so it remains totally anonymous.

The analysis of our interview will be written up in a report of the study for my degree. You will not be identifiable in the write up or any publication that might ensue.

The study is supervised by Viviane Green and Stephen Frosh, who may be contacted at who may be contacted at the School of Psychosocial Studies, BIRKBECK University of London, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HX. 0207 631 6207

Consent form

Title of Study: The experience of adopting siblings: challenges and satisfactions of adopting a sibling pair.

Name of researcher : Olivia Thompson

I have been informed about the nature of this study and willingly consent to take part in it.

I understand that the content of the interview will be kept confidential.

I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

I am over 16 years of age.

Name

_____

Signed

_____

Date

_____

There should be two signed copies, one for participant, one for researcher.

APPENDIX 3a

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 1 (PILOT INTERVIEW)

<u>1st Interview</u>

a) Preliminary questions to produce demographic data eg: Age, profession, brothers/sisters, parents, place of birth (possibly in questionnaire form)

b) Open Questions:

1   Can you tell me about how you came to the decision to adopt?
2   Can you tell about how you came to adopt two rather than one child?
3   Can you tell me about the story of the process you went through to adopt A and B?
4   Can you tell me about your first encounters with the children and how you first felt about them?
5   What were your thoughts about adopting siblings before the adoption and what is your opinion now?
6   Can you tell me about times together since the adoption with the children?
7   Has the adoption brought up issues from your own childhood?
8   Can you tell me about how feel the experience of parenting your children has affected you, individually and as a couple?

I would like the interview to allow participants to think about siblinghood issues so one of questions above (7 perhaps) may be replaced by questions below:

a) What kind of issues did you expect to come up in the adoption of a sibling pair?
b) Did any issues take you by surprise?

<u>2nd Interview</u>

c) Tailor-made narrative questions coming out of the first accounts (possibly focusing on areas in the narratives where there appeared to be tension or conflict as suggested by "contradictions, avoidances or hesitations" (Hollway and Jefferson 2000, p.43)
d) Structured questions to cover issues that the narrative interview may not have covered and to establish any factual/demographic information I may feel necessary for contextualisation/location of study and comparisons across the sample.

PRELIMINARY DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE (*To be completed at the first meeting)*

Part 1: about you (mother and father to be given a copy each to be filled in separately)

1. Name (initials only): _____

2. Date of birth: _____

3. What is your employment/profession? :

_____

4. Do you have siblings? (include half-siblings and step-siblings in your answer):

Yes/No

5. Number of siblings:

6. Give Details:

Sibling 1

Sibling 2

Sibling 3

Sibling 4

Sibling 5

Sibling 6

Part 2: about your children

7. What is the age and gender of your children?

Child 1:   Child 2:

8. Do they have any other siblings? (Include half-siblings and step-siblings in your answer) Yes/No

9. If the answer is yes, do they know any of their other siblings?

If yes, how many?

10. Do they have contact with them?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 2

<u>1st Interview</u>

The first meeting will be an opportunity for the participating couple and myself to meet each other, for me to give a brief explanation of my project and for us to discuss any queries the participants might have about me, the purpose of the project, confidentiality, the interview process etc.

I will ask participants to fill out the 'Preliminary Demographics Questionnaire'.

The interview itself will be quite open, aimed at allowing participants to tell me what they want about their life as a family.
My first question will be very open-ended: **Tell me about your life now, as a family.**
My prompting question might be**: Can you tell me (something) about times/life together as a family since the adoption of the children?**

Estimated duration of the interview: 1 hour.

<u>2nd Interview:</u>

In the second meeting I intend to pick up on details in the interviewees' accounts and to integrate them with the questions below:

1   *Can you tell me about how you came to the decision to adopt two rather than one child (and a little bit about the process you went through to adopt A + B?)*

2   Can you tell me about your first encounters with the children and how you first felt about them?

3   What kind of issues did you expect to come up in adopting siblings? Did any issues take you by surprise?

4   Can you tell me something about A+ B's relationship?

5   Can you tell me something about how you feel the experience of parenting your children has affected you, individually and as a couple?

Estimated duration of the interview: between 1 hour and 1 and a half hours

APPENDIX 5

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 3

1st Interview

Participants to fill out the 'Preliminary Demographics Questionnaire'.

Open-ended question: **Tell me about your life now, as a family.**
My prompting question might be**: Can you tell me (something) about times/life together as a family since the adoption of the children?**

Estimated duration of the interview: 1 hour.

2nd Interview:

In the second meeting I intend to pick up on details in the interviewees' accounts and to integrate them with the questions below:

1   *To begin with could you tell me about how you felt about the first interview? Did you have any thoughts about it?*

2   Can you tell me about how you came to the decision to adopt two rather than one child (and a little bit about the process you went through to adopt A + B?)

3   Can you tell me about your first encounters with the children and how you first felt about them?

4   What kind of issues did you expect to come up in adopting siblings? Did any issues take you by surprise?

5   Can you tell me something about A+ B's relationship?

6   Can you tell me something about how you feel the experience of parenting your children has affected you, individually and as a couple?

Estimated duration of the interview: between 1 hour and 1 and a half hours

SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE PARTICIPANT ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Parent Couple	Adopted sibling-pair	Full or half siblings	Age of siblings at point of adoption	Time living as an adoptive family at point of interview	Age of siblings at point of interview	Sibling-pair's other siblings known about	Contact with other sibs
Susan and Gordon	Joseph and Sally	Half siblings	4 and 1 yrs. old	7 yrs.	11 and 8 years old	Information not given	N/A
Cate (and Mike)	Chris and Tom	Half siblings	5 and 3 yrs. old	12 years	17 and 15 years old	-3 half sisters on maternal side - 1 brother each on paternal sides	Letter box contact
Alastair and Deborah	Rob and Ali	Full	5 and 4 yrs. old	5 yrs.	10 and 9 years old	1 half sibling	No
Keith (and Sarah)	Kieran and Julie	Full	6 and 3 yrs. old	4 yrs.	10 and 7 yrs	No	N/A

ADOPTIVE PARENT-COUPLE SIBLING HISTORY

Parent Couple	Age at point of adopting	Siblings	Full/Half sibs	Birth Order	Siblings spoken about in interview
Susan	Not known	1 sister	Full	Not known	Yes
Gordon	Not known	1 sister	Full	Not known	Yes
Cate	42	I brother	Full	Youngest (2 years younger)	Yes
Mike	Not known	1 brother		Not known	
Alastair	42	4 sisters (with one twin)	Full	Youngest with twin sister	Yes
Deborah	40	1 brother	Full	Youngest	No
Keith	40	2 brothers	Full	Youngest	Yes
Sarah	Not known	0	N/A	Only child	N/A

LISTS OF NARRATIVES AND SUB-NARRATIVES DRAWN FROM THE INTERVIEW TEXTS

SUSAN AND GORDON

Interview 1: "NOTHING PREPARES YOU FOR WHAT IT'S LIKE"

