Same-Sex Adoptive Families' Journey Through Education: A Multi-Perspective Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study

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Summary

This thesis consists of three separate parts: a review of the relevant research and literature relating to the subject of the study, an empirical paper and a reflective account from the researcher. The literature review examines historical context on same sex parenting and specifically discusses research relating to adopted young people in same sex families and their experiences in education including factors influencing those experiences. The empirical paper consists of an exploratory qualitative study carried out with a small sample of adopted young people and adoptive gay or lesbian parents in same sex families within the East of England. The study used online semi-structured interviews to elicit the experiences of the two groups about their educational journey so far as well as their experiences of educational support received. Finally, the reflective chapter provides the personal reflections of the researcher about this study from the initial conception of the subject area and research questions to the completion of the analysis and write-up of the paper. Further implications on the researcher professional development and for the profession of educational psychology and research are also explored.

Access Condition and Agreement

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Table of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full term
EP	Educational Psychologist
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
LA	Local Authority
SGO	Special Guardianship Order
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer, Plus
UEA	University of East Anglia
YP	Young people
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CAMHS	Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Part 1: Literature Review Paper

1.0 Introduction

Same sex adoption is a recent social phenomenon that has only been in the focus of the researchers in relevant fields of psychology and education in the last two decades (Golombok, 2007). While the needs of adopted children who have experienced significant trauma are starting to become established in the literature and within the EP profession, there is still a significant gap in research with regard to exploring the educational experiences of adopted young people and their same sex parents. The limited research on this field has been conducted primarily in the United States and has identified additional strengths and challenges faced by this subgroup of adopted children. However, the English context in adoptive same sex family research is significantly lacking. This literature review is providing some context around the background of the same sex adoption phenomenon and provides an overview and critical reflection of the literature involving related factors such as trauma, educational experiences and psychological adjustment of adopted children in same sex families. The role of support available to this group of children as well as the support role of the EP profession and work so far is also examined.

A thematic literature review was used instead of a systematic review in order to facilitate the understanding of the available limited research on the researcher's subject and position this study within a literature context. As the aim of a systematic literature review is to answer a specific question by exploring the available published research, it was decided that this would not be an appropriate method for this review as its main purpose is to provide an overview of the subject in question.

Due to the limited literature on adoptive same-sex families and the even more restricted literature on using qualitative methodology to explore the experiences of young people adopted into same-sex families, the researcher had to apply multiple variations of the search words to collect a broader pool of research and then use specific exclusion criteria to select the studies that would be included in the review. It is noted also that the variety of terminology used in this area (same sex, LGBTQ+, gay, lesbian) by different researchers made this task more complicated so expansion of the search terms was required. The following search terms were used: "adopt* and same sex parents", "adopt* and gay and lesbian parents", "same sex families", "adopt* and LGBT*", "adopt* and young people", "adopted young people and same sex parents". The researcher used the UEA electronic library database as a primary means to locate relevant literature which also extended to other databases including ScienceDirect, Google Scholar and Springer Link. A more targeted approach was also used with journals that publish literature relevant to the subject area such as Adoption & Fostering, Adoption Quarterly and the Journal of GLBT Family Studies. In addition, the Education Psychology in Practice journal was also examined to acquire literature connected to the subject area and EP practice. A focus was then applied to include studies relevant to the purpose of this literature review that focused specifically on same sex couples and families (gay and lesbian) and those that have been created through means of adoption. This literature search took place between December 2020 and December 2021. Other types of LGBTQ+ families created through surrogacy, previous heterosexual marriages or donor insemination for example were not included as the focus of the research was on the subgroup of adoptive same sex families.

This review starts by providing some historical context around same sex parenting from different parts of the western world based on available research and will continue to explore the available literature on same sex adoptive families based on thematic factors identified in the literature. Lastly the review will explore the available support that is offered in England to this group as well as the contribution of EPs so far in the ways they engage in working with this population.

2.0 Historical background on same-sex parenting

2.1 Western world context

The experiences of same-sex relationships and gay or lesbian individuals vary significantly around the world based on factors such as cultural effects, societal expectations, religious influence, and legislation. For the purposes of this literature review, an emphasis will be placed on the context of the Western World regarding the topic including United States of America, Australia and Western European countries in terms of a much more liberal social policy and favourable legal setting. Research on the topic of same-sex parenting began in the 1970s-1980s in the United States as a direct consequence of court custody battles that were taking place at the time between divorced men and their ex-wives who after the dissolution of their marriage were identifying and living as lesbians. This was a completely different practice from similar custody battles that involved heterosexual mothers as the lesbian mothers were deemed to be unfit to raise children due to their sexual orientation and "life choices" (Golombok, 2007). This phenomenon sparked the need for further research on the subject of same sex parenthood as decisions of professionals and judges were made without any evidence of the effect of the sexual

orientation of the parent on the development of the child and through a heteronormative lens where heterosexuality is considered the only healthy norm (Hicks, 2005). These court battles sparked interest in the wider scientific community to further explore this population, but attitudes in literature around same-sex couples had already started changing around that time when "homosexuality" was removed as a diagnosable psychiatric disorder from the Diagnostic And Statistical Manual for Mental Health Disorders in 1973 (Drescher, 2015). Since then, more research has been produced to explore these new family norms including families that were created through a variety of methods such as surrogacy, adoption, and sperm donation and are showing promising and positive results. Despite that, global acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex couples as parents still varies to this day despite societal and scientific attitudes having changed since 1973 and new legislation that has been introduced. Varying degrees of acceptance of the public still persist about children and young people being raised in sexual minority families as is shown in the study by Takács, Szalma, & Bartus (2016) exploring attitudes of residents of 27 European countries including the United Kingdom on the matter.

2.2 The English context

In England, the first publication on the subject of same sex parenting was a report published by Skeates & Jabri (1988) about fostering and adoption by gay and lesbian couples which argued that the debate on this topic was influenced more by societal stereotypes and discrimination and less by scientific evidence. The topic of same sex relationships would also come to affect education and the curriculum in later years. This was due to Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act in England and Wales, which after being published, placed a moratorium on schools

and education staff from promoting same sex relationships and banished any teaching in the curriculum about families with same sex parents. A second effect of this act was that it also prevented schools from tackling homophobic bullying.

As expected, this legislation caused a lot of tension within the country especially from the LGBTQ+ community and it was later appealed in 2003 (Cocker et al., 2019). Furthermore, more legislation that started protecting the rights of same sex couples and individuals passed in the following years, which empowered this population with rights that were reserved for heterosexual couples for the first time. Firstly, in 2002, the option to adopt became legal for gay and lesbian couples with the introduction of the Adoption and Children Act (UK Parliament, 2002) which allowed both gay or lesbian individuals and same sex couples to apply for adoption and protected them from being discriminated as potential adopters because of their sexuality. Since the introduction of the Adoption and Children Act of 2002, an increasing number of same-sex couples have gone through the process of adoption and have created their own adoptive families with 12% of all UK adoptions in 2018 being reported as allocated to same sex couples (Department for Education, 2019a). Secondly, the Education Act of 2003 (Department for Education and Skills, 2003) tried to counteract the effect of Section 28 that was appealed during the same year and introduced guidelines to battle homophobia in schools and address homophobic bullying. Thirdly, the introduction of the Equality Act in 2010 (UK Parliament, 2010) added sexual orientation as one of the protected characteristics to protect sexual minority individuals and families.

2.3 Context from literature on same sex families

Reviewing the literature on same-sex parenting, it was interesting to note that the majority of the research has been conducted in the context of the United States with more limited research conducted in England despite the fact that UK is shown as the second highest country in Europe with regard to policies and law protecting LGBT rights (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020). In addition, it seems that the majority of these studies have focused on same sex families in general that have been created through a variety of means including children from previous marriages, donor insemination and In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF), but fewer have emphasised on same sex families that have been created through adoption. In his extensive literature review of same sex parenting literature, Schumm (2016) points out that almost no studies existed until recently that explored the outcomes of children adopted by same sex parents. This is also stated by Farr, Forssell, & Patterson (2010) in their article explaining that "less is known about adoptive lesbian and gay parents than about other families headed by lesbian and gay parents" (p.166).

Most of the research on same sex adoptive families came as a follow-up from research that started with an emphasis on lesbian mothers as explained above, which later extended to gay fathers, but it was only much recently that adoptive same sex families entered the focus of the literature. This mostly happened through comparative studies as a way of measuring outcomes of children and young people raised in adoptive sexual minority families and contrasting those with outcomes of children raised in heterosexual families (Averett et al., 2009; Farr, Bruun, et al., 2019; Goldberg et al., 2012; McConnachie et al., 2020; Mellish et al., 2013). The main emphasis was to dispel the negative preconceptions on same sex adoption and public opinions that advocated that adopted children are already at a "disadvantaged

position" and placing them within a sexual minority family would contribute further to them being "disadvantaged" (Averett et al., 2009). While references to general same sex families' literature will be made throughout this review, an emphasis will be placed on the studies where adoptive same sex families are being researched and where this is not possible due to the significant dearth in the literature, the researcher will draw on literature for adoptive young people in general.

3.0 Research on adoptive same sex families

3.1 Developmental trauma

The presence of early traumatic and adverse childhood experiences in the early stages of an adopted child's life is an experience shared by all members of this particular group of children as well as children who are care experienced or in Special Guardianships. Whilst the general term 'trauma' has been used by professionals in mental health context as well as researchers, it still remains a heavily contested term without a standard definition that is universally accepted, which in turn hinders our ability to study it (Perry & Winfrey, 2021). Another criticism about current definitions revolves around the fact that most definitions are being formed through a Westernised lens and are focused on single-trauma events, which may not be applicable to "Non-Western and ethnic minority groups" (Andermahr, 2015). In his recent book, Perry (2021) discusses the difficulties of defining trauma due to the individualised experience of the same event and different impact on each person. He also makes references to the "three E's definition" of trauma originating from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), which has isolated three components in most trauma definitions: event, experience

and effects. According to their working group's findings, they have given the following definition:

> "individual trauma results from an event, series of events or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being" (SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative, 2014).

Researchers and clinicians in the US and the UK such as Van Der Kolk (2005) and Treisman (2017) have used the term 'developmental trauma' when working with children and young people. Treisman is a UK-based trauma researcher and practitioner psychologist who has published a wealth on trauma theory and practice and has used the term *developmental trauma* to refer to the trauma that has been experienced within the context of early relationships in children's lives with their primary caregivers. A working definition of 'developmental trauma' has been produced by Beacon House, who is a UK therapeutic service specialising in working with trauma in children and young people:

> "Developmental Trauma is the term used to describe the impact of early, repeated trauma and loss which happens within the child's important relationships, and usually early in life" (Lyons et al., 2022).

The above definition seems to emphasise on the impact of trauma on the person rather than the experience or event itself. Similarly, Perry defined trauma as something that activates our stress response system in a way that "overwhelms the system dramatically and negatively disrupts homeostasis" (Perry & Pollard, 1998). It is clear from the definition by Beacon House and the literature on childhood trauma

that relationships with others is an important area affected in these children as those early relationships have been disrupted due to those negative experiences. Treisman (2017) suggests that building secure relationships should be one of the priority areas for support and intervention in working with children that have experienced trauma in the sense of rebuilding their trust in others and building a secure attachment so that they can build healthier baselines for relating to significant others. This rationale extends to adopted children that have experienced early trauma, which also fits in well with the way that practitioners such as EPs engage in supporting adopted children and young people in schools by using relational approaches and attachment based-theory such as the trusted adult approach to support their school experience (Dawson, 2021; Midgens, 2011). However, it is important to keep in mind that despite its popularity, attachment theory has been criticised due to "ambiguity" and "lack of consensus with regards to terms such as 'attachment' and 'attachment disorder' (Chaffin et al., 2006).

Van Der Kolk (2005) explains the internal mechanisms of childhood trauma in a family where a young child exposed to neglect or domestic violence will begin to adjust to this traumatising context in order to survive. This will lead to usually either compliant or defiant behaviour to help with the feelings of helplessness between those opposite feelings of affection to caregivers and the same people being the source of the child's trauma. When these children learn these maladaptive behaviour patterns, it often leads to social difficulties when those are displayed in other contexts, for example in school as children are expected to behave in a certain manner according to certain standards. It is at this point for children that have experienced trauma such as adopted children that the difficulties at school arise and

a different approach to behaviour management based on attachment theory and not strict behavioural policies would be required.

Literature on trauma also refers to the pervasive and long-term nature of the impact of trauma in childhood development that extends from childhood and adolescence and into adulthood. Young people that have experienced trauma not only face more increased risk of mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and aggression but also have increased chances of being diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder such as post-traumatic stress disorder or developmental trauma disorder (Fisher, 2015; Van der Kolk, 2005). Perry et al.(1995) also adds a biological element to the discussions around the impact on trauma on young children. Perry explains that continued presence of stress patterns that are "unpredictable, extreme and prolonged" can lead to sensitisation / vulnerability of the embedded stress response system in our bodies, which then leads to overactivation. This can be used to contribute to our understanding for example of young people, who have experienced trauma and show signs of hypervigilance to danger and behavioural outbursts over any trigger. In trying to address the impact of trauma from the perspective of children rather than applying research on trauma from adults, Gregorowski & Seedat (2013) conclude that the disruption of secure and healthy relationships between children and their primary caregivers due to the presence of trauma "may have far-reaching and lifelong developmental consequences" for the young person. While long-term negative effects may be an increased possibility for children that have experienced trauma, it does not have to dictate their future for certainty as appropriate and timely intervention has been shown to minimise the impact and help the child develop coping skills later on in their lives (Treisman, 2017; Van der Kolk, 2005). For example, research by Dr Perry and colleagues (Hambrick

et al., 2019) demonstrates that the presence of helpful, attuned and safe adults in a

child's life such as key workers at school can mitigate the effect of early adversity

and trauma.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Model can be considered a

useful framework for EPs and other professionals working with adopted children that

have experienced significant developmental trauma and is widely used in practice

with professionals. The model provides a basis for professionals to consider

systemic and chronological factors that may be impacting on the child both at

present and from the past within the different contexts in the child's life.

Bronfenbrenner has identified 5 systems around that are affecting child's

development in a bi-directional way (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem,

macrosystem and chronosystem). It also allows for exploration of interactive effects

between people in the child's life enabling a more relational approach to be

considered as well as promoting interdisciplinary and collaborative work between

agencies and professionals supporting the child. Compared to other development

theories such as Freud's Psychodynamic Theory or Erikson's Psycho-Social theory,

Bronfenbrenner's theory avoids common criticisms in the literature about the

inflexibility of stage-based theories (Smith-Osbourne, 2007) by basing child

development around a theoretical context of systems and layers interacting with the

child over a period of time rather than a series of stages that a child has to go

through during development. Despite this, the Ecological Systems model is not

without its criticisms. For example, like other theories of development and theoretical

framework including trauma theories, it appears that Bronfenbrenner's model suffers

from the same limitations of being a Western-based model that may not be able to

take into consideration development contexts in non-western or ethnic minority

cultures (Andermahr, 2015; Christensen, 2016). As a remedial action to this criticism, Drakenberg & Malmgren (2013) have thus suggested a new addition to the model which they refer to as the "ex-macro" system which takes into consideration international and socio-historical circumstances. In addition, Engler (2007) has argued that Bronfenbrenner's model needs to incorporate the concept of Resilience to account for young people that can transcend adversity and trauma. Currently, the model appears to focus and try to explain mostly negative effects during development and does not account for examples of resilient young people that can achieve positive outcomes despite negative influences in their different systems in their lives.

The concept of resilience has also been very contested and hard to define similarly to the concept of trauma as it has undergone many changes in research literature over the years. Van Breda (2018) has commented how remarkable it is for resilience that "a theoretical framework can so rapidly move from being almost unheard of to being so critiqued" because of a "lack a consensual foundation". Over the years, the meaning of resilience in literature has ranged from being something intrinsic or intra-person factor to something viewed more holistically. Joseph (2013) argues against the view of seeing resilience as an intrinsic factor due to influences of neoliberal agendas as this could lead to reduced accountability from the government and services with the view that people are responsible for their own personal growth and achievement of outcomes. However, more modern theorists (Hartling, 2008; Van Breda, 2017) have started developing new models for resilience processes that not only tap into just the individual or the environment, but also take into consideration the interactions between the two. Such a model is described by (Van Breda (2017) where resilience is defined using the PIE model, categorising resilience processes

into personal or individual (P) such as optimism, the social environment (E) such as

family, friends and community as well as interactional processes (I) such as

teamwork between individual and social environment. There have also been debates

about whether resilience should be seen and defined an outcome focused or

process focussed concept, which seem to have undermined the validity of the theory

in general (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). "Fourth wave" resilience theories (Van Breda,

2018) such as the PIE model that give more emphasis on both individual and

environment thus linking two sides of previous arguments in resilience literature may

help reinforce its credibility due to rapid developments in genetic sciences and

statistical methods that lend further evidence.

3.2 Psychological adjustment

As mentioned above, the majority of the relevant literature in the field has

focused on comparing outcomes between gay, lesbian and heterosexual adoptive

families with a specific emphasis on the development of general adaptive skills.

Research on adopted children in same sex families has been positive and identified

specific strengths when comparing them to children in heterosexual adoptive families

(Mellish et al., 2013; Tasker & Bellamy, 2007). Despite this, it has also identified

additional unique challenges that this particular group faces including perceived

stigma, having to answer questions about their family structure constantly, feelings of

marginalisation and "feeling different" (Cocker et al., 2019; Cody et al., 2017; Farr et

al., 2016; Farr & Vázquez, 2020; Goldberg, 2012, 2014).

A great part of the research on adoptive and other sexual minority families in

England has been pioneered by Professor Susan Golombok and the Centre for

Family Research in Cambridge. Indeed, the first study in England to compare outcomes in adopted families of gay, lesbian and heterosexual parents was conducted in 2014 by Golombok et al. (2014) and focused on quality of parent-child relationships and the psychological adjustment of the adopted children in those families. This study reported that gay adoptive families presented with more positive parental wellbeing and parenting and the children of both gay and lesbian adopted parents presented with less externalising behaviour problems compared to children adopted by heterosexual parents. However, these findings might be affected by the fact that the study included the first gay men to become adopters, which could be perceived as a highly motivated group to participate and thus not be as reflective of the general population. This study was only the first phase of a longer longitudinal study that continued to evaluate those families when their children reached early adolescence as this is shown in the literature as an age of where adopted children begin experiencing further adjustment difficulties and explore further their adopted status (Gunnar & Van Dulmen, 2007). The original findings did not seem to be supported in the second study (McConnachie et al., 2020) when the children were in adolescence and no significant differences were found in parental mental health or child adjustment. However, an increase in externalising behaviour was noted throughout all groups, thus giving further support to research that indicates adolescence as a challenging period for adopted families. Similar findings about the presence of more externalising problems in older adopted children were found in studies conducted in the United States (Averett et al., 2009; Goldberg, 2012), however sexual orientation of the parents was not found to affect neither the adopted adolescent's attachment style (Erich, Hall, et al., 2009; Erich, Kanenberg, et al.,

2009) nor their adjustment difficulties (Farr, Bruun, et al., 2019; McConnachie et al., 2020).

Even within the same-sex families, there are reported differences in the way children and young people are constructed and viewed by others. For example, Golombok & Tasker (2010) discuss that families headed by gay men are more vulnerable to increased discrimination by society compared to families headed by lesbian women due to the persistent societal norm of seeing men as less nurturing than women and perpetuating the traditionalist view of women being primary caregivers to children and young people.

3.3 Educational outcomes and experiences

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study to this day has explored explicitly the educational outcomes of adopted children and young people by same-sex parents. It has been hypothesized that this has been partly due to the fact that adopted children's educational attainment has only very recently been a focus of policy holders. Furthermore, access to specific attainment data for adopted children were only collected separately to that of general population since the introduction of the Child and Social Work Act (Children and Social Work Act, 2017). In addition, research on same-sex adoptive families has also been a recent area of research interest as described above, thus this part of the literature review focuses primarily on the educational outcomes of adopted children in general.

Children who have been adopted from care have been identified consistently in the literature and in official government reports as facing a higher risk of both internalising and externalising behaviours compared to their non-adoptive peers and

that their academic performance is also lower than expected standards, thus requiring careful and frequent monitoring (Brown et al., 2017; Department for Education, 2017, 2019b). The latest government report (Department for Education, 2020) published last year indicates that only 41% of previously looked after children (including children who have left care through adoption, special guardianship order (SGO) or child arrangements order (CAO) reached the age-expected progress for maths, writing and reading in Key Stage 2 in contrast to 65% of their non-looked after peers that reached age-expected levels at the end of Key Stage 2. There was only 1% increase in attainment compared to attainment levels reported in the previous year (Department for Education, 2019b), however it is interesting to note that in both years previously looked after children have achieved slightly better than their looked-after counterparts (41% vs. 37% in 2019, 40% vs. 35% in 2018). Although the attainment gap between previously looked after and non-looked after children seems to persist for progress reported at the end of Key Stage 4, there is, however, a smaller difference of reported attainment than in Key Stage 2 suggesting that more difficulties arise for both groups of children in the higher tiers of education with attainment and in terms of social, emotional and mental health affecting their learning.

Another important fact that was highlighted by these government reports (Department for Education, 2017, 2019b, 2020) was the higher prevalence of identified Special Education Needs (SEN) for Previously Looked After children at the end of Key Stage 2 compared to their non-Looked After peers, which has been identified as a contributing factor for the attainment gap between the two groups. This statistic illuminates adopted children as a group with an increased chance of having SEN and potentially requiring specialist support input during their learning in

school. But why is it that adopted children have a higher prevalence even though they have left the care system? As identified by Christoffersen (2012) in his literature review article, adopted children have experienced several potential traumatic experiences including domestic abuse and neglect from parents before they got adopted. In addition to those pre-adoption factors, adopted children also have to accept and work through their adopted status as part of their identity and may often have parents that might not bear many similarities to them including race, social status and financial background, which may also increase the risks of low self-confidence for them (Christoffersen, 2012). This argument illustrates the importance that even after adoption, this group of children still must cope with unique challenges compared to their non-adoptive peers and may still require additional support.

Fisher's (2015) review of adoption and looked after children literature found extensive evidence that this group of children are indeed affected both psychologically and neurobiologically in their development. Studies included in the review showed that adopted children showed high rates for both internalising difficulties including anxiety disorders as well as externalising behaviour leading to higher diagnosis of ADHD, oppositional defiance disorder and conduct disorder. In addition, high difficulties regarding their attachment to others and approaches to forming relationships with peers as well as school adjustment were also observed. However, the review also showcased the presence of increased resiliency within this population as a protective factor and pointed to other review studies with adopted children that suggest less difficulties after early adoption. Early intervention work based on attachment theory as well as more systemic intervention including whole school approaches (staff training, policy adaptation) was also mentioned in Fisher's review (2015), which also suggested that it can reduce the impact of the risk factors

described so far and also promote positive outcomes for both learning and behaviour trajectories.

These early experiences and discussed risk factors due to early environmental effects could be considered to have an impact on the cognitive functioning and educational attainment of adopted children if we consider the explicitly expressed link in the literature between positive early developmental experiences and cognitive development. Van IJzendoorn, Juffer, & Poelhuis (2005) conducted a systematic literature review of studies comparing academic attainment between adopted children and two control groups: non-adoptive siblings and non-adoptive peers in their environment. The results showed that while adoptive children scored higher on standardised intelligence tests than their non-adoptive siblings, their performance was found "lagging behind" compared to non-adoptive peers. Interestingly the effect size was only found significant if the children were adopted past their one year of life. Looking at the educational attainment from information based on a larger data set, a recent study by Brown, Waters, & Shelton (2019) drew data from the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Survey (UKHLS) and the Wave one of the Youth Questionnaire with 4,899 adopted young people. The findings of the study indicate that adopted young people tend to opt for seeking immediate work after finishing the compulsory schooling instead of continuing on to further studies compared to non-adopted peers (33% vs 6% respectively). Interestingly, the adopted group did not opt for more managerial professions and instead tended to choose roles in caring professions more. However, both of these results may be mitigated by extensive references in literature of negative experiences of adopted children in school and increased presence of behavioural difficulties thus contributing to less educational aspirations. The findings of this

research provide a new insight into the attitudes of adopted young people regarding their future and aspirations, which can help inform policies of support in education for this population and could link with the role of EPs supporting young people before their transition in post-16 settings and into adulthood.

While the aforementioned literature provides information on educational outcomes of adopted young people, there is limited literature that directly explores the experiences of this group of young people in schools. This literature becomes almost non-existent if we consider the additional factor of being in a same sex adoptive family. While Messina & Brodzinsky's study (2020) does touch on aspects of young people's experiences in school such as peer relationships and sharing of adoptive identity or family status, its main emphasis lies on the development of identity as adopted young people in same-sex families rather than the educational experiences as a whole. Even when considering research on the domain of adopted children in general, the amount of studies that have elicited the direct voices of adopted children and young people about their school experience remains limited, to which this literature review will try and summarise as the closest link to the researcher's topic of study for his thesis.

One of the most recent studies by Crowley (2019) explored the educational experiences of four adopted young people using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis by focussing on the their views on their education in general as well as their peer interactions and relationship within the classroom and outside of it. The experiences of the four participants varied among them however, both strengths and difficulties were expressed with some of them commenting on positive friendships while others reflected on their difficulties with establishing and maintaining long-term friends. In terms of their school experience, the responses were varied again and

depended on the presence or absence of additional Special Educational Needs for the participants which influenced in turn how positive or negative their general experience was. An additional factor that was mentioned by most of the participants was around the difficult transition from primary to secondary school. The participants revealed how their adoptive status also affected their peer interactions in school with three out of four participants experiencing direct bullying about this.

An important survey by the charity Adoption UK (2018b) tried to capture the voices of adoptive families by including "more than 2000 parents" and "about 2000" adopted children that participated in the survey. The findings show that 74% of secondary age young people expressed that "their teachers do not fully understand and support their needs" as well as that 47% of adopted students were "bullied or teased because they are adopted". These findings seem to present some of the challenges expressed already in the literature by parents or professionals working in education with regards to the challenges and additional barriers faced by children that have experienced trauma in their early lives.