1. We've just gone through quite a difficult time in adoption terms (ll.2 - 154)

    a) Joseph starting secondary school

    b) He's just done the first half term

    c) We have a fair amount of experience now

    d) He's that bit older now so he can process better

    e) It has been a difficult time

    f) It's set off by the need for confrontation

    g) It's part of getting used to the new [school] environment

2. Sally has had less time and attention (ll.155 - 246)

    a) She's come off the worst

    b) There have been situations where she has been scared by him

    c) You have to restrain Joseph and take Sally out

    d) He's getting older, he's getting bigger

3. Having the confidence to take control (ll. 247 - 315)

    a) The help we have had

    b) He really gave us the confidence to hold him

    c) I can't talk to people who don't appreciate the situation

    d) I had to pick him up and take him to his room

    e) The situations have become less frequent

4. What happened on Monday night: repairing the situation (ll.316 - 354)

    a) What impacts me is what he says

    b) I was met by both of them at the door to say we're doing tea tonight

    c) He got off that high quicker than I did

5. The next morning they don't want to talk about it (ll. 355 - 439)

    a) The next morning you have to approach the subject

b) He's just flooded with shame

c) He wants us to move on very quickly

d) He knows what to say to wind us up

6. Sally's much more closed in (ll.440 - 575)

   a) If there's something she's ashamed of, it's much more difficult to get her to talk about it

   b) She put a kitchen knife against her wrist

   c) Joseph in some way has managed to express how he feels

   d) Even praising her […] she doesn't want to know

   e) It might be a ticking time bomb

7. Susan gets the motherly burden (ll. 576 - 623)

   a) Susan tends to get the emotional side

   b) Joseph's pursuits now have more of a leaning towards wanting to be with Gordon

   c) He's needed a lot of mothering

8. They cling on to the primary carer (ll. 624 - 709)

   a) It's almost a desperate thing sometimes

   b) They would sit on my feet

   c) It's a feature, we don't get hung about it

9. We ultimately wanted two children (ll.710 - 850)

   a) We thought we might have one and a few years later we might have another one

   b) The realization that if you wanted another one you had to go through the whole process again

   c) I always thought it was a better environment to have a family of four rather than three

   d) At that time they were not accepting couples who only wanted to adopt one child

   e) I don't think there were pressures to go more than two

10. Nothing prepares you for the reality of what it's like (ll.851 - 973)

    a) The training that we received was very good and we were taught about attachment

    b) But nothing prepares you for the reality of what it's like

c) I sometimes feel trapped a little bit between telling the full-scale truth about what it is like […] and trying to present it as a positive thing

d) The process has got to weed out the people who are wavering

e) I do think there's a bit of dishonesty around it

11. We completely underestimated it on all fronts (ll. 974 - 1052)

a) We probably thought we'd have maybe a couple of years of few difficulties

b) I wasn't in the mode that it would be so life changing

c) We underestimated the duration and the intensity and the frequency

d) A conundrum ever since we've adopted the children, what is the behaviour as a result of? Is it adoption, is it growing up, is it my behaviour?

12. My ideal family unit: a boy and a girl (ll.1053 - 1134)

a) We wanted them to be able to be a support to each other

b) For me the ideal family unit is full

c) We were fortunate to be matched with them

d) To be able to be in a family with another child you do get to practice your social skills

13. The challenges of adopting siblings: we were a bit naïve (ll. 1135 - 1247)

a) There's a competitiveness between them of greater intensity than I see in other families

b) It's like little birds in a nest

c) They've each been quite sly in getting the other into trouble

d) It might not be as heightened but non adopted children behave like that as well

e) When the chips are down they'll stick together like glue

14. They both regressed when they got here (ll.1248 - 1336)

a) She was 12 months old and he was three and a half

b) He suffered much more than she did in the birth home

c) We played babies a lot

d) We felt very fortunate to get Joseph and Sally at the ages that we did

15. The early days (ll. 1337 -1459)

a) I had two weeks paternity leave […] In hindsight it's absolutely not enough

b) Those early days were a nightmare

c) There's a big disparity between what you get as paternity and maternity leave for adopters and people having their own children and it should be the other way round

d) I think I just barely existed for about two years

e) Our lives are starting to re-emerge

Interview 2: "I'VE NOW GOT ADOPTION GLASSES ON AND THE WHOLE WORLD LOOKS DIFFERENT"

1. There were no thoughts about the specific consequences of a sibling group (ll.1- 214)

    a) You'd think about it in terms of double the care

    b) The complexity is underestimated

    c) They are much more competitive for attention and nurturing

    d) There's not enough love to go round

    e) An event last week

    f) They take fair to the nth degree

2. That's what we've got to get used to (ll. 215 - 417)

    a) There's no silver bullet

    b) We have to put a lot more planning in place

    c) We get exhausted

    d) It does impact us

    e) There was always a preference for mummy at bedtime

    f) Their anxiety rubs off on me

    g) Giving my attention to Gordon is also a threat to their survival

3. When it tips over to boiling point (ll. 418 - 555)

    a) We know the signs

    b) There are strategies

    c) We have learned to say when we are both exhausted

    d) They respond well to symbolism

    e) We have to show them that we are human

4. Talking about what can't be talked about (ll.556 - 705)

    a) I feel as though I am betraying their trust

    b) I don't see any added value of opening up these types of issues

    c) My parents don't get it at all

    d) There are very few people around us that understand

e) I want to keep a circle of friends that isn't always second guessing what I'm going through

f) I could do with a few more people

5. I've now got adoption glasses on and the whole world looks different (ll.706 -815)

a) I feel I'm just swamped in it

b) At book club

c) This crusade mentality

d) The Obama thing

6. Family and friends have got their own issues (ll. 816 - 1062)

a) Do you want to be dragged into our issues?

b) It's a lot broader than adoption

c) You can hear the tumbleweeds

d) You don't want to be labeled

e) When you do try and discuss it, it just doesn't go the way you want it

f) The myth still rules

g) There's a feeling it must be you

h) It helps to weed out your friends

7. Remembering the adoption process: the formation of a new family (ll.1063 - 1207)

a) We were over the moon

b) It was shocking to read what happened to them

c) You don't want to be too positive because it might not happen

d) Their social worker was a difficult woman

8. Being matched (ll.1208 - 1344)

a) Preparing the matching information

b) A big blow

c) We were matched just before Christmas

9. Meeting the children for the first time (ll. 1345 - 1555)

a) It was bizarre

b) There were lots of social workers we had never come across

c) This was the birth of our children

d) Moving in

10. A bizarre time (ll. 1556 - 1662)

a) Being really nervous

b) Fearing being rejected by them

     c)   You've already been through such a lot

     d)   There was no scale

     e)   It was all positive

11. Learning to communicate with the children (ll. 1663 - 1786)

     a)   Sally didn't come near us for a bit

     b)   Joseph was very difficult to understand

     c)   It must have been really hard for him

     d)   His cohort didn't understand him either

12. The early days (ll. 1787 - 1939)

     a)   The different gear of parenthood

     b)   A bond of anxiety

     c)   The day was full of meaningless noise

     d)   Fearing public embarrassment

     e)   You're just in a complete panic

     f)   The overriding feeling of I don't know how to parent

     g)   There's very little affirmative guidance

13. The post-adoption years (ll. 1940 - 2012)

     a)   We've found someone

     b)   Those post adoption years were very less supportive

14. Feeling like an interloper (ll. 2013 - 2148)

     a)   I had a lot of pride being a dad

     b)   I felt like a bit of an interloper

     c)   There's got to be a moment when you tell people

     d)   How do I find a preschool?

     e)   Before the adoption order you're in a strange hinterland

     f)   Nothing is straightforward

     g)   Changing the children's names

15. The shadow of the birth parents (ll. 2149 - 2400)

     a)   There was a big security concern

     b)   A visit

     c)   Getting spooked

     d)   We decided to change Sally's name

     e)   There's still a shadow

     f)   It was Sally they wanted

g) That's not our family; that was then

16. Talking about the adoption experience to prospective adopters (ll.2401 - 2558)

    a) If this was a typical adoption story …

    b) You've got to recruit the right kind of people for adoption

    c) We used to get a few people sent to us

    d) All you can do is be honest

    e) It gets a bit wearing

    f) This is bloodletting

    g) Being put in front of people that I thought couldn't do it

CATE

Interview 1: "I FEEL LIKE I HAVE HAD TO BE A MUM AND A DAD TO THE BOYS"

1. Putting things in context (ll.3 - 66)

    a) They have been always challenging, it in the last year they have been very challenging

    b) Being the only woman in the family

    c) Chris has given up education; Tom is at a pupil referral unit

    d) I have a very close relationship with them

    e) I am in the business but it is very difficult to when it's your own children

2. The boys are very different (ll.67 - 121)

    a) Chris settled very quickly; Tom was a lot more reticent

    b) The first moment kind of set a pattern

    c) I had to work really hard at my relationship with Tom

    d) It's like they're two sides of one coin

    e) They are teenagers now

3. I've always wanted to adopt two, not one, not three (ll.122 - 183)

    a) I felt that whatever happened to us as parents they would always have each other

    b) There's a gender story in my family

    c) I've only got two hands

    c) Why didn't you adopt my sister?

4. I feel like I'm being a mum and dad to the boys (ll.184 - 222)

    a) I'm having conversations with them that I would have traditionally thought their dad would have had

    b) The boys have taught me that I can be quite strong

    c) I always thought my husband would be the one to set the boundaries

5. It's within the parameters but a bit on the extreme side (ll. 223 - 268)

    a) When they argue their arguing is a lot more vehement

    b) Tom's like an overgrown toddler, throwing things around

    c) Chris can be a right little toe rag

d) It's more of an intense relationship I have with Tom

6. The adoption process: I thought they were going to really test me (ll. 269 - 331)

    a) Because of being a social worker

    b) I didn't want to be told any rosy stories

    c) I found it a bit too easy

7. The difficulty was keeping on at work (ll.332 - 422)

    a) Having the process alongside working within child mental health, that bit was difficult

    b) Having people at work getting pregnant, that was hard

    c) The loss and the grief of not having my own birth children

    d) It was really helpful having those two years of therapy

    e) I always had this feeling that I would not have my own birth children

    f) It was very difficult because I couldn't get any adoption leave then

8. Mike is committed in his own way (ll. 423 - 467)

    a) He said all the right things

    b) I do wonder now how committed he was

    c) Being in the business is a huge pressure for me

    d) Because it is such a challenge at the moment I think he really questions whether he ever did the right thing

9. We moved in the middle of the process (ll. 468 - 555)

    a) They had been through lots of changes

    b) We wanted to find somewhere to minimalise the possibility of moving again

    c) It made the process a bit longer

    d) We were offered two little girls; they didn't feel right

    e) Mike said "I think we could give these two little boys a home"

    f) I was already connecting with them

    g) The last foster-carer turned everything around by concentrating on the positives

    h) The transition was really smooth

    i) We didn't go anywhere for about a year to put down roots

10. The introduction is quite an ordeal (ll. 556 - 601)

    a) I've never been so nervous in my life

    b) A very important moment

  c) Mike managed better than I did; I was putting pressure on myself

  d) I was quite jealous actually

11. When they were little (ll. 601- 653)

  a) He was very interested in them

  b) We used to go out cycling

  c) I could manage Chris but Tom was very defiant even at an early age

  d) I thought all the other mums were much better than me

12. Tom and Chris: home life, school life (ll. 654 - 768)

  a) For Tom Chris was his main attachment figure

  b) He would bar me from leaving the nursery and then when I went to pick him up he wouldn't come

  c) Tom was always very good at school and Chris was an absolute nightmare, whereas at home I found Tom really difficult and Chris was a dream at home.

  d) We appealed every exclusion

  e) Tom's finding growing up really hard

  f) It's a strange moment now

Interview 2: " I CAN BE A LOT STRONGER THAN I EVER THOUGHT I COULD BE"

1. It felt good to have some space to think about them (ll.1 - 16)

  a) Thinking about the kind of journey we've been through together

  b) I have not problem talking about the whole process

2. I've had to learn to step back (ll. 17 - 69)

  a) My influence is a lot less than it used to be

  b) I was very involved in meetings at the school for Chris

  c) The challenge is more to step back now

  d) How will he manage in the big world when he has this kind of thread?

3. Managing the two of them (ll. 70 - 133)

  a) I always thought there would be a lot of sibling rivalry

  b) What I had to manage was keeping them both entertained in different ways

  c) Now they fight a lot more so I'm being referee a lot more

d) The surprise was actually about managing the difference between the two of them

   e) I've always seen Tom as the aggressive one but actually its about different sorts of aggression

4. With Tom it's an emotional rollercoaster (ll. 134 - 234)

   a) Chris is the bright one; Tom's not so bright

   b) It really upsets me that that he's still holding onto that kind of negativity

   c) At the weekend he sat on my lap

   d) Tom acts out that little boy bit of him

   e) When he switches its really hard

   f) The move to the pupil referral unit

5. Having to be mum and dad (ll. 235 - 348)

   a) The problem with doing the job I do is that my husband thinks I can do it all

   b) Mike finds the boys incredibly difficult

   c) We've always been told that when they are teenagers is when the difficulties are going to be

   d) With Mike it escalates

   e) Chris is quite a master of retreating

   f) I stand between Mike and Tom to calm things down

6. Mike (ll. 349 - 413)

   a) Mike's got to the stage where he feels Tom has got to go

   b) He has lost his confidence

   c) He doesn't like talking to people about it all

7. Wanting outside help (ll. 414 - 487)

   a) There's a social worker involved with Chris looking for his birth dad

   b) The social worker involved with Chris is now going to be involved with Tom to step up the search for the dad

   c) Nobody seems to have a kind of regular contact with the boys

   d) What might be more useful would be somebody out there who could help our relationship be a bit better

   e) It feels like there's more people around but nothing's really helping

8. It's the dads that seem important to the boys (ll. 488 - 625)

   a) The boys don't seem that bothered about meeting up with mum

b) Chris has met his dad twice now

c) Understanding his dad's background is quite a lot to take in

d) The problem for all adopters is that you haven't got a full history

e) I'd feel very different if they were looking for their mum

f) Visiting Chris's dad's unit: I can really be mum and not worry too much

g) I'll feel very differently about when Tom finds his dad

h) They've always latched on to when they're 16 that's when they will see their birth parents

i) If Tom doesn't find his dad it will reinforce the fact that Chris is the favoured one