3.4 Voice of adopted young people

When trying to understand a specific phenomenon or the experiences of a particular group, one of the most authentic ways to accomplish that is by exploring the experiences of the population that is under question, in this case adopted young people in same sex families (Alase, 2017). However, that does not seem to have been the case for the majority of the literature in this area as most of the research on same sex adoptive families has been conducted from the perspective of professionals (social workers and education staff) and adoptive parents or using

primarily quantitative methods such as questionnaires, but the views of the

protagonists that are in the centre of research seem to be missing or not be the

focus (Selwyn et al., 2006; Thomas, 2013). Only four studies were found to this day

that explored directly the experiences of children and young people that had been

adopted by same sex parents, while none of them has been conducted in the UK

context (one in Europe and three in United States).

Gianino et al. (2009) was the first study to conduct interviews with 14

multicultural adopted adolescents ranging in ages between 13 and 20 years old in

same sex families (lesbian and gay) with a focus on their disclosure practices of their

adoptive status as well as their status of having gay or lesbian parents. The young

people expressed a range of opinions and practices about self-disclosures for both

"statuses" ranging from complete transparency to hiding their status. It is interesting

to note that participants expressed that they often felt pressured to "come out" due to

their family structure and that this pressure was mostly heightened during early

adolescent years, when a lot of young people recall wishing for a more "normal

family". This was due to the difficulties of finding appropriate ways to explain their

family structure to their peers and this is reported to have had an effect on their peer

friendships during that time. This finding seems to be consistent with previous

literature that reports increased difficulties experienced by adoptive parents with their

children during the early adolescent years (Gunnar & Van Dulmen, 2007;

McConnachie et al., 2020). Lastly, young people expressed that they often found it

easier and found acceptance in disclosing their adoptive status but were more

apprehensive to reveal their sexual minority family status. This finding bears

implications on the context of schools and potential homophobia still experienced by

sexual minority families (Cocker et al., 2019) and the need for education professionals such as EPs to offer support with systemic change to address this.

The second United States-based study was conducted by Farr et al. (2016) with 49 adopted children ranging from six to 11 years in two-father or two-mother families and found similar findings in the children's experiences to the first study. More specifically, most of the children experienced feelings of difference from their peers that was related to their same sex family structure as well as reluctance in often disclosing their family structure as experienced by the young people in Gianino et al's. (2009) study. A second finding also gives further support to the rising evidence of the unique difficulties that these adopted young people experience as 57% of children experienced some form of microaggressions from peers because of their same sex family, however these were mostly reported with a neutral emotional valence and their intensity was rated by the children as mostly medium or low. While these first findings provide some context on the unique challenges that adopted children in same sex families might experience, the last findings of the study identify also strong positives for these children as participants reported "an abundant number of positive feelings regarding their families" (Farr et al., 2016, p. 94) with older aged children showing increased resilience and coping skills to deal with the reported microaggressions and feelings of difference.

The last United States study to explore the voices of adopted young people in same-sex families (Cody et al., 2017) did so by using focus groups, a different type of qualitative methodology. Consistent findings to the previous two studies were also reported in the analysis of the data collected through the focus groups discussions with young adoptees sharing a range of disclosure or non-disclosure practices to their peers in addition to reporting instances of bullying and teasing because of their

different family structure. In contrast, the young people also emphasised on some of the positive aspects of being adopted by same sex parents, which they considered made them more empathetic towards others and increased their understanding of "difference".

Messina & Brodzinsky's study (2020) is the only study that has been conducted in Europe researching the views of this specific population and has done so by drawing on a sample from three countries (Spain, Belgium and France). The difference of this study was that it focused more on identity related issues and did so in a longitudinal way by exploring these in 4 age groups of children from pre-school years to late adolescence. Some of the most important findings indicated that young people are often confronted with assumptions about their family structure based on heteronormative perceptions as well as the evolution of questions and challenges which adoptees in same sex families have to deal with across their developmental years. One interesting finding that was consistent with previous literature was the presence of increased negative feelings towards their parents and increased externalising behaviour during their early adolescent years, when feelings of difference from peers due to their sexual minority family were mostly heightened. These feelings though are reported in the findings to change in later adolescence with young people reporting more "understanding" of their adoptive sexual minority status, feelings of "being grateful" towards their parents for having been adopted as well as awareness of the difficulties that same sex parents have to go through to adopt.

While Guasp's (2011) study does not focus on adopted young people in same sex families, it is worth mentioning it because it explores the views of children in general with gay, lesbian and bisexual parents regarding their feelings about their

family and about their educational experience in the UK context and is the only study

of its kind. While feelings of difference in terms of their family were experienced by

these children that were consistent with previously described literature, these

feelings were constructed in a more positive context by the children compared to

what was reported before. In terms of their educational experiences, children

expressed concerns regarding how schools dealt with their sexual minority status,

fears of bullying from peers as well as difficulties with disclosure of their family

structure. The difficulties described above in the existing literature create an ever-

developing picture of the unique strengths and challenges those adoptees in same

sex families face in their lives, which are summarised for ease in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of strengths and difficulties expressed by adopted young people in same

sex families in literature

Strengths	Difficulties
Positive feelings and appreciation of family (Farr et al., 2016; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2020)	Being questioned about family structure (Messina & Brodzinsky, 2020)
Increased resilience (Farr et al., 2016)	Heteronormative perceptions around family (Messina & Brodzinsky, 2020)
Empathy towards others (Cody et al., 2017)	Complexity of a double identity (Gianino et al., 2009; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2020)
Understanding of difference and diversity (Cody et al., 2017; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2020)	Feelings of difference due to family structure (Guasp, 2011)
	Bullying about family structure (Cody et al., 2017; Farr et al., 2016)
	Sharing of family identity with others (Cody et al., 2017; Gianino et al., 2009; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2020)

The difficulties reported by this population seem to be in addition to difficulties experienced by adopted children in general as expressed by them in the literature including difficulty with open communication about their feelings of being adopted with parents and peers, loss of birth family and pre-adoption relationships (Soares et al., 2019). A contributing factor for these difficulties seem to be the "heteronormative" view as Hicks (2005) explains it in his brief history of LGBT adoption in the UK and the perception that heterosexual families are more preferred than same-sex families. In fact, it seems that elementary school children were found to show a significant preference for heterosexual families rather than same sex families (Farr, Salomon, et al., 2019). It is significant to note that while these studies explore the experiences of adopted young people in same sex families, there is no study conducted yet in the English context that focuses on this population. Limitations of current studies include the difficulty of generalising the results to the wider population because of not only the small samples, but also the impact of social and cultural context on the experiences of the population. As mentioned in Messina & Brodzinsky (2020), this should not be underestimated as differences are noted in experiences of adoptees between the three countries due to legislation and social attitudes. For example, varying degrees of acceptance towards homosexuality and same sex adoption was found throughout 27 European countries (Takács et al., 2016) by analysing data obtained through the European Values Study, which is a longitudinal survey using standardised questionnaires and conducted every nine years to measure the current attitudes and values trends in Europe. The study examined two areas: acceptance of homosexuality in general and acceptance of adoption by same-sex couples. While the UK context was rated as more favourable to both variables than most other countries including the countries in the previous research, it was not among the three

highest rated countries (Iceland, Netherlands and Sweden) indicating that homophobic values and opinions are still present in society despite the strong legislative context offering protection to same-sex individuals and couples.

4.0 Support for adoptive same sex families

As explained extensively above, adopted young people in same sex families face unique challenges during their educational journeys compared to their non-adoptive peers who require support not only for them but also for the whole family to be put in place. One of the mechanisms of support for this group of young people in education is The Virtual School for Looked after and Previously Looked After Children which was set up within Local Authorities (LAs) after the Children and Families Act (UK Parliament, 2014) and was later amended to include Previously Looked After and adopted children too (*Children and Social Work Act*, 2017). It is the responsibility of the Virtual School to monitor the progress of adopted young people through an annual review process and to offer support to schools and parents with regards to identification of needs and specific support required by the school. Apart from seeking advice from the Virtual School, there is additional support that is available to school aged adopted children, which includes priority school admission, access to Pupil Premium Plus funding as well as access to a designated teacher within the school who is closely working with the Virtual School (Adoption UK, n.d.). In terms of local context, the Norfolk Virtual School's "aim is to ensure all looked after children have the best possible education that matches their needs and enables them to realise all of their potential" (Norfolk Virtual School, 2020) and they have outlined the different ways that they can offer support to schools, LAs and families through their SEND offer. Additionally, the Norfolk Virtual School has outlined the

inclusion of their new statutory responsibilities including previously care experienced children and what that entails for schools and designated teachers. In certain LAs, there is also a strong link and collaboration between the Virtual School and the Educational Psychology Service to enable strategic support for adopted children. This usually takes the form of a dedicated EP role such as a 'Specialist EP for Looked After Children' working in collaboration with the Virtual School. Examples of this support include consultations, training, intervention work and early identification of difficulties within the school context (Dawson, 2021). This will be further explored in a separate section later.

However, there seem to be certain barriers identified in the literature that prevent the efficient implementation of support provision for adopted children. The first barrier seems to be an emphasis of professionals and the systems on the support of looked after children which are favoured in both available provision and in the literature versus the underrepresented group of adopted and previously looked after children. This can also be surmised by the fact that only recently adopted children were included under the responsibilities of the Virtual School in LAs, which before 2018 focused solely on children that are currently in care despite the fact that both groups of children have been identified in the literature as being more "at risk" and requiring additional support (Adoption UK, 2018a). Even with this change in legislation to extend the support to adopted children, the Virtual School seems to be lacking both the financial and staffing resources to offer the same level of support to this group of children (Busby, 2017).

No study to this day has managed to explore the experiences of support received in education for adoptive young people and parents in same-sex families. As such, it is difficult to discern what support is needed specifically for adoptive

same-sex families in addition to the support described before that is available to all adopted children and their parents especially if taking into consideration the identified unique challenges that this specific population face being members of a sexual minority family on top of being an adoptive family.

There is, however, some limited recent literature that does explore the views of adoptive parents with regards to their experiences of support that they have received by school and other services. A very recent study by Best, Cameron, & Hill (2021) tried to elicit the voices of both adoptees and adopters about their educational experiences as well as the experiences of support in an effort to inform future EP practice with regards to the support needs of that specific group of young people. One of the main themes that arose from the analysis was a theme which concerns "unsupportive school context", which referred to two dimensions: firstly, a lack of understanding around the long-term impacts of trauma and the adopted young people's needs related to that and secondly, inconsistent or inadequate support for the young person's emotional and social needs from the school. Some of the adopters in the study shared that their children's emotional needs were not being met and in fact were exacerbated in certain occasions by strict behavioural policies that did not take into consideration the needs of adopted students. While the sample size remains small and the findings of the study may not be transferable to the general population, this study provides a unique addition to the literature by incorporating the views of three groups of people, adoptees, adopters and Designated Teachers. This provides the researcher with a stronger claim to the validity of the study compared to other similar studies that have explored the educational experiences from the position of one of those groups.

A study funded by the Department of Health (Sturgess & Selwyn, 2007) interviewed 54 adoptive parents in order to gain information on the support provided to the adopted children. Interestingly, the study found that post adoption, the majority of the support came from specialist services like CAMHS and EPS instead of the Social Care which was the case before the adoption order. Parents in the study expressed that the support provided by the services was not deemed sufficient to support the consistent needs of the young people referring to it as "too little, too late". Specifically, adopters expressed the need about additional support with regards to managing challenging behaviour, providing financial aid as well as access to a multidisciplinary assessment and support plan due to the complex profile of needs of their adopted children.

5.0 The EP role in supporting adoptive families

EPs have always had a duty and been involved with supporting children with identified SEN or those that are considered an "at risk" group for having difficulties with at least one aspect of their learning in one of the 4 main areas of Cognition and Learning, Communication and Interaction, Social Emotional and Mental Health, Physical and Sensory according to the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education, 2015). In addition, the Children and Families Act (UK Parliament, 2014) that preceded the Code of Practice placed additional emphasis on specialist education professionals such as EPs working with children and young people to strive to acquire their views and ensure that the processes remain child-centred and child-focused. As such, it stands to reason that EPs need to have an active role in supporting adopted young people and those subgroups that are identified as requiring additional support including adopted young people in same sex families.

EPs are uniquely placed within the school and educational context to support the needs of adopted young people as explained in the report published by the British Psychological Society stating that EPs "have a contribution to make to understanding the dilemmas of looked after/adopted children such as the feelings of rejection and alienation can have on their functioning and sense of belonging" (Division of Educational and Child Psychology, 2006, p. 9).

The absence of substantial links in the literature between EPs and the area of adoption can also be considered an indication of the focus that is placed within the profession for this particular area. In terms of published research, the current work of EPs has been described as being "at an embryonic stage… as very little has been written about the role of educational psychologists in this field" (MacKay & Greig, 2011, p. 6). This might also link in with the wider view that less is known about the needs of adopted children than for their care experienced peers (Dunstan, 2010). Another barrier is the inconsistent available support and work time offered by EPs in different LAs in England to this group of children as a government report showed that some counties have demonstrated more commitment and collaboration for EP involvement with looked after children than others (Department for Education and Skills, 2006). Osborne, Norgate, & Traill (2009) reviewed the responses of 88 EPs across the country with regards to the nature and extent of their service's involvement with supporting in the areas of fostering and adoption. They found that 69% of all services were in some form involved with an average of 67 days spent per year, but unfortunately only 27% of that time was spent on supporting adopted children. In addition, statutory work demands as well as a general shortage of EPs may also be partly responsible for limited availability to do different types of work such as offering specialist support to adopted children (Lyonette et al., 2019).