9. People think they know what's best (ll. 626 - 671)

a) Mike's family's view of the value of strict parenting

b) My family were much more supportive

c) Mike thinks its down to me because his father left it to his mother

d) Mike and his brother: it's a mirror image

10. I called the police (ll. 672 - 746)

a) It was an argument over a really small thing that escalated

b) Tom gets involved: any excuse to have a go at Mike

c) It wasn't getting better

d) So I just called the police

e) It did what I wanted it to do; it stopped the argument

f) "You realise I called the police on you as well as the boys"

g) The night before we had been called to the police station for Chris

h) Mike got very angry at the police station

i) Calling the police was not just out of the blue

11. We are trying to work out how we manage things with the experience we both had (ll.747 - 785)

a) I'm always putting Mike down

b) My father was like a mother and a father to me

c) Mike grew up with a mother doing everything and I grew up with a father doing everything

d) The expectations we have

12. When you adopt your friendships change (ll. 786 - 831)

a) A lot of my friends adopted as well

b) "You're a social worker Cate, you'll know what to do"

c) Some people don't appreciate how hard it can be

d) Playground conversations

e) You began to realise that people had prejudices

13. The judgments people made (ll. 832 - 896)

a) Chris's behaviour was difficult out there, with school

b) There was a girl in Chris's class …

c) I don't know whether I was being oversensitive

d) There were judgments people made

e) It was probably because it was a nice white middle class school

14. It was something about fighting for them and protecting them in the outside world (ll. 897 - 981)

a) I challenged the Head Teacher about using emotive language for Chris

b) Once I got very angry with her and I gave her a book I had in my bag about attachment and separation

c) I felt I was like a mother protecting her young

d) In Year 5 and 6 other teachers started to understand where Chris was coming from

e) The Deputy gave us enough support

f) Every time he was excluded we appealed

g) We've done exactly the same for Tom

14. I have found bits of myself I never knew existed (ll. 982 - 1052)

a) Parenting Tom and Chris has had a massive impact on me

b) I've always thought that somehow fate has got me into this position to challenge me

c) It's had a huge impact on our relationship

d) The strain has been there much more recently

e) I feel quite bad

15. Training to be a family therapist (ll. 1053 - 1097)

a) Going through infertility and interrupting the training

b) Resuming the training when the boys had just started secondary school

c) I think I did manage

d) It helped because I did my dissertation on adoption

ALASTAIR AND DEBORAH

Interview 1: "THERE'S TWO OF US AND THERE'S TWO OF THEM"

1. The introductory period (ll.1 - 68)

   a) The introductory period was brief and frantic

   b) We did want a sibling pair

   c) They were older, definitely

   d) Going into the process we'd always thought the younger the better

2. We weren't bothered about the baby bit (ll. 69 - 142)

   a) We were offered a baby

   b) It did make us think

   c) Ali spent the first three years with us being a baby

   d) You found it a bit more over the top than I did

   e) I still had a worry that I would have that longing for a much younger one, but I never did

   f) I was happy to have older children

3. The first time we met them (ll. 143 - 167)

   a) It was joyous, they were so excited

   b) We were more nervous than they were

   c) We were completely in love with them before we met them

4. The adoption process (ll. 168 - 236)

   a) We'd known about them for three and a half months before we met them

   b) The catalogue is really quite upsetting

   c) The photograph we had of them was beautiful

   d) We weren't formally matched until two weeks before we met them

   e) We certainly were going through some definite emotional bonding already

   f) It was very emotional watching them on video

5. I don't think we had the wool pulled over our eyes (ll. 237 - 341)

   a) We found out later that they were on the difficult to place register

   b) We knew quite a lot about their early experience

   c) Social services realized that they tried too long to help the parents

   d) After all that time they did it as an emergency in the end

e) The foster-carer did an amazing job

f) The Guardian Ad Litem's report was the really depressing one

6. We're dealing with the consequences (ll.342 - 386)

    a) Rob has come a long way but he's still not easy

    b) We had to access CAMHS

    c) We didn't legally adopt until 18 months later because I didn't want to give up the support

7. We've done stuff for our Adoption Agency (ll.387 - 412)

    a) As part of the process a parent turns up and talks about their experience

    b) We've done that two or three times (we like talking about ourselves)

8. The first and foremost bit is we are a family (ll.413 - 458)

    a) We feel like a family on a sort of ordinary day-to-day basis

    b) Ali had developmental delaying due to foetal alcohol

    c) We've finally got her diagnosed with ADHD

    d) Rob's got the emotional (difficulties)

9. Rob (ll.459 - 581)

    a) In the early days he couldn't be alone

    b) He'll always be the one that's in charge directing

    c) He finds it really hard to take criticism

    d) I don't expect him to do very much because he's so oppositional

    e) He will lie

    f) He took himself outside the other day

    g) He's made lots of progress

    h) He's usually very remorseful

10. Ali (ll. 582 - 653)

    a) Its funny because Ali, when she came to us, just was so good

    b) She used to say "I love you mummy" all the time; that was a feature of the first year

    c) She didn't understand certain relationships with adults; she was indiscriminate

    d) The Adoption Agency provided us with a brilliant little letter which we gave to friends and relatives

    e) We did worry for her safety

11. They love being part of the extended family (ll.654 - 715)

    a) One of the things we wanted to do fairly early on was for them to meet a cousin

b) All the meetings with other family members were very short and brief

c) There was a wedding six months later, and they were amazing

12. We have family snuggles (ll.716 - 760)

    a) Fairly early on we had this thing called family snuggles

    b) We've alway had a tactile loving cuddling and not everyone has that

13. Ali adores Rob (ll. 761 - 858)

    a) She always does nice things for him

    b) They do play together

    c) She does get upset when he's horrid to her

    d) Her upset has a different quality

    e) There was some times when we were actually quite scared that he seemed to be enjoying his anger

14. She has an interesting dependency on him (ll. 859 - 940)

    a) When we moved here she had to go to a different school; she really missed him

    b) She used to seek him out in the playground

    c) He got a bit of positive attention by being Ali's big brother

    d) Sometimes she'll try and cover up for him

15. They get lumped together because they are so close, 13 months (ll. 941 - 974)

    a) Exclusive attention

    b) We tried to separate their bed times

    c) We had to separate them because we were frightened for her safety

16. The move (ll.975 - 996)

Interview 2: "WE ARE FAMILY AND IT'S GREAT"