Sturgess & Selwyn's (2007) study showed that 50% of adopted children have had involvement form an educational psychologist after being granted the adoption order. However, parents in the study expressed concerns about the support offered by EPs and other specialist services explaining that they felt it did not provide them with sufficient tools to support their children's needs. Thus, this study bears implications about the role and capacity in which EPs work with adoptive families, evidencing the need for further research of the parental experiences of support in order to inform future practice.

Some existing literature, however, has shown positive results for the EPs' work with families of adopted children. Osborne & Alfano (2011) evaluated the impact of consultation sessions between 101 EPs and 78 foster and adoptive parents that was offered in a LA in England and found that both groups found the support in the sessions really helpful. More specifically, the adoptive and foster parents expressed that they valued the offer of a safe space to raise their concerns and feelings about the difficulties experienced in the family and the opportunity to talk with specialist professionals and get practical strategies that they could implement at home. In addition, several local authorities in England in collaboration with EPs have launched projects targeted to support adopted young people such as 'the Adoptables' project in Essex County Council (Coram Charity, n.d.). This project includes a networking platform for groups of adopted young people, which allows not only opportunity to meet and share experiences with other adopted peers, but also to participate in discussion with local adoption teams and influence local policies and support offered in a local authority level. Dawson's work (Dawson, 2021; Dunstan, 2010), as an EP in a LA in England has contributed to raising awareness about the specific and significant needs of adopted children within the profession and with

schools. Her latest (Dawson, 2021) study also demonstrates an innovative support

mechanism established by her service to support adoptive parents through a support

group facilitated by an EP dedicated to parents experiencing challenges in their

child's education. Dawson undertook an appreciative inquiry to explore the impact of

this support mechanism, which revealed positive responses from the participating

parents. Parents expressed that the group provided useful peer support with

likeminded parents facing similar challenges and addressed unique challenges faced

by adopted parents through increasing their psychological knowledge and offering

containment of difficult feelings.

In the last 5 years, one of the most useful resource and important contribution

of EPs in supporting the needs of adopted children in schools has been the work of

Gore-Langton & Boy (2017) with the independent Adoption Support Agency, PAC-

UK. Their work culminated in the publishing of a book, which provides guidelines to

schools and professionals on how to become an "Adoption-Friendly" school and

contains not only [psychoeducation around the needs of adopted children, but also

offers practical resources and strategies to implement. This work has also been

recognised by other recent published EP literature (Dawson, 2021), which starts to

challenge the view expressed above by MacKay & Greig (2011) about the published

work of EP and adoption being in early stages.

This limited research appears to be non-existent when it comes to the

involvement of EPs in supporting adopted children in same sex families as no

existing research has ever delved into this specific area according to this

researcher's current knowledge despite the recent focus on adopted children's

needs and the even more recent literature of adoptive children within same-sex

families. The limited UK literature in this area has been conducted from the

perspective of social workers mostly (Cocker et al., 2019) and how these professionals can work more efficiently with this population.

6.0 Conclusion

Thus, this review has delved into the literature around adopted children and more specifically those that have been adopted in same sex families and has demonstrated a set of unique challenges and protective factors that appear to be present with this group, also summarised in Table 1. In addition, the role of EPs and increasing need for more specific intervention work and family support for adoptive families have become increasingly evident through examining examples of EPs' action research work in this field.

However, there is still much unknown about the educational experiences of adoptive same sex families in the UK context as well as the support provided to this subgroup, which as demonstrated, faces unique additional difficulties to those experienced by adopted children and families in general. More research on what has worked and what support is required form the perspective of the service users (students and parents) and not only from professionals can allow the shaping of a services that are tailored to this particular population. The exploration of these experiences in the English context may also provide insights into the similarities and differences of adoptive same sex families' experiences in schools compared to other countries.

Part 2: Empirical Paper

1.0 Abstract

Whilst international research has begun to explore the experiences of parents in adoptive same sex families, less attention has been paid to the educational experiences of the young people in these families as well as eliciting their voices directly. Furthermore, there has been limited research that has evaluated the educational support offered to this particular subgroup of adopted young people despite research suggesting the presence of additional challenges on top of those faced by adopted children in general. The current study used a qualitative methodology to elicit the educational experiences of adoptive same sex families from the perspectives of both parents and young people as well as their experiences of educational support. Analysis of the participants' narratives using IPA has revealed five superordinate themes across both groups: a same sex family; an adoptive family; protective factors; support for young person and family and school as a system. Young people and parental experiences seemed to converge for the majority of themes emerging from the data with few contrasting themes depending on the approach or emphasis that was placed by each group. Contributions of this study to the existing literature are considered as well as future implications for both research on this area and the EP practice.

2.0 Introduction

The rise of the LGBTQ+ rights movement in the western world in the last few decades has led to the expansion of new forms of families that have changed the way family was portrayed in society through the heteronormative lens of the nuclear

heterosexual family consisting of a mother, a father and children. As Professor Golombok describes in her book 'Modern Families' (Golombok, 2015), it is important to consider that new forms of families have been established in society, for example families that may not contain a mother or a father and acknowledge the diversity. One of these growing forms of families are those consisting of same sex parents that have gone through the adoption process and have formed adoptive families. Whilst families created by LGBTQ+ parents have been in the focus of researchers in the fields of psychology, social work and mental health since the 1970s, much less emphasis has been placed in the subgroup of same sex families that have been created through adoption. A potential reason for this might be the fact that adoption by same sex couples can be considered a relative recent phenomenon in certain countries of the Western world, while it is still a prohibited or often controversial issue in other parts of the world. Research on this area has been really limited with the majority of research taking place in the United States and very limited research in the UK context primarily led by Professor Susan Golombok and her associates at the Centre for Family Studies in Cambridge (Golombok, 2020; Golombok et al., 2014; McConnachie et al., 2020; Mellish et al., 2013).

Adopted children have been identified consistently in the literature as "one of the most vulnerable groups in society" (Gore-Langton & Boy, 2017) with unique strengths and challenges that are not present in their non adopted or care experienced peers. In addition, literature available on same sex and other LGBTQ+ families seems to indicate that children in these families also come to experience specific challenges, for example around perceived stigma, invasive questions about their family and feelings of difference (Cocker et al., 2019; Farr & Vázquez, 2020; Goldberg, 2014). However, there seems to be very limited literature available on the

educational experiences of adopted young people in same sex families in general and this is limited even further for those studies that have directly elicited the voice of the young people themselves. As no other study at this point of writing has explored the educational experiences and experiences of support for adoptive same sex families in the UK by including both the young person and the parent's voices, this study will aim to fill this gap.

3.0 Historical context on same sex parenting and adoption

Research on the subject of same sex parenting started in the 1970s-1980s in the United States in response to an urgent need for more evidence to inform court decisions about child custody. These case specifically revolved around mothers that were going through divorce from their heterosexual marriage and were now identifying as lesbians (Golombok, 2007). There was a disparity in the way that courts were making decisions about the custody of children, when compared to heterosexual mothers in similar situations which favoured those mothers identifying as heterosexual and not as lesbian. These decision were based on a heteronormative view in society at that time (Hicks, 2005) regarding what was perceived to be the best outcome for the children. However, these decisions were not evidence-based, as there were no studies available, so more research was required to compare the outcomes of children being raised by heterosexual vs lesbian mothers to inform court decisions.

Homophobia and prejudice against LGBTQ+ people were also heightened during this period not only because of the rise of the AIDS pandemic in the 1980s, and because homosexuality was treated as a mental health disorder by clinicians.

Prior to the 1970s. It wasn't until the 1973 that homosexuality was removed from the Diagnostic And Statistical Manual for Mental Health Disorders (Drescher, 2015) as a diagnosable menta health disorder, which then started having a ripple effect in society in terms of acceptance for people with a different sexual orientation. This corresponded with the rise of the LGBTQ+ rights movement.

In terms of the English context, one of the most influential changes in legislation was the passing of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (UK Parliament, 2002), which made it official and possible for same sex couples to adopt. A year later, another important legislative milestone for same sex families was introduced through the appealing of Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act, which had actively prohibited schools from discussing and promoting homosexuality and same sex families in the curriculum. These two acts paved the way for more same sex couples to create families through adoption, which has led to an ever-increasing number of children being adopted in same sex families in England. For example, this number was reported to be 12% in 2018 out of all adoptions in England and Wales that happened during that year (Department for Education, 2019a).

As mentioned, the majority of the research on same sex parenting has been conducted in the United States with more limited literature in countries like Australia, England and Western European countries, which is surprising considering the UK was shown to be the second highest country in Europe in terms of policies and legislation that protects and promotes LGBTQ+ rights (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020). A quick review of this literature, however, reveals that these studies have explored same sex families in general including those created through surrogacy, In Vitro Fertilisation and previous marriages, while only in the last decade a limited amount of studies have focused on adoptive same sex families (Schumm, 2016), which

separate them from the others due to a lack of biological bond with the child. In addition, most of these recent studies have emphasised on contrasting outcomes for adopted young people in heterosexual, gay and lesbian families (Averett et al., 2009; Farr et al., 2019; Goldberg et al., 2012; McConnachie et al., 2020; Mellish et al., 2013). The purpose for this was centred around challenging a view expressed by a certain part of the research community and in society around the argument of placing adopted children who are already facing "disadvantages" into a family that is going to place in into a further "disadvantageous" position by being a sexual minority (Averett et al., 2009).

4.0 Research on same sex adoptive families

As explained above, research that specifically addresses the experiences of adoptive same sex families is really limited and as such relevant literature will be examined that paint a picture of a unique profile of strengths and challenges faced by this population. References to general adopted children literature will also be made because of the scarcity of data for that particular subgroup.

The comparative studies between heterosexual, gay and lesbian adoptive families in the UK by Susan Golombok included two stages of an ongoing longitudinal study comparing the outcomes of these children in pre adolescence (Mellish et al., 2013) and then later on during their adolescent years (McConnachie et al., 2020). During the first study, increased parental wellbeing and positive social interaction skills were found in adoptive gay families compared to the other two, while children in both gay and lesbian adoptive families showed less externalising difficulties when contrasted with children in heterosexual adoptive families.

Interestingly, these differences did not seem to be present in the follow up study when the adopted children were in their adolescent years with no significant differences between the three groups. However, a general increase in externalising behaviour problems as measured by standardised questionnaires (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) was noticed across all three groups, which supports a trend noticed in similar literature regarding an observed increase in adopted young people's adjustment difficulties during adolescence (Gunnar & Van Dulmen, 2007) as well as those adopted in same sex families (Averett et al., 2009; Goldberg, 2012).

Only four studies to this day (three in the US, one in Europe) have tried to understand the phenomenon of being an adoptive young person in a same sex family from the perspective of the young person. Other literature in this field including the comparative studies mentioned above have usually done so from the perspective of parents (Cocker et al., 2019; Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg et al., 2012; Jennings et al., 2014; McConnachie et al., 2020), which may limit a comprehensive understanding of what it means to grow up in an adoptive same sex family without eliciting the direct experiences of the young people themselves. One of the most important and common findings from those studies was the fact that a range of practices was expressed by the young people with regards to sharing their two distinct identities, adoptive and same sex family with their peers, ranging from either secrecy to complete transparency or following a more selective approach based on who they chose to share them (Cody et al., 2017; Farr et al., 2016; Gianino et al., 2009; Guasp, 2011). The main reason for this was thought to be due to several young people experiencing negative responses from peers after sharing their sexual minority family status in the form of bullying (Cody et al., 2017; Gianino et al., 2009) or microaggressions (Farr et al., 2016). This also seemed to lead to an increase in

behavioural and adjustment difficulties for the young people as they entered adolescence with rising feelings of "difference" from their peers (Gianino et al., 2009; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2020), which is also documented in general adoption literature as an frequent occurring phenomenon in adolescent adopted young people (Fisher, 2015; Gunnar & Van Dulmen, 2007). However, protective factors and unique strengths were also identified in the studies with the young people expressing also strong positive feelings about their families, closeness between family members and a sense of gratitude to being adopted (Messina & Brodzinsky, 2020). In addition, a sense of increased resilience towards dealing with bullying and microaggressions (Farr et al., 2016) as well as increased empathy towards others due to being different (Cody et al., 2017) were also noticed. One unique study (Guasp, 2011) that was conducted in England and explored the views of children in LGBTQ+ families also bears similar positive findings with regards to feelings of difference being conceptualised in a more positive than negative way for these children in the English context. However, this study has researched the experiences of children in LGBTQ+ families in general, not just adoptive ones. While these studies are useful to provide some insight into the experiences of this group, none of the studies has emphasised on exploring the educational experiences of adoptive same sex families as they progress through school in the English context.

It is important to also consider that these difficulties described above seem to on top of other challenges reported in the literature by adopted children in general including loss of birth family and foster families, difficulty with identity formation and exploring feelings about their adopted status (Soares et al., 2019). Educationally, it is also well recognised by both researchers and the UK government that adopted children also face more emotional / behavioural difficulties in their learning and

attainment compared to non-adopted peers, whilst performing slightly higher than their care experienced peers. (Brown et al., 2017; Department for Education, 2017, 2020). In addition, due to those early adverse experiences and the persistent nature of developmental trauma (Van der Kolk, 2005), reviews of adopted children literature has shown that this population may present with long-term psychological and neurobiological difficulties (Fisher, 2015) as well as emotional difficulties with regards to low self-esteem and building relationships with others (Christoffersen, 2012).

5.0 Support for adopted children and the EP role

The primary statutory support mechanism for adopted children is the Adoption Support Fund which is provided to local authorities by the government in order to provide required therapeutic services to adopted children or children under an SGO so that they can receive specialist support (Department for Education, 2018a). Another supportive mechanism is the Virtual School, which was set up in LAs after the Children and Families Act (UK Parliament, 2014) and was later amended to include Previously Looked After and adopted children too (*Children and Social Work Act*, 2017). The Virtual school is responsible not only for monitoring the educational outcomes of adopted students, but also to offer advice, support including additional supportive mechanisms such as the Pupil Premium Plus, priority admission and Designated Teachers, which are also available to adopted children in school (Department for Education, 2018b; Norfolk Virtual School, 2020). In addition, other organisations and charities in the UK also offer advice and support through a range of services to any adoptive families such as PAC-UK and AdoptionUK (Adoption UK, 2018a), with some focussing on supporting same-sex and LGBTQ+ adoptive families such as 'New Family Social' (National Fostering Group, 2020).

A very limited amount of studies has evaluated the support offered to adoptive families from the parents' and children's perspectives and no study has done so for same sex adoptive families despite the acknowledged additional difficulties recorded in the literature. Whilst it seems that over 50% of adopted children have had some involvement with specialists such as EPs or CAMHS, parents felt that this support was either insufficient to enable change or received too late (Sturgess & Selwyn, 2007). Another study that interviewed both adopted children and parents also found similar themes around lack of unsupportive school environment due to limited understanding and inconsistent or inadequate support (Best et al., 2021). A lack of understanding of trauma and the need to prioritise emotional needs of adopted children in school was also noted in the last study.

EPs are well placed in the educational context to offer support to at risk groups of students such as adopted children which is also supported by the BPS guidance describing how EPs "have a contribution to make to understanding the dilemmas of looked after/adopted children" (Division of Educational and Child Psychology, 2006, p. 9). Whilst the work between EPs and adopted children is a quickly developing field, it has been argued that much is still unknown about the needs of adopted children compared to their care experienced peers (Dunstan, 2010). Some positively evaluated practice is evident in the literature where EPs have supported this population with offering specific consultation to adoptive parents (Osborne & Alfano, 2011), participated in multidisciplinary meetings (Osborne et al., 2009) and facilitated support groups for adoptive parents (Dawson, 2021). In addition, guidance on how to make a school "adoption friendly" has also been published by EPs in the UK (Gore-Langton & Boy, 2017), which has been positively praised by schools, families and EPs as it incorporates the views of adoptive parents

and school staff, thus making it a unique and multiperspective resource. However, whilst this literature covers with adopted children in general, no study has focused on the support required or experiences of support received by adoptive same sex families.

6.0 Rationale and aims of the study

The aim of the current study is to explore the educational experiences of adopted young people and their parents in same sex families and their journeys through the educational system as well as their experiences of any support they have received using a qualitative approach. More specifically, the intention of this study is to gain a deeper understanding from a dual perspective of the young people's experiences in school as well as those of their parents as members of a same sex adoptive family. The emphasis was placed on their experiences going through the educational system in England. In addition to this, a second intention was to contribute to a scarcity of research regarding same sex adoptive families in the English context. This study addresses the gap of exploring the 'school experience' from the perspective of the young people as well as their parents, which has not been explored or emphasised in a study in the UK before. It is also hoped that gathering the young people's experiences around available support for them will help to focus understanding of their educational needs and contribute to changes in Educational Psychology practice and policy (Cameron, 2006).

Thus, the study is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the educational lived experiences of adopted young people and their same sex parents?

- What are the experiences of adopted young people and parents in same sex adoptive families of available educational support?

7.0 Methodology

7.1 Ethical Approval

This research was given ethical approval by the UEA's Ethics Committee (Appendix A) and was conducted in accordance with the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (The British Psychological Society, 2021). A participant information sheet (Appendix B) was distributed to prospective participants which included both parents and young people attached with separate consent forms (Appendix C) for each member that expressed interest in participating in the study. The opportunity to ask any questions via email or phone call was also given to the participants before returning the signed consent forms to the researcher. Particular importance was given to acquiring explicit written consent form the young people participating along with parental consent to ensure that no implicit pressure was applied in participating in the study. Verbal consent from the young people was also acquired during the remote video interview before starting as an additional measure. Additional clarification for video / audio recording of the interviews was stressed to both parents and young people in the beginning of each remote interview to confirm consent for this again.

The process of data collection during this project was completed in accordance with requirements of the Data Protection Act (2018) and the principles of General Data Protection Regulation. Video recording of the interviews were stored in the encrypted UEA OneDrive system as per the University's Data Storage policy and were deleted after transcription. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym for the

transcripts and any communications between the researcher and research supervisor to protect their anonymity. These were either chosen by the participants themselves during the end of their interviews or were assigned randomly by the researcher if not specified by the participant. The choice of editing the transcripts was also given to each participant after the transcription process was finalised and certain parts of the interviews were omitted according to the participants' wishes.

7.2 Design

This research project is underpinned by a Critical Realist stance (Maxwell, 2012), which states that the "objective" reality can only be partially known and is mediated by individual human perceptions and societal, cultural and historical factors. This epistemological position is placed between those of Realism and Constructivism (Robson, 2011) as objective reality does exist, but the said reality is interpreted through various individual belief systems. This epistemology and ontology were deemed to fit well with this study's purpose as it recognises that the participants of the study share the "reality" of being part of an adoptive same sex family, but the researcher is exploring how the individual perceptions of the young people and their parents' experiences along with contextual and societal factors have influenced their perceived "reality".

To further the understanding of these individual experiences and taking into account that this study is the first in the English context to include the views of these adopted young people, an exploratory qualitative methodology was adopted using a multi-perspective IPA design (Larkin et al., 2019). This design was deemed to be the most appropriate as it gave a voice to these adopted young people, but also to

enable an in-depth exploration of the participants phenomenon, in this case the 'school experience' (Larkin et al., 2006). Phenomenology is a philosophical and ontological approach that revolves around the study of the human "lived experience" and explores the deeper meaning that people make of their world or a phenomenon (Alase, 2017). Whilst many different theorists exist that have discussed phenomenology, Heidegger (1962) was the first to combine the study of phenomenology and hermeneutics (derived from the word 'to interpret' in Greek), which are the two pillars of the IPA methodology even though phenomenology was considered more of a philosophical position than a research methodology. The methods of phenomenology associated with this qualitative tradition (IPA) have been developed more recently and more regularly connected to the Constructivist epistemological position (Pilarska, 2021). However, it can be argued a critical realism stance would also fit with IPA in that it accepts that there are stable and enduring features of reality such as "events then are categorically independent of experiences" or human conceptualisation but emphasises that differences in the meanings individuals attach to experiences are possible because they experience different parts of reality (Bhaskar, 1978).

Rather than employing a usual IPA design, Larkin et al. (2019) argue that researchers may use a multi-perspective design to incorporate a more systemic approach in the interpretation of the phenomenon. This can be accomplished by taking into consideration more than one group of participants experiencing a phenomenon, which has been accomplished in similar studies where the aim was to understand a phenomenon from different perspectives (Dancyger et al., 2010; Larkin et al., 2009; Rostill-Brookes et al., 2011; Visser & McDonald, 2007). Since research on the subject so far has mostly focused on the parental perspective (Brown et al.,

2009; Golombok et al., 2014; Golombok & Tasker, 2010), a multi-perspective IPA design will not only elicit the experiences of the young people, but also explore commonalities and differences in the way that young people and their parents give meaning to the educational experience.

7.3 Participants

Due to the nature of the IPA methodology and the "minority" status of the participants, an opportunistic sampling strategy was employed to recruit same sex adopted families in the East of England with young people between the ages of 11-19, who were still in education. Additional recruitment criteria included that the adopted young person needed to have been adopted for at least 2 years into the family. This criterion was used as a way to allow for more school experiences to be drawn from the participants due to lengthier time spent in the family, but also to mitigate the effect of additional emotional stress to the participants, as the first few years after placement have been identified as critical for the family cohesion (Liao, 2016).

Participants were recruited through dissemination of a recruitment poster to staff and social media pages of local organisations in the East of England. Originally, the intention of the researcher was to only recruit dyads of parent - young person within a family, however this was not deemed possible due to low numbers of families that expressed interest. As such, a decision was made to include the dyads of families that had consented to participate and to also allow individual parents to participate from families, where the young person's participation was not possible due to a variety of reasons (presence of learning needs, child below the recruitment

age, coping with remote nature of interview). After all the above were considered and the inclusion criteria were accounted for, a total of two young people and six parents (consisting of two dyads of parent and young person) consented to participate in the study and were interviewed as seen in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant pseudonyms and groups

Participant Name	Ella	Ace	Matthew	Lisa	John	Andrea	Hayley	Helen
Participant Group	Young person	Young person	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent

Whilst this sample size is small, it was sufficient to extract rich, in-depth data. Similar multi-perspective IPA studies have undertaken individual interviews with similar numbers of participants (Larkin et al., 2009; Rostill-Brookes et al., 2011). In order to protect the participants' anonymity, a pseudonym of their choice was given to each of them, which was decided at the end of each interview and this was used in all relevant transcripts.

7.4 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used as the most suitable method to collect data regarding participants' experiences. As explained by Smith, Flower, & Larkin (2009), IPA researchers need to choose an appropriate way to collect data that enables the extraction of detailed and rich narration of personal accounts of a phenomenon by the participants. In IPA designs, this is usually accomplished

through means of in-depth interviews or diaries. In addition, the semi-structure format of the interview allows for more flexibility in the exploration of the individual's experience, whilst limiting constraints being placed by the researchers questions and at the same time enabling follow-up questions to be guided by the participants' accounts (Larkin et al., 2006).

Two opening questions were asked to each participant, and these were slightly varied between the young people and parent groups. For the young people group, the two questions were "how has school been for you so far as a young person with same sex parents" and "have you ever had any support in school and if so, what are your thoughts about it". For the parent group, the two questions were "what are your experiences regarding your child's school as an adoptive same sex parent" and "what are your experiences of available support for you and your child as an adoptive same sex parent". Additional prompts were used during the interviews such as "tell me more about…", "can you explain what you mean by…" in order to elicit further data and enable a richer and more in-depth picture of the participants' lived experiences without using guiding questions.

Interviews were conducted during Autumn 2021 over Microsoft Teams in an effort to account for the ever-changing climate and limit risks of direct contact due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All communication before and after the interviews was undertaken via email. Each parent and young person were interviewed separately and both members of a dyad were interviewed before moving to the next dyad or individual parent. Before a young person's interview took place, a parent was asked to be in close proximity in the household for safeguarding reasons due to the remote nature of the interview and to intervene and provide support to the young person if needed. The length of the interviews varied between 45 minutes to 75 minutes.

Interviews were video recorded using Microsoft Teams, which the participants were reminded of before each interview. These recordings were then transcribed verbatim using the participants' chosen pseudonyms, after which video recordings were deleted. The transcripts were then saved and stored in the UEA OneDrive where they will be kept for a minimum of 10 years for publication reasons according to the UEA Data Management Policy. Participants were made aware of this before consenting.