1. We always like the opportunity to talk about our family (ll.1 - 31)

2. The move out of London (ll.32 - 106)

    a) We had a small window of opportunity

    b) We moved to this part of the country because all our family are in this chunk

    c) School-wise it has been positive

    d) We're still bedding down

    e) It's nice having people to stay

3. Seeing members of the family (ll.107 - 232)

    a) The helpful letter

    b) They've been fantastic

c) Deborah's mum was very ill

d) Deborah's dad drove them to the coast without asking

e) They love being part of a big extended family

f) The wedding

4. The only negative episode (ll.233 - 287)

a) My brother and his wife have not been able to have children

b) She later claimed they didn't proceed [with adoption] because of my advice

c) We changed our minds

d) It became a family issue

5. We gradually came to the realization that we would like to try and adopt (ll.287 - 371)

a) We realized that you can love children that aren't biologically yours

b) A negative experience of adoption

c) We went into it with our eyes open; being aware there are challenges
doesn't always help you

6. They should've been removed sooner (ll.372 - 481)

a) Reading the Guardian's report: that's the one I remember

b) I was angry partly on [the children's] behalf

c) This phrase of falling through the net

d) They were having a miserable time

e) It was the police that took them out

7. When Rob's kicking off it takes over everything (ll.482- 602)

a) Sometimes it pervades the whole day

b) He can do nasty things to Ali

c) We read all these horror stories: we've never had that

d) We don't always cope do we?

e) The lower level oppositionality, that's the stuff that drags me down these days

f) Sometimes Ali joins in

8. The surprising and unexpected (ll.603 - 704)

a) You were surprised how cross you get; I'm surprised how cross you get

b) The lying bother's you more that it does me I think

c) All these things you can discuss beforehand but when it really happens it is really
difficult to rationalize

d) The best thing you can have is a reputation for being an honest person

9. Information gets hidden from adopters (ll. 705- 769)

a) Anything written by adopters there is a huge feeling that information has been hidden from them

b) With my brother-in-law […] they didn't even discuss about attachment disorder

c) We had to really fight for stuff for Rob

d) We didn't know that they were classified as hard to place

10. The government is trying to speed things up (ll.770 - 822)

a) If you're going to do that then there's probably got to be more post-adoption support

b) We know of two cases where children have been places and it's collapsed within a week

11. Once you have legally adopted you're cut adrift (ll. 823 - 887)

a) Norfolk weren't visiting as much as they should have

b) Some get legally adopted as soon as possible to get social workers out

c) We were clinging on!

12. Dipping our toe in the water: experiencing different adoption teams (ll.888 - 942)

a) We did our research, definitely.

b) When Deborah was making lots of phone calls you always spoke to someone different

c) Most of the London boroughs were not recruiting white couples

d) Our adoption agency sounded like they would want to work with us

13. Going back to talk about adoption (ll.943 - 1076)

a) The thing I've banged on about is be honest with yourselves as a partnership

b) We went through the preparation course and we didn't hand the form back in for almost a year

c) Most people there probably like us have gone through unsuccessful fertility treatment

d) We read this British adoption BAAF book and it was full of horror stories

e) Some people in our preparation group were so naïve

f) It's just like a dating thing, they have to go and sell you

g) These people are so desperate

h) Some people did seem to think that they were going to have a magic wand

14. I didn't realise the amount of work we'd need to do to give them individual time (ll.1077 - 1190)

a) I didn't realise the importance of that and the impact that would have on me

b) The agency said to take Rob out of school one day a week; they were called mummy days

c) Then I went into school for a few weeks then I didn't

d) Ali was getting all this mummy time

e) It was just constant

f) Because they are so close in age there is a tendency to lump them together

15. Bedtime (ll. 1191 - 1268)

a) We still struggle to separate bedtimes

b) Going from no children to two children is quite a learning shock

c) The mixture of closeness in age but huge difference in personalities and sort of needs is always going to be a funny old juggling act

16. It has tested us as a couple (ll.1269 -1350)

a) I think we managed it a lot better in the first two years.

b) I think we probably judge each other more

c) We're just getting on with it

d) They definitely feel like ours

e) I haven't told people here

17.We think it is an overwhelmingly positive thing (ll.1351 - 1435)

a) One of the things that made me want to adopt was working with children

b) One of the reasons we go back to talk about it is because we think it's an overwhelmingly positive thing

c) The chanciness of the match

d) Doing alchemy

e) The big nature and nurture thing

f) We are a family and it's great

18. Our motivation for adopting siblings is still valid (ll. 1436 - 1491)

a) Sometimes he says I wish I hadn't been adopted with Ali

b) They warned us that often adopted children will fix more on one than the other

c) Being consistent

d) Sometimes we think: oh my God what have we done!

KEITH

Interview 1 - "WE HAVE BEEN IN A DESPERATE AND DARK PLACE"

1. The constitution of a family (ll. 1- 97)

    a) A potted history

    b) It's completely wonderful now because it's been completely desperate and dark

2. Wanting siblings from the beginning (ll. 98 - 196)

    a) Coming to terms with infertility and deciding to adopt

    b) The selection process; "We wanted siblings"

    c) We had no idea of the complications adoption and sibling adoption would entail

    d) The children's traumatic early history

3. First encounters with the sibling relationship (ll. 197 - 400)

    a) We've been trying to convince Kieran that he is not Julie's parent

    b) Kieran goes back to being a traumatised toddler

    c) His anger has become more age-appropriate: it is more verbal

4. Dark times (pp. 401 - 559 in the raw interview text)

    a) He decided the honeymoon was over

    b) There was a massive incident

    c) Things had become more fraught as a family

    d) He told the teachers I had strangled him and that Sarah had kicked him

    e) They took Kieran away and we were arrested

    f) That was a massive amount of damage to the relationship

    g) We're back to being quite close

5. What help and support in adoption? (ll.560 - 663)

    a) Seeking help after the shock

    b) We were approved to adopt quite quickly

    c) There was a rigorous interview process

    d) We didn't examine in depth the behavioural issues around attachment

6. Knowing/not knowing about attachment (ll. 664 - 748)

    a) I wish we'd known more about it

b) There was that period with the honeymoon and then it went dramatically wrong – we didn't know what the hell was going on

c) The emphasis was on matching us

d) The pitfalls that we were aware of are nothing to what they actually are

e) It was a family breakdown

f) We're a very strong little family unit now

7. Remembering the first encounter with the children: it still gets me (ll. 749 - 804)

a) Driving to the house

b) Seeing the children

c) There were other children there

d) We had a big massive hug

8. The backstory (ll. 805 - 924)

a) Why was it such a powerful moment?

b) They looked so vulnerable

c) We'd been through this massively difficult selection process

d) We weren't ready

e) Looking through the catalogues: a horrible transaction

f) The adoption service drew back

g) From being a golden couple to not being such a golden couple

h) We'd fought really hard for it

i) The physical stuff comes into it

j) It was a long journey by the time we arrived at the house

9. Bringing the children home (ll. 925 - 995)

a) After about four days we were released out into the world with them

b) We wanted to get them away and start our new family

c) The journey home was really nice (children who have been through trauma are incredibly good at hiding it when they're scared)

d) It was lovely bringing them back into the house: there's no-one else there; it's just you