8.0 Analysis

The analysis of the collected data originally followed the traditional methods of the IPA as explained by Smith et al. (2009), but was adapted influenced by the steps followed in Rostill-Brookes et al.'s (2011) study to incorporate the multiperspective element in the analytic process. The adapted process is detailed below in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Steps of multi-perspective IPA analysis
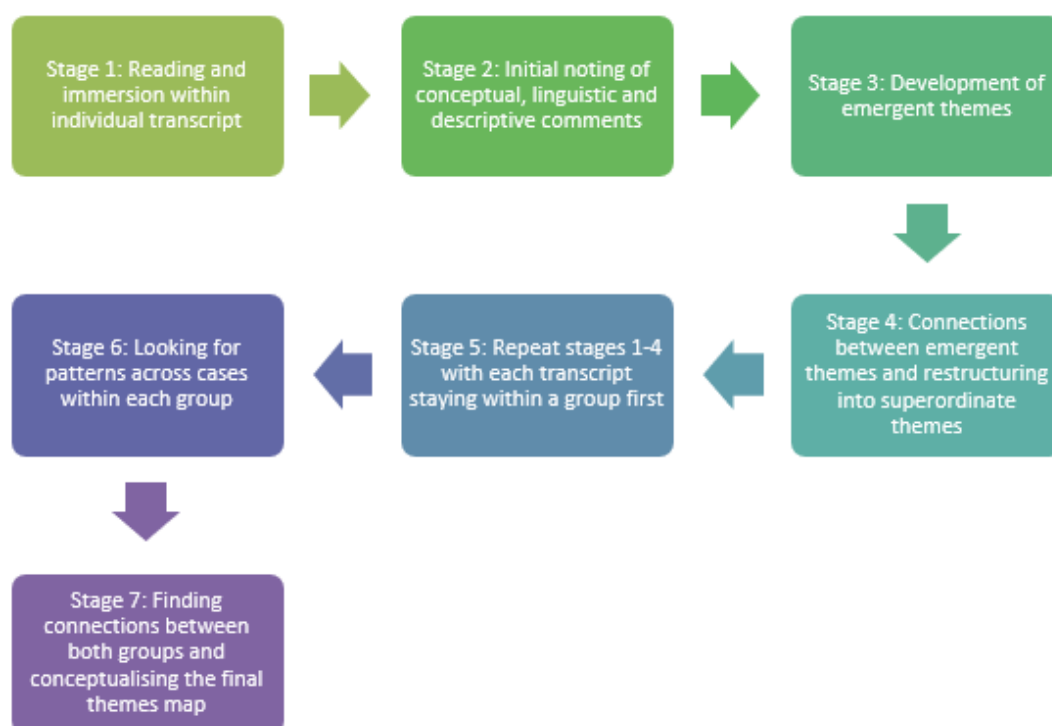
This process included reading and re-reading of the data so that the researcher could familiarise himself with the data and really emerge into the participants' experiences. Following that, an initial reading and coding of the transcript took place where the researcher engaged in initial comments in the margins of the transcripts in the form of descriptive, linguistic and conceptual observations and thoughts. The conceptual notes and observations begin the double hermeneutic process of the analysis (Heidegger, 1962), by starting to attribute meaning to the participants' lived experiences. Following this, the researcher engaged in reading the transcript once more and start noticing emergent themes that were showing in the data by selecting slightly larger chunks of the transcripts and summarising the content of that transcript in a more succinct phrase. The aim of this step is to start moving from the specific and descriptive to the more abstract and

conceptual level of the participant's experience (Dancyger et al., 2010). An example of this process can be found in Appendix E. The last step of the individual transcript analysis was looking at connections between the emergent themes and going through a process of crystallising and organising them, merging similar themes and discarding themes that were not recurring in the data so that a clear structure could form. This process was repeated with each participant, which led to a list of superordinate themes for each participant as seen in Table 3.

Table 3

Individual participants' superordinate themes

Ella	Ace	Matthew	John	Lisa	Andrea	Hayley	Helen
Selective sharing of identities	Importance of friendships	Openness about same-sex family	Lack of school support	Long-term effects of early experiences	Long-term impact of early experiences	Selective sharing of identities	Long-term impact of early experiences
Same-sex vs Adoptive identity	Peer bullying due to family identity	Need and assumptions of heteronormative gender roles	Impact on parental mental health	Same-sex family as an additional burden	Varied presentation of needs	Uncertainty / judgment from parent interactions	Understanding of adopted CYP needs
Judgement from peers about identities	Selective sharing of identities	Parents as advocates	Openness about same-sex family	Same sex not a factor with school	Parents as advocates	Varied profile of needs	Same sex acceptance from school
Homophobia and sexuality assumptions	Primary vs Secondary	Same-sex family as an additional burden	YP openness / acceptance about double identity	Need for heteronormative family roles	Openness about family identity	Heteronormative assumptions about family structure	Heteronormative assumptions of gender roles
Positive Friendships	Acceptance of difference	Long-term effects of early trauma	Behaviour as communication	Extended family as a protective factor	Religion as a protective factor	Impact on parental resilience	Explicit vs Implicit needs
Heteronormative family vs Same-sex family	Heteronormative assumptions of gender roles	Cooperation between parents / school	Judgement from parental interactions	Active parental engagement with school	Heteronormative perceptions about family roles	Same sex acceptance from professionals	Communication between school and parents
Primary vs Secondary	Resilience	Prioritising emotional wellbeing	School understanding of trauma and behaviour	Lack of understanding of adopted CYP needs	Need for understanding of trauma needs	Long-term impact of early trauma	Trusted adult approach
Engagement between parent and school	A helpful and trusted person	YP bullying from peers	Same-sex acceptance from school staff	'Patsy' support	Peer family support network	Explicit vs implicit needs	Specific allocation of funding
Wellbeing over academic achievement	A special space	Diversity of school	Parents fighting for adopted CYP	Support from external professionals	Openness about family identity	Need for parent support	Inconsistent / absent support
Trusted adult to talk	Teacher's inaction	Same-sex acceptance from school staff	Long-term impact of trauma	Support for parents	Allocation of resources	School experience of LAC/adopted children	Simpler professional language
A special room for adopted CYP	Diversity and Inclusion	Individual effects of trauma	Support from external agencies	Specific allocation of funding	Judgement / Uncertainty from society and professionals	1:1 trusted adult	Support from external professionals
Understanding in actions, not words	Homophobia and sexuality assumptions	Explicit vs implicit needs	CYP ability to connect with others	Emphasis on nurture and wellbeing	Awareness of different family structures	Active parental engagement with school	Support for the whole family
School understanding of early experiences	Same-sex vs Adoptive identity	Allocation of resources	Exclusion seen as punishment	Parents as advocate	Adopted vs Non adopted needs	Support from external professionals	Individual presentation of need
Additional learning support		Lack of school understanding of adopted YP needs	Support for parents	Implicit vs explicit needs	Family identity being evident	Use of funding	

It was also important for the researcher to take time breaks between analysis of each transcript to allow reflection time after each transcript and to also minimise potential influences transferring from a previous transcript to the following one in order to allow a more authentic and fresher look at each participant's story and experience. Whilst complete impartiality cannot be achieved due to the effect of the researcher's previous experiences and preconceptions (Heidegger, 1962), keeping a reflective and reflexive approach was encouraged to bring these to the researcher's awareness during the analytic process.

In order to achieve the multi perspective aspect of the analysis as explained in the methods section, the analysis went through one further step and looked at similar themes not only within each group, but also across the two groups of young people and parents. Whilst still being faithful to the ethos of IPA to understand each participant's experience of the phenomenon in question (going through education as a same sex adoptive family), the purpose of looking for insights across the two groups offers unique perspectives of the same phenomenon as experienced by the two groups by looking for similarities, contrasts or both (Larkin et al., 2009). It was hoped that the including of multiple experiential perspectives of the same phenomenon will illuminate unique aspects that may not become present by examining one participant group. In order to achieve this step of analysis, a variety of analytic techniques were used whilst looking for connections between the subordinate themes of each group. At times, similarities between the two groups were drawn (consensus or conceptual overlap), whilst other times it was clear that there were differences in the way the participant groups experience the same phenomenon (conflict of perspectives) as evident in the structure of the superordinate and subordinate themes of the study by Rostill-Brookes et al. (2011).

Occasionally, participant groups expressed divergent meanings or interpretations for the same shared experience, which led themes that tried to reflect this multiple perspective of experience (paths of meaning). The final thematic map that encapsulates this multi perspective process of analysis can be found in Table 4.

Table 4

Structure and links between superordinate themes and related subordinate themes

Overarching Superordinate Themes	Superordinate Themes (Across Groups)	Subordinate Themes (Across and Within Groups)	Individual Superordinate Themes
A Double Identity	A Same Sex Family	Openness vs Selective Sharing	Selective Sharing of identities, Openness about same-sex family, Openness about family identity
		Acceptance, Uncertainty or Judgement	Judgement from peers about identities, Homophobia and sexuality assumptions, Peer bullying due to family identity, Acceptance of difference, Same-sex acceptance from school staff, Judgement from parental interactions, Same sex not a factor with school, Judgement / Uncertainty from society and professionals, Uncertainty / judgment from parent interactions
		Heteronormativity of Family and Roles	Heteronormative family vs Same-sex family, Heteronormative assumptions of gender roles, Need and assumptions of heteronormative gender roles, Same-sex family as an additional burden, Need for heteronormative family roles, Heteronormative perceptions about family roles, Heteronormative assumptions of gender roles
	An Adoptive Family	A Long-term Effect	Long-term effects of early trauma, Long-term impact of trauma, Long-term effects of early experiences
		An Individual Presentation	Individual effects of trauma, Varied presentation of needs, Varied profile of needs, Individual presentation of need, Explicit vs implicit needs
	Protective Factors		Positive Friendships, Resilience, CYP ability to connect with others, Extended family as a protective factor, Religion as a protective factor
A Holistic Approach to Support	Support for Young Person and Family	Wellbeing as a Priority	Trusted adult to talk, A special room for adopted CYP, A special space, A helpful and trusted person, Support for parents, Peer family support network, Need for parent support, Support for the whole family, Wellbeing over academic achievement, Prioritising emotional wellbeing, Emphasis on nurture and wellbeing
		Working Together	Engagement between parent and school, Cooperation between parents / school, Active parental engagement with school, Communication between school and parents, Support from external professionals, Support from external agencies
	School as a System	Understanding of Trauma: Actions not Words	Understanding in actions not words, Teacher's inaction, School understanding of trauma and behaviour, Lack of school understanding of adopted YP needs, Need for understanding of trauma needs
		Diversity And Support Consistency	Diversity and Inclusion, Diversity of school, Awareness of different family structures, School experience of LAC/adopted children, Primary vs Secondary, Lack of school support, 'Patsy' support, Inconsistent / absent support

9.0 Findings

The findings from the analysis will now be presented in attempt to illustrate the experiences of both the young people and parent groups summarised in the simplified version of the thematic map presented in Figure 2. These will be further supported by direct extracts from the interview participants to offer a clear insight into each participants' experience related to the discussed theme, which is hoped to provide the reader with an authentic access to the participant's experience.

Figure 2

Thematic map of superordinate and subordinate themes
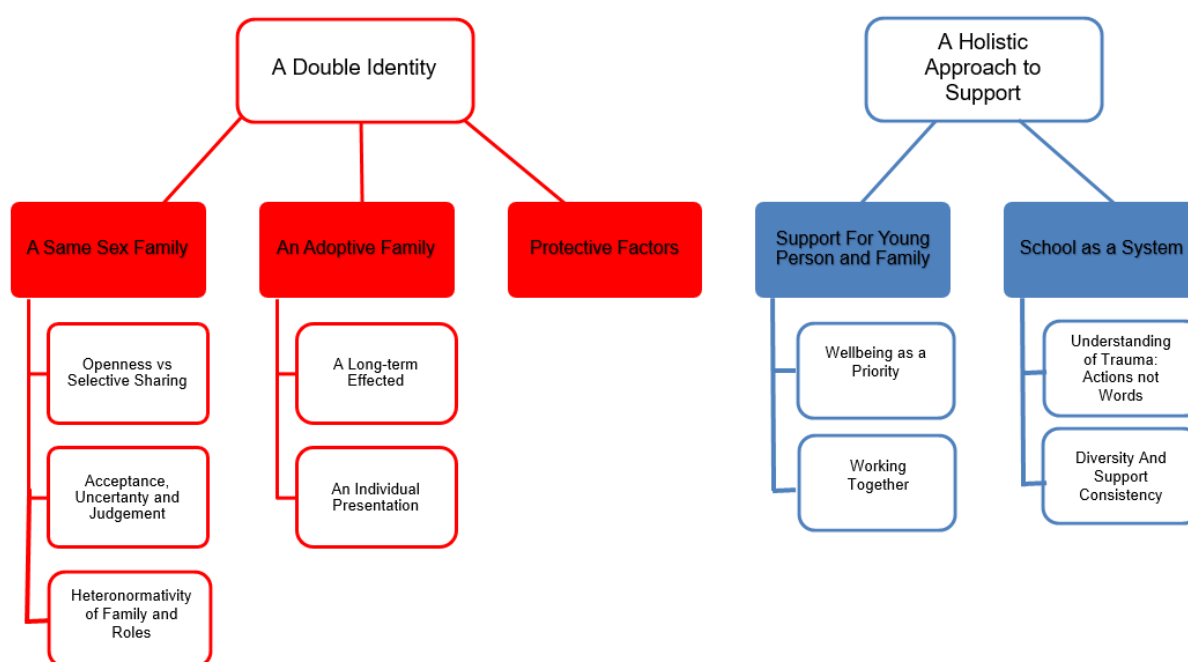
In general, two overarching superordinate themes were identified, 'A Double Identity' and 'A Holistic Approach to Support' after organising the common superordinate themes across participants and the two groups, which seem to reflect the researcher's two research questions around the experiences of adoptive same

sex families in education and their experiences of support. Within the 'A Double Identity' overarching theme, three superordinate themes were developed: 'A Same Sex Family', 'An Adoptive Family' and 'Protective Factors'. Within the 'A Holistic Approach to Support' overarching theme, two superordinate themes were developed: 'Support for Young Person and Family' and 'School as a System'. Within most of superordinate themes, several subordinate themes were identified by comparing or contrasting the superordinate themes on individual participant or group level which are described in detail below.