10. Back to the present: things are good now (ll. 995 - 1010)

Interview 2: "WE HAVE BEEN ON A REAL JOURNEY"

1. Its been good to go back and think (ll. 6 - 109)

a) What a journey we've been on

b) What a tight little family unit we are

c) I'm so glad we adopted a sibling pair

d) Meeting the children for the first time: a pinnacle moment in adoption

e) A foreign way of preparing for a massive life-changing event

f) It's like giving birth

g) You've got your own baggage

h) You're presented with a couple of personalities

i) You don't understand the gravity of what you are doing

j) It's lovely to see them now

2. The nature/nurture thing (ll. 110 - 149)

    a) I can see Sarah all over Julie

    b) They've got a sense of humour out of us

    c) You nurture what's good in them

    d) It's not all rosy

3. We've changed massively (150 - 190)

    a) We got closer as a couple

    b) We've been plonked into being faced with some pretty extreme reactions

    c) You realise what stress is and what anxiety is

4. There's a narrative they play out (ll. 191 - 275)

    a) The sibling pair are a little unit: they work together as a tag team

    b) Keiran and Julie would get each other involved in the scheme

    c) At first we were distraught

    d) He wants to test you with these scenarios to test how you are going to react

    e) It wasn't funny back then

    f) You're always drawn to the little cute one in the relationship

    g) Keiran had the desire to prove that no-one loved him

5. Their relationship: it's almost symbiotic (ll. 276 - 506)

    a) Keiran is the one who acts out; Julie is much more internalised

    b) When Julie came to us aged three she didn't speak

    c) I think she's really blossomed

    d) They are a real unit

    e) We spent a long time trying to separate their relationship

    f) We still do sleepovers on a Saturday where they go and sleep in the same bed

g) Julie doesn't go back into that toddler state whereas Kieran goes right back

h) She's tremendously enthusiastic; Kieran is more guarded

6. A tremendous sense of loss (ll. 507 - 645)

    a) Julie was definitely our baby in the relationship of the unit

    b) Those early years that you wish you had experienced

    c) He was too old for Incy Wincy Spider

    d) He's got a nice little place now in his peer group

    e) With Julie I felt the joy of like a love; it's only recently I've got that with Kieran

    f) "I want to try and get you to enjoy the stuff I enjoy"

    g) Chess has been a real segue into him

    h) He's lost so much

7. Play: it has seen our family bond hugely (ll. 646 - 682)

    a) Because we separated them physically Kieran could have his time with one of us

    b) "We are going to teach them as many games as we can"

    c) He actually beat me at chess for the first time ever

    d) Play at home was so important because we were mirroring, replicating, taking turns

    e) With adoption and with a sibling pair you've got lack

    f) There's a massive need to formulate some form of boundary and stability: I think games are a brilliant part of that

8. Parental differences in play (ll. 683 - 737)

    a) "My mum and dad never played with me in this way"

    b) I'm from a three-boy family: quite rough and tumble

    c) It's the kind of benchmark you don't have as an only child

    d) It's not fair that Sarah isn't here

9. Therapy (ll. 737 - 771)

    a) We got it all out on the table

    b) It was important for us to have a space where we could just be a young family making sandcastles with each other

    c) Kieran could be this little toddler who was loved and secure and happy

    d) For a long time we couldn't even talk about Julie: he wouldn't have it

10. Another aspect of their relationship (ll. 772 - 808)

a) There is a lot of jealousy

b) Most things would be about keeping Julie removed from us

c) For the future it makes me wonder

11. The impact of the adoption on the extended family (ll. 808 - 941)

    a) There have been some jealousies with Sarah's parents

    b) They've played a really important part in Kieran and Julie's life

    c) Sarah's dad was put into homes and things

    d) My mum is the proper granny kind of thing

    e) You've got to understand that adoption comes from a place of loss

    f) She didn't realise we were trying all the way through

    g) My first cousin is adopted: they were taken to a Catholic orphanage to select a child

12. The impact on friendships (ll. 942 - 1005)

    a) It's very normal now

    b) At the beginning you are very earnest

    c) I don't feel I have to declare the adoption

    d) I felt like I was a different person but I'm just a bloke

    e) It's hard for other people to react to adoption

    f) A bit of social engineering; I'm sure all parents do this

13. Is it social engineering? (ll. 1006 - 1113)

    a) We've really created friendships

    b) The new drumming teacher

    c) You have to engineer a little bit more

    d) We've seen the dark side so we are not going back there

    e) They give her the work of two groups up but she sits with the bottom group

    f) They'll always gravitate towards other children with issues at school

    g) Being around kids with more settled upbringings gives them an opportunity to raise their self-esteem

    h) The school is amazing – with our support though

14. The school handled it terribly (ll. 1114 - 1173)

    a) We've been a thorn on their side

    b) We kept with it and I'm really glad we did

    c) They maintain they went down the proper procedures

    d) We've never had an apology from the senior staff

15. It's all about people supporting you (ll. 1174 - 1223)
    a) The new Head's ideal would have been Kieran going to a special school
    b) I feel we've given something back for all the chaos we created
    c) It was at quite a low ebb with the school but it's grown quite strong
    d) It's all about people supporting you
    e) In the training they ask you to plot who might support you
    f) There's a ton of people who are going to help us on this journey

APPENDIX 8a

SUSAN AND GORDON, INTERVIEW 1: "**Nothing Prepares You For What It's Like**"

3.1.2. Narrative Part: "*Sally Has Had Less Time And Attention*"2

A. Raw text, ll.154 -246 (3 mins. and 10 secs. duration)

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154 OT: And um, and, so, so how would you say in terms of the fam-
155 family life, you know, being at home and, and also for his sister,
156 Sally?

157 S: Yeah.

158 OT: Yeah. You know, how do you think it, they've managed?

159 S: I would say Sally because, because he kind of eats up time and attention,
160 she has had less time and attention and kind of, even as a, as a young child
161 has toddled around on her own a little bit.

162 G: It's always been that way.

163 S: Yeah. And that, you know, is not how I would have wanted it.

164 G: No, no.

165 S: At all.

166 G: We are always looking to ensure that there's a balance between-

167 OT: Hmm.

168 G: -the two I think.

169 OT: Yeah.

170 G: And it's difficult.

171 S: It is difficult. She's come off the worst.

172 G: Second best.

173 S: Of that. Uh-

174 G: With respect to time.

---

175 S: Yeah.

176 G: I mean I think she's very able to cope. I mean I think she has-

177 S: Yeah.

178 G: -coped very well.

179 S: Hmm. But she, there have been situations though where she's been
180 scared.

181 G: Yeah.

182 S: And felt physically threatened by him.

183 G: Hmm.

184 OT: Right.

185 S: And we have to kind of leap into action. One of us has to manage
186 Joseph, which often means restraining and the other one has to just remove
187 her from the house almost isn't it?