9.1 A Same Sex Family

This superordinate group theme relates to those experiences shared by the participants that were connected to their status as a member of a same sex family and describes the ways participants chose to share their family status as well as the effect of sharing their identity with others. It also discusses the participants experiences of others and their own perceptions with regards to heteronormative assumptions and beliefs in society, which related to their own family. This superordinate theme comprises of three subordinate themes: 'Openness vs Selective Sharing', 'Acceptance, Uncertainty or Judgment' and 'Heteronormativity of Family and Roles'.

9.1.1 Openness vs Selective Sharing.

This theme was reflected in most of the participant's accounts and refers to their experiences of sharing either one or both of their identities with others and the approach that they chose to employ when interacting with member of the school

community. Whilst disclosing their identities was a shared experience between both subgroups, a contrasting approach was noted when comparing the young people with the parents group. More specifically, it appears that the majority of the parents' group chose to employ an open approach about their identity as a same sex family and disclose that with school member straight away.

> *John: We've always made a point, my husband and I of being very visible, very upfront about you know who and what we are and by and large we've, we've had hardly any shit from people.*

For John and his husband, it was important to be visible within the school community and make others aware of their family identity, which created a positive response from other adults. John shares how even when they are the only same sex parents in a school, they always felt the need to be transparent and that this was something that their son also took on board by mirroring that open approach to sharing his family identity with others. John's open stance seemed to be an example for his adopted son to follow.

> *Andrea: the other thing is, Ali and I are not backwards in coming forwards. We are always very clear this is my wife Ali, and a lot of the time people go. Oh, that is my wife, Ali. This is my wife, Andrea. These are our children. You know we don't, we don't leave it for people to kind of speculate. We absolutely just go straight in and say this is, you know this is who we are.*

Andrea and her wife's openess to share their family identity and be upfront with others stemmed from preventing speculation and questioning about their family structure. Andrea explains further that this would happen often due to the fact that

they were also an interracial family, which seemed to create another layer of difference that frequently attracted personal questions and looks from others.

In contrast, the young people in the study seemed to adopt a different approach to sharing their identity which included being more selective with whom they shared. Both young people described that they would usually share their identities only with specific people that they felt they trusted, and this could take some time before building that level of trust between them.

> ***Ella:*** *it was very like different to say, oh it, it was very difficult to say, oh yeah, I don't have a mum and a dad. I have two dads because I don't think I ever told anyone I had like 2 gay dads until I was in Year… at the very end of year six.*

In this extract, it is clear that for Ella, it was a difficult experience to share her family identity with others in her school as she felt different to others because she did not have a mum and a dad. We also see that Ella chose to keep this secret for most of primary school until Year 6, where she chose to reveal it to her "best friend".

> ***Ace:*** *I used to make up this story as every, every boy who has two parents of the same sex probably might do. "Oh, my dad lives there." No, I know, I know he doesn't live there, that's someone else's dad, but to me same house. Yeah, that's where my dad is, that's why… all my friends, like I said before in reception knew that I didn't have one, everyone else, that is what's that.*

In terms of sharing his identity, Ace describes that in his primary school, he would create a story about his dad that he used to share with those peers that he had chosen not to reveal that he had two mums. Ace also commented that making up stories like this is probably quite common in adoptive same sex families.

Apart from being selective about their identity sharing practices, both young people also found that it was easier at times to share one of the identities before the other due to preconceptions that peers had about that particular identity. For example, the adoptive identity often came with questions about the birth family, which the young person found more uncomfortable to answer or the same sex family identity would be shared after seeing how others responded to the adoptive identity.

Ace: So yes, no, I do share one first, and that's because it was easier to do it that way, and that would be to say I am adopted you know this is, this is what's happened.

Ella: I think it was easier to share that I had two gay parents instead of me being adopted.

For Ella, sharing that she is adopted seems much more difficult than sharing that she is part of a same sex family due to past negative experiences. Ella describes how when some of her peers in primary found out that she is adoptive, they would become "nosy" and make comments such as "oh is your mum some sort of drug addict" or "is your mum is your mum getting abuse or something".

9.1.2 Acceptance, Uncertainty or Judgement.

This theme was shared between all participants, and it relates to the experiences that each participant encountered after sharing their identity with other members of the school community including class peers, other parents, school staff or other professionals involved. Whilst this was a shared experience, the name of the theme was chosen to reflect the variance and contrast in experiences between each participant and across the two subgroups.

Matthew: Sharing that we are two dads with school, yes, I mean I, I have, you know, I can tell you how much it's not an issue cause I until now I've never thought about it, I've just gone in and we are two dads and we've been, it has been accepted as two dads.

Lisa: From the gay point of view, though, I can't honestly say I've experienced any issues that are of the I think, of course any prejudice or disadvantage really.

Both Matthew and Lisa describe how being gay and in a same sex family was not met with prejudice or judgement, but instead both felt that their family was not treated any differently to other families in school by staff and parents resulting in positive experiences and feelings of acceptance. Matthew explains that not only his family has been accepted in school and "feels no different to any other family", but he also thinks that nowadays, schools "take diversity and the whole gay lesbian LGBTQ plus community very seriously". Lisa continues to explain that she has not been aware of any "direct discrimination" because of her family status and thinks that her family's "negative experiences have not been due to same sex".

Lisa: Of course, you don't know what parents say do you? Yeah, you don't know what parents say to their kids and whether some of them are funny about it cause sometimes parents have been funny, but I don't know if that's why you know.

Hayley: I think like I said before, it was more about not kind of feeling, but is it because we are outsiders? Or is it cause I'm gay? Or is it because I've got a brown child? I think it was I naturally felt like that, whereas I think in where we used to live in Surrey, it didn't feel like that.

What Lisa and Hayley described in those extracts are feelings of uncertainty as to the motivations behind other parents' behaviour towards them, which leaves them confused as to how they are perceived by other parents or the discussions that might happen in the background with their children about their family. Hayley describes her frustration with parents that may not be welcoming or warm in their interactions with her during school pick-up times and she is often left to wonder "which bracket is it that I am not falling into for them" whether that is because she is a "newbie" or "because they've sussed out that we're together and so they're not so accepting of that" or "because I have an Asian child and a white child". Hayley also contrasts this feeling of uncertainty with the time when she and her family used to live in Surrey, and she did not experience this level of uncertainty about other parents' behaviour.

The extracts below showcase those instances where participants experienced prejudice or judgement from either peers or parents about being in a same sex family.

> *Ella: Um… I felt a bit like I don't actually know. I think when everyone found out, I got a bit like worried like would people judge me or stuff like that. That's the only way I felt.*

> *Ace: I got, I got a little bit bullied when I was in high school and most of it was down to because I had two mums and people had the thought, they had the right to bully me.*

> *John: When we were in London, some of the families did find us quite hard to take and you could see that they were keeping their distance and we're just didn't understand us. I mean in so you know, just because perhaps culturally it*

was not OK for them, so we kept a sort of polite distance from them, but you know, we we've rarely had any you know.

Ella describes her stress after people in her primary school found out that she had two gay dads and how she felt worried that people would judge her because of her family, which affected her experience towards school for example because of "quite a few homophobic like words" that she was told by peers in Year 8. In addition, Ace experienced direct homophobic bullying from one of his peers in high school when he told him that he had two mums but attributed this to immaturity and the fact that "people do not understand properly". Along the same lines, John describes his experiences when living in London with his husband when some of the parents chose not to interact with them within the school context due to perceived cultural differences. John feels that there are some similar experiences in the current school where some of the parents just "don't want to have anything to do with them", however he comments that this is "really rare" because when he interacts with other parents at school, he will mostly feel "no different" to others.

In certain cases, this judgement also took the form of peers making assumptions about the young person's sexuality based on the sexuality of their parents, which was experienced by both participants in the young people group.

Ella: there was one comment and say, "oh she's got 2 gay dads and she must be gay herself", which I just thought was very stereotypical, just because I've got 2 gay dads doesn't mean I am gay myself.

Ace: In college there was there was homophobia thrown at me because a gay bloke did have a crush on me, but he said it to the wrong people and that that

threw in the whole "he's gay. He must like it" and you know all that, all that

ridiculous speech that people feel is appropriate.

9.1.3 Heteronormativity of Family and Roles.

This theme was present in all, but one participant and it revolves around experiences that are related to perceptions or assumptions around heteronormative gender roles or the family structure and what implications that has had on the participants. This theme includes those instances where heteronormative comments or opinions have been expressed not only by others outside of the family including parents, school staff or peers, but also from the participants themselves as they make sense of their own experience and family.

> ***Ella:*** *because people just assume that a mum and dad or a more just a dad is normal. They wouldn't think oh, you've got 2 gay dads, that's just really weird.*

> ***Ella:*** *but whenever we go out as a family to town or to get food shopping and I feel very what's the word like anxious cause if my school friends there, what are they going to say to a 14-year-old girl out with her two gay parents and her little brother?*

Ella explains how she feels that others perceive that having a mum and dad is normal and that anything that is different from this heteronormative structure would be considered as weird. The second extract also showcases that Ella may have appropriated some of those perceptions of normality when she questions what her school peers are going to think when they see her family out during a shopping trip insinuating that they will judge them and find a same sex family as weird. Ella

experiences such stress from this internalised perceived judgement that she will often persuade her parents to go shopping further away "where no one knows me".

Another interesting concept that was expressed by some participants was the beliefs around the fact that being in a heteronormative family consisting of a mother and a father might be a better alternative for adopted children or the fact that there were missing out by not having one of the gender roles in their family as shown in the extracts below.

> **Lisa:** *my views around it was that if there were, if there had been a heterosexual couple equivalence available, I think I did say to the social worker when I did believe that they the children probably should have gone to those because I think Ace needed a father. But and I think you know; life is going to be easier the more mainstream. You've got enough difficulties, isn't it? So, I do think that it's not great to have an additional potential disadvantage really, which think it could be.*

> **Matthew:** *it is across isn't it, ideally that you would want a mum and a dad, you don't want a mum only or a dad only, you want a mum and a dad and it's no different for same sex families.*

Lisa described that when they started the adoption process for their two children, she contemplated the need for a father figure for her son Ace and how a heterosexual couple may have been a more preferred choice for them as being in a same sex family can constitute an additional disadvantage for them. However, Lisa further reflects that in those circumstances, not only there was no other couple available for adoption, but also her daughter "didn't really want a bloke at that time father" so having two mums would be beneficial for her. Matthew emphasises how it

is a universal need to want to have a mother and a father, so the same need applies for adopted children in same sex families. He explained that he knows that his daughter "obviously misses her mum" and she might look at other heteronormative families and think that "there's where there are mums, and she hasn't got a mum" and has "no contact with her with her mum", which makes it just another burden" for her.

> **Helen:** *they didn't sort of say this is the mum one and this is the dad one, you know but I found some artwork they've done and they did put me in a skirt which I hardly ever wear and Maggie in trousers in the artwork and but this artwork was obviously much guided by the assistants, you know, because my kids wouldn't have created that on their own then.*

In the above extract on the other hand, we see an example of how school staff may incorporate their own heteronormative preconceptions of gender roles in a same sex family when working with adopted young people in same sex families. Helen describes how her and her wife were ascribed a motherly and a fatherly role based on being depicted wearing skirt or trousers, which was not representative of how they usually dress and so could not have come from the children themselves.

> **Andrea:** *and the doctor. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Who are you and I said I'm his mother and he looked at me and he looked at Ali and he said you're his mother? I said yes, I'm his mother. And then I said, adoptive mother. He said OK, so who's the real mother then looking at Ali and Ali was like no, no. We're both his mothers. We are both his adoptive mothers is that you know? But who gave birth to him?*

Andrea's interaction with the medical professional above showcases another experience by a member of a same sex family where questions are being asked under a heteronormative assumption by the professional which does not seem to take into consideration the factors of being an adoptive family or a same sex family and insists on asking about a birth mother. Andrea also recants a similar interaction with a mother in the playground which turned to one of her friends and inquired "what would two lesbians want with two boys? That's a bit weird". This again employs a heteronormative view of gender roles within a family and stereotypes of men raising boys and women raising girls.

9.2 An Adoptive Family

This superordinate group theme relates to those experiences shared by the participants that were connected to their experiences of being an adoptive family. Specifically, this theme relates to experiences expressed by the participants about the long-term impact of early trauma experienced by the young people on the whole family as well as how it affects each adopted child in a unique way creating very different presentation of needs. This theme also highlighted the need for parental advocacy as an adoptive family. This superordinate theme comprises of three subordinate themes: 'A Long-Term Effect', 'An Individual Presentation' and 'Parental Advocacy'.

9.2.1 A Long-Term Effect.

This subordinate theme was included in each parent's account of their school experience and reflects the long-term impact that the early adverse childhood

experiences of the adopted young people had on their school experiences even years after being adopted. John explains this perfectly when he mentions how:

> *"developmental trauma is a very complicated thing, and it affects their learning, it affects their social interactions, it affects their emotional regulation and their ability to, the, UM, their impulse control, their ability to take instruction, to be part of a community, and all of those things".*

While this theme was not reflected strongly by the young people, there are still mentions of this when talking about their time with their birth family and it can also be shown by taking into consideration their shared experiences and difficulties around their educational experiences.

> **Matthew:** *I think there's a general misconception that as soon as children are adopted all the problems go away and of course, they don't. You know, the former is still there*

What Matthew describes in this extract is a general societal view that children that get adopted stop presenting with needs around trauma because they are not looked after anymore, however he emphasises that the trauma is still there and remains after adoption.