188 OT: Right.

189 S: Sometimes if it's not possible it will be to another room but you know it
190 happened on Sunday evening-

191 G: Hmm.

192 S: -and it hadn't happened for some time so-

193 G: No.

194 S: -it was a little bit of a surprise-

195 G: Yes, that this happened.

196 S: -but he was, he was tired and-

197 OT: Hmm.

198 S: -you know obviously it's the end of this half term-

199 OT: Hmm.

200 S: -and when he loses control, he, he's not like another child having a
201 temper. It is full scale loss of control so he'll be trying, he'll be thumping
202 walls, kicking walls, just picking up anything he can and throwing it-

203 G: Yeah.

204 S: -and it would be lashing out at us and Sally.

205 G: Hmm.

206 S: Um, and quite often she will try and show that she's not rattled by him

207 but when it's like that she is very, very clearly frightened.

208 G: Hmm.

209 S: So you have to sit and restrain Joseph and calm him down and I have to
210 take Sally out, you know, for a walk so…

211 OT: Hmm. Is that how it tends to be? Is that how you-

212 S: No, sometimes-

213 OT: No.

214 G: No. No, yeah.

215 S: It's not always is it?

216 G: I mean, when was the last time it happened? Months and months ago I
217 guess.

218 S: Yeah.

219 G: It doesn't happen a lot. We don't want to give you the wrong impression
220 but-

221 S: No.

222 OT: Hmm. No.

223 G: -when it does happen it's usually a big go, you know-

224 OT: Yeah.

225 G: -it is usually big.

226 OT: Hmm.

227 G: I mean I can see particularly from this last session on Sunday he's
228 getting older, he's getting bigger. The, you know, it's going to be-

229 S: It is harder.

230 OT: Hmm.

231 G: I mean we've got some friends who have, are in a similar situation with
232 adopted children-

233 OT: Hmm.

234 G: -that are a couple of years older. Um, Jake has had, you know, they,
235 they become unmanageable.

236 S: Yeah.

237 G: You can't just-

238 S: Yeah.

239 G: -go and restrain them 'cause they're too-
240 OT: Right.

241 G: -physically large so-

242 S: Yeah.

243 G: -that is always, that's always a concern of mine.

244 S: Yeah.

246 OT: Okay.

B. Narrative Part: "*Sally Has Had Less Time And Attention*"
Transcribed with line breaks

154 OT: And um, and,
    so, so how would you say in terms of the fam- family life, you know,
    being at home and,
    and also for his sister, Sally?
    S: Yeah.
    OT: Yeah. You know, how do you think it, they've managed?

159 S: I would say Sally
    because, because he kind of eats up time and attention,
    she has had less time and attention
    and kind of, even as a, as a young child has toddled around on her own a little
    bit.
    G: It's always been that way.
    S: Yeah.

163 S: And that, you know, is not how I would have wanted it
    G: No, no.
    S: At all.
    G: We are always looking to ensure that there's a balance between-
    OT: Hmm.
    G: -the two I think.
    OT: Yeah.

    G: And it's difficult.
    S: It is difficult. She's come off the worst.
    G: Second best.
    S: Of that. Uh-
174 G: With respect to time.
    S: Yeah.

    G: I mean I think she's very able to cope.
      I mean I think she has-

S: Yeah.
G: -coped very well.
S: Hmm.

179 S: But she, there have been situations though where she's been scared.
G: Yeah.
S: And felt physically threatened by him.
G: Hmm.
OT: Right.
S: And we have to kind of leap into action.
One of us has to manage Joseph, which often means restraining
and the other one has to just remove her
from the house almost isn't it?
G: Mm
OT: Right.
189 S: Sometimes if it's not possible it will be to another room but you know

190 it happened on Sunday evening-
G: Hmm.
S: -and it hadn't happened for some time so-
G: No.
S: -it was a little bit of a surprise-
G: Yes, that this happened.
S: -but he was, he was tired and-
OT: Hmm.
S: -you know obviously it's the end of this half term-
OT: Hmm.

200 S: uhm, and
when he loses control,
he, he's not like another child having a temper.
It is full-scale loss of control
so he'll be trying, he'll be thumping
walls, kicking walls, just picking up anything he can and throwing it-
G: Yeah.
S: -and it would be lashing out
at us and Sally.
G: Hmm.
S: Um, and quite often she will try and show that she's not rattled by him
but when it's like that
she is very, very clearly frightened.
G: Hmm.
209 S:So you have to sit and restrain Joseph and calm him down and I have to
take Sally out, you know,
for a walk so…
OT: Mmm
S: Uhm

211 OT: I-is that how it tends to be? Is that how you-
S: No, sometimes-
OT: - Do it?
S: No.
G: No. No, yeah.
S: It's not always is it?
G: I mean, when was the last time it happened?
Months and months ago I guess.
S: Yeah.

G: It doesn't happen a lot. We don't want to give you the wrong impression but -
S: No.
OT: Hmm. No.
G: -when it does happen it's usually a big, you know-
OT: Yeah.
G: -it is usually big.
OT: Hmm.

227 G: I mean I can see
   particularly from this last session on Sunday
   he's getting older, he's getting bigger. The, you know, it's going to be-
   S: It is harder.
   OT: Hmm.
   G: Yeah

231 G: I mean we've got some friends who have, are in a similar situation with
   adopted children-
   OT: Hmm.
   G: -that are a couple of years older.
   Um, Jake has had, you know,
   they, they become unmanageable.
   S: Yeah.
   G: You can't just-
   S: Yeah.
   G: -go and restrain them 'cause they're too-
   OT: Right.
   G: -physically large so that -
   S: Yeah.
   G: -that is always, that's always a concern of mine.
   S: Yeah.
   246 OT: Okay.

KEITH, INTERVIEW 2 **"We've been on a real journey"**

3.2.2. Narrative Part: *There's a narrative they play out*

A. Raw text: ll 191 - 256 (duration 4 mins 23 secs)

---

191 You know, the two of them, the sibling pair are a little unit and they, they,

192 they've got uhm mechanisms beyond sort of I think individual mechanisms.

193 You know, they work as a tag team sometimes to try to, to try to get under

194 or skins. In a way, only in a challenging way that every child will do, because

195 that's about how you grow up isn't it, you challenge, you learn, you see if

196 you can do it, you push it, you learn and you go back, you sort of absorb and

197 you come back and do it again, you know, but it would be, for a long, long

198 time it was constant sort of and quite, quite often Kieran and Julie would get

199 each other involved in the scheme or whatever it was and …

200 OT: Can you remember a time?

201 K: A time (laughs), this is where I'm rubbish! (laughs)

202 OT: Well, it doesn't have to be, does it still happen now? Is that how
203 you work?

204 K: Yeah, we'll, we've caught, you know, we hear them round the corner kind

205 of saying "*Right you tell them, you tell them that I've hit you and uhm I'll*

206 show them a mark on my" (whispering)- sorry, I'm whispering, I don't need

207 to whisper, do I! You tell them that I've-

208 OT: It won't come out in the transcript, but I'll-

209 K: Yeah, it'll be like, "You tell mum and dad that I've hit you, and I'll go, um,

210 you slap yourself now, give yourself a mark and then I'll put a strangle mark

211 round eh my thing and then we'll, you know, we'll, we'll run away from

212 them" (pretending to whisper). We've heard them say that sort of thing.

213 OT: Ok

214 K: It's sort of like a, it's like a narrative that they play out, you know, and do
215 you know what, I think it's, I think it's, it's that, but do you know what, this
216 used to happen to us or this has happened to us, let's see if it, let's see how
217 they're going to react when we tell them it's happened and – there's a lot of
218 that goes on!

219 OT: And how does that make you feel when you hear that or perhaps
220 there's been a ?

221 K: Bloody angry! (laughs) No, not angry, but, not at all, that's the wrong word,
222 just like oh! Sometimes you just think- (laughs)

223 OT: What, here we go again, or?

224 K: Yeah, because it happens so often you're just like ah! (laughs)

225 OT: So now you respond differently to how you responded?

226 K: Yeah, no yeah when we responded at first we just would be, you know,
227 um, a little bit like almost distraught and be like oh my goodness, you know,
228 and we would probably, a lot of what happened I think with Kieran was he,
229 because of his attachment he was trying to reaffirm that he was useless and
230 not loved and not wanted and that we actually wanted to get rid of him. Its
231 only I mean I think it's only recently, in the last year that he's accepted that
232 he's ours, he's permanent, he's not going to be, you know, there was
233 constant themes of being given away, given back, taken away, taken back
234 and … I think he wanted, he wants to present you with these scenarios to,
235 to, to just test and see how are you going to react, are you going to take him
236 away, does he need do we really love him, can he trust us, you know. And
237 but it was, so, you know, there'd be, there'd be lots of like "Ahh!" screams,
238 you know, "Ahh, Julie's," you know, "strangling me, oh, Julie's pushed me
239 out of bed!" And then there'd be Julie running in the room crying going, "Oh
240 he's done this to me." And so, you know, even now we know sometimes,
 241 we're like "All right, okay, come on, you've, you've, you've set this one up".

242 OT: The two of you.

243 K: (Laughs) Yeah, yeah! Set this one up and it is quite funny but, you know,

244 it wasn't funny back then. It was sort of, we'd react really, we'd be like oh

245 how do we get through, you know, we'd sort of try and sit them down, talk

246 them through it and we'd, we'd, we'd do a lot of, you know. I think at first

247 we'd panic, but we didn't quite know, we'd sort of tell him off, he'd go crazy.

248 We'd, we'd comfort Julie because we were always, it's terrible, you're always

249 drawn towards the, the little cute girl, you know, in that relationship. It's

250 really difficult and it shouldn't always be but I don't know why we were.

251 Kieran was this five-year old boy, you know, and he comes at age five, going

252 on to six, quite aggressive. You know, it was difficult sometimes to take his

253 side and that's quite, you know, I hate the fact that it was like that when I

254 look back, you know. Julie always got the more kind of emotional response I

255 think. Now it's different and now, now we realise that Kieran was just

256 (pause) crying out for that.

B. Narrative Part: *"There's a narrative they play out"*
Transcribed with line breaks

191 You know, the two of them, the sibling pair are a little unit and they, they, they've
    got
    uhm
    mechanisms
    beyond sort of
    I think
    individual mechanisms.
193 You know, they work as a tag team sometimes to try to,
    to try to get
    under our skins.
    OT: Mmm

    K: In a way,
    only in a challenging way that every child will do, because that's about how you
    grow up isn't it, you challenge, you learn,

you see if you can do it, you push it, you learn and you go back, you sort of absorb and
you come back and do it again, you know, but it would be,

for a long, long time it was constant sort of uhm
and
quite, quite often Kieran and Julie would get each other involved in
the scheme or whatever it was and …

200 OT: Can you remember a time?
    201 K: A time (laughs),
    OT: Yeah?
    K: this is where I'm rubbish! (laughs)
    OT: Well, it doesn't have to be,
    does it still happen now? Is that how
    how you work?
204 K: Yeah, we'll, we've caught, you know, we hear them round the corner kind of
    saying "*Right you tell them, you tell them that I've hit you*
    uhm
    and
    uhm I'll show them a mark on my" (whispering)
    sorry, I'm whispering, I don't need to whisper, do I! You tell them that I've-
    OT: It won't come out in the transcript, but I'll-

209 K: Yeah, it'll be like,
    OT: Yeah
    K: "You tell mum and dad that I've hit you,
    uhm
    I'll
    go,
    uhm,
    you slap yourself now give yourself a mark and then I'll put a strangle mark
    round my eh
    thing and then
    we'll, you know,
    we'll, we'll run away from them" (pretending to whisper).
    You know, we've heard them say that
    sort of thing.
    213 OT: Ok

214 K: It's sort of like a, it's like a narrative that they play out,
    OT: Mmm
    K: you know,
    and do you know what, I think it's, I think it's,
    it's that, but do you know what
    this used to happen to us or this has happened to us,
    let's see if it,
    let's see how they're going to react when we tell them it's happened and –
    there's a lot of that goes on!

219 OT: And how does
    how does that make you feel when you hear that or how
    perhaps there's been a - ?
    K: Bloody angry! (laughs) No, not angry, but, not at all, that's the wrong word, just
    like oh! (laughs)
    Sometimes you just think-
    OT: What, here we go again, or?

K: Yeah, because it happens so often you're just like ah! (laughs)

225 OT: Mmm, so now you respond differently
K: Yeah
OT: to how you responded?
K: No yeah, when we responded at first we just would be,
you know,
um,
a little bit like almost distraught and be like oh my goodness, you know,
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a lot of what happened I think with Kieran was he,
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so, you know,

there'd be,
there'd be lots of like "Ahh!" screams, you know, "Ahh, Julie's,"
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"strangling me, oh, Julie's
239 pushed me out of bed!" And then there'd be Julie running in the room crying
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sometimes,
we're like "All right, okay, come on, you've,
you've, you've set this one up".
OT: The two of you.
K: (Laughs) Yeah, yeah! Set this one up and it is quite funny but,
you know,

244 it wasn't funny back then. It was sort of, we'd react really,
OT: Right
K: we'd be like oh how do we get through, you know, we'd sort of try and sit them
down, talk them through it
and we'd, we'd,we'd
do a lot of, you know. I think
at first we'd panic,
but we didn't quite know, we'd sort of tell him off,
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248 We'd, we'd comfort Julie because we were always,

it's terrible, you're always drawn towards the, the little cute girl, you know,
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254 you know, I hate the fact that it was like that when I look back, you know. Julie
always got the
more
kind of emotional response I think.

Now it's different
and now, now we realise that Kieran was just
crying out for that.