> **Helen:** *they asked them to talk about their family, you know, from birth to five. You know their early family and X found that so upsetting and traumatic that she walked out of the class. And you think oh here it goes again. But in fact, it hasn't gone. You know she hasn't gone on to get a habit of walking out because she really was upset by the fact that they were asking her to think about that early damaging time that she remembers in the way that she remembers it.*

For Helen's daughter, it becomes evident in this extract how important preparation before any related family activity such as a family tree is for adopted children. Helen comments on how discussions about her child's early years with her birth family can be quite re-traumatising and evoke a great deal of stress for them that can create barriers with her engagement in lessons, which was "the worst one that we've experienced". Helen describes how her daughter's reasons for leaving the class in the first place might not be clear for school staff and might not notice the level of uncomfortableness that such an activity might place on her.

> *Andrea: He's not good at, uh, making friends. He likes things his own way. He would rather do things his own way and be on his own than make friends. But some of that is just about his social skills and he also both boys seek out adults all the time because that is what they used to because their children that in the foster home they went from nursery to foster home nursery to foster home they didn't do play dates. They didn't do anything else. They haven't had that kind of socialising bit that has meant that they kind of understand how the world works.*

While describing her son's current difficulties with social interaction and making friendships, Andrea illustrates that the lack of certain experiences in their early years when placed with foster families can be considered a contributing factor into her child's current difficulties. Andrea's connection between early experiences and current difficulties reflects the theme's long-term effect that early year's experiences or lack thereof may have on the development of crucial skills later on.

> *Lisa: And when she was about 15, 14, we got a letter from her therapist that had come in, and it was a nice, you know. So, we were in the car going so I said "oh X, there's a letter for you at home. It's a proper letter, you know, not*

just an envelope thing" thinking she would be quite excited, and she said, "oh

is it telling me that I'm going to move somewhere?" This is at 15 and I tell you

that cause I want you to really understand because I didn't think that even

when your children have been with you for 10 years and there's never been

any talk of anything else that they carry within them, that impermanence, and I

think teachers need to know that.

The above extract by Lisa demonstrates in the clearest way how long-term the effects of trauma and early experiences can be for adopted young people even after being adopted and being a stable member of a family for 10 years. Lisa's daughter seemed to maintain that uncertainty around her place within the family based on those early experiences of being removed from her birth family and then being placed in a foster family before being adopted that she still experiences stress around her security within her adoptive family. Lisa points out how important that is to consider as her child "only had once had one small foster placement and then one good 18 month one" before being adopted at age six, but still experiences stress around being removed from her adoptive family.

In terms of the young people, one young person highlighted relevant material, which would be important to include and discuss here. In the following extract, Ella mentioned about how she used to struggle at school because of the limited experiences of learning that she had when she was living with her birth family as well as the time she spent out of education after being adopted and moved before she got a place in a school.

Ella: I think Primary was a bit hard because I was in year 2 when I moved

from living with my birth family to living here and it was about three months

before we found a school to go to and I missed out on three months of

education and I was already behind because when I was living my birth

parents, I don't think we did that much learning.

9.2.2 An Individual Presentation.

This subordinate theme was present in only half of the participants; however, it demonstrates an important aspect of the nature around the presentation of adopted children's needs. More specifically, this theme highlights parental reflections around the different level of need in adopted siblings or how certain needs might be more implicit in adopted children and young people rather than explicitly evident when interacting with them in school. This theme also contains those references made by parents on the type of needs that may be present in adopted children but missing in their non-adopted peers.

> *Hayley: Everybody knows someone who's got an adopted child who's doing brilliantly and wasn't any trouble. And we've all heard of Bambo whatever his name was, who killed his parents? You know, so that it's kind of like you said, but they're not like Bambo, you know, so they're going to be like the other one no problems, but they do have in their make up some differences because of I think and because of their early life, I whether that makes sense to you, I don't know.*

In this point of the interview, Hayley describes how there are always examples of adopted children with less severe additional needs than others, but everyone knows examples of children that really struggle after their adoption. Each child will have their individual strengths and needs and people should not presume that each adopted child can be treated the same way.

> *Matthew: Ella has a, I mean, Uh, uh, they both got, I would what I would say that all the things you'd expect to see in a child that's had you know significant trauma in their early years, but they both cope with it in slightly different ways.*

In this extract, Matthew describes that while both of his children present with difficulties associated with their adoptive status and identity, they have developed very different mechanisms to cope with these and their stress response. Specifically, he goes on to described how Ella's "coping mechanism is to put a smile on your face, I can do this, show the world everything is fine", whilst for his other child, he "sort of shuts down, he'll stop and refuse to do things", which can often create tension in his relationships with his teachers.

> *Andrea: it is right that you tell people so that they understand sometimes why there might be challenges or difficulties that they don't see in birth children and birth parents, and particularly with Elliot, with his emotional instability at times, you know, we have to treat him like a baby, and it's good that other parents know that, and that they know that there is a reason behind it rather than, you know, we're just either babying him or whatever, whatever.*

Andrea makes a clear point here that having awareness of the adopted status of a child can give school staff and parents clarity on the underlying reasons of their behaviour presentations as specific challenges are only present in adopted children that have experienced early trauma in their lives and not in their non-adopted peers. Andrea mentions how clarifying the child's background helps in further understanding the behaviour that the child is displaying as well as the strategies used to manage that behaviour by the parents in order to avoid misconceptions from other members of the school.

9.3 Protective Factors

This superordinate theme was present in almost all participants and refers to how each participant in the study identified specific protective factors that worked for themselves and their family in general. These protective factors varied and were unique to each participant which led to this superordinate theme being named as such. Some participants identified within-person factors such as resilience and ability to form connections with others which made their school experience more positive, while others emphasised more on external factors such as extended family, religion or peer support.

> *Ace: I don't take things too seriously. Uh, if any was like, Oh yeah, I should be doing this, I'm just like cool so what? Just brush it off cause my motto in life is life is too short to have arguments. There's no point cause you don't. I know it is depressing, but you don't know what day is gonna be your last.*

Ace displays a 'Carpe Diem' mentality when he describes how he views adversity in his daily life by not taking things too seriously and looking to the future rather than letting arguments ruin his present. He goes on to explain that he tries to remain positive and empathetic to others even when they might treat him in a negative way as he "put it down to youngsters just being youngsters" who often "take the mickey out of something they don't understand".

> *Lisa: I think the other thing that perhaps has been a protective factor is we've both got fairly, I mean, Linda family lived local, her sister and niece and nephew and my family live in Essex, but they've always been extremely involved and active with the children and we've got very positive relationships*

with all of them, so I imagine that again helps to provide that sort of normality

protective ring, you know.

Lisa identifies that maintaining strong relationships with the extended family and living within close proximity to them allows for another layer of protection to be placed around adopted children, as they are able to have positive interactions with more than their parents and foster those positive relationships. In a similar fashion, Andrea talks about the importance of having an extended family there for the children and how supportive that can be for them even if this is being part of a specific community.

Andrea: So religion is not something that we shy away from either with the

boys and I was brought up in in a very Christian up with a very Christian

upbringing and that was important to me not necessarily the God stuff, but just

having more people that understood you and could accept you for who you

were and we definitely feel like the boys may well need that as life goes on for

them that they have people who just accept them for exactly who they are.

Andrea's religious upbringing meant that she wanted to incorporate this with her own children as she found the church community as a non-judgmental and accepting 'extended family' that can will be useful for the children as they grow up. Andrea believes that Christianity's values seemed to reflect that unconditional understanding and acceptance that she would like to offer to her family and would prove to be a protective factor for them.

John: He has always had a real knack for making friends. He's very, he's

quite charismatic. He's a, he's a very good-looking child and he's very athletic

and agile and funny. And you know, he knows how to get other children to

play with him and he had, he had managed friendships quite well throughout his childhood.

Meanwhile, John identifies his son's ability to make connections with others and form friendships easily as a protective factor for him as it has helped him build a supportive and consistent circle of friends throughout his childhood, which has been a protective factor for his son in terms of some of the behavioural difficulties that experiences at school. John emphasises how certain personal characteristics such as humour, being good at sports and having a certain degree of charisma during interactions has helped his son make friends and increase his sense of belonging at school.

9.4 Support for Young Person and Family

This superordinate theme refers to a group of subordinate themes across the two subgroups that relate to their experiences of support that they have received either as an adoptive young person in a same sex family or as an adoptive same sex parent. This theme not only discusses past experiences expressed by the participants, but also relates to support that the participants identified as desirable for the young person specifically or for the whole family as a system. This superordinate theme contains two subordinate themes: 'Wellbeing as a Priority' and 'Working Together'

9.4.1 Wellbeing as a Priority.

This subordinate theme was an amalgamation of individual superordinate themes found in each participant and within each subgroup and was formed under a

title that captures the conceptual essence of those superordinate themes. This theme was present within all participants and reflects on the experiences of support that the participants received or would find desirable to support their mental health and wellbeing. While the two subgroups discuss different types of support which are more relevant to each of the groups individually, the common thread that connects them is the need for school staff and other people to see the wellbeing of the young people and their parents as an important priority and to provide support for this.

In terms of the young people group, both participants focused primarily on two aspects that considered important to support their wellbeing at school: having a trusted adult available, with whom they could talk about their thoughts and feelings and secondly having a safe space or room at school that they could use when needed.

> ***Ella:*** *I think secondary was more better because I had someone to talk to and I've still got some to talk to, but she's not well at the minute, so she's having to stay home, and she was very good. She was. She's been like a mentor sort of type person since the year 7.*

Ella is describing how her secondary experience of school was better because she felt that she had a trusted school staff to talk to whenever she needed it and how she helped guide her as a mentor since her beginning in Year 7. Below, Ace describes similar positive experiences of support in his secondary school, because he forged a trusted relationship with the school SENCo and was able to have a check-in every day and share how he was feeling. Ace jokes about how he would "see her early in the morning" and they "always used to have a joke", which really made the day count for him.

Ace: I had the SENCo who's helping me through my high school years and if I had any problems, I could go to her and she was lovely she really she really made, she really made the day count … cause I could just go to her and say I had this trouble also or nothing really bad happened today and that was pretty much it for high school.

Ace: The same sex thing in high school, again she supported me through that as well. Just like if you got any questions or anything, just come and ask me, you know I'll sort things out, you know? And that was brilliant.

Ella: I couldn't really like go to a teacher and say "oh, can we talk? I've got loads of things on my mind" and stuff like that. So, I felt like very I don't know what that is like, I don't have anyone to talk to, so I felt left out and like no one really understood stuff.

In terms of support with regards to their same sex family status, the two participants expressed differences with regards to how much they felt supported to explore their feelings. Ace felt that his SENCo was a person that he could just "go and ask any questions" about his family and explore his thoughts, while Ella felt less encouraged to approach teachers to discuss her feelings about being in a same sex family leading to feelings of isolation and lack of understanding by her school.

Ella: They have this, Uh, what's it called? They have like this like they have a massive room with walls and like split doors in and I'm allowed to go there whenever I feel that I need to and they've done that with X as well and I think most adopted and foster children.

Ace: that was also probably the thing that got me through high school. This is the fact that I knew that there was that special place that I could go if ever there was a need to go somewhere.

In addition to having a special person to talk, both young people described their positive experiences of having a specific space that they could use to retreat from the world and seek emotional support in order to regulate themselves. Ella describes that there was a room that was mostly focused on emotional regulation and was designed to be used by most adopted children in the school. For Ace, his safe space was a garden that the school created, and Ace helped maintain, which he used every time he needed a quiet place to think.

In terms of the parents' group, several parents reflected on the impact that being an adoptive same sex family can have on parental mental health either through personal experience as John and Andrea described below or through experiences of other couples.

John: You know it's making it almost impossible for me to continue working because I think I'm going to have to become… I mean, I only work part time as it is, but I think I'm going to have to stop working to become… you know just to just to manage his care. That's not fair.

Andrea: It is hard going, just raising kids and adopted kids and kids with particular needs that is hard enough. Me with a full-time job and Ali with her part time job. You know it is tough and you almost just want something that's readymade that you can just roll into turn up and come home again.

Parents expressed the need for support to be put in place not only for the adopted young people, but also for the parents and the family as a whole and how

this would need to be something easily accessible or "readymade" as Andrea mentions above due to time restrictions.

> *Lisa: We were lucky to get Claire when we did. I think that that made all the difference to us and our kids as well. I think there needs to be a bit of a mental change of saying that if you help the parent you know with the kids so. This adoption support fund should also be used to help parents, I think.*

In the extract above, Lisa describes how lucky she and her wife felt with the support they received from a Social Worker that offered them guidance and advice not only for them as parents but also directed them to other useful services to seek targeted support for their children. Lisa also contemplates that the model of support needs to be adjusted to look at a more systemic approach of supporting the young people by also helping their parents in the process, which will have a positive effect on them as well.

> *Helen: All our support as a family has been given to us through the Adoption Support Fund and at times when things were very difficult and things have got bit rocky in the family and the social workers from the support adoption support thing have put in extra meetings with us about it and I'm very grateful for that, indeed.*

Helen also describes the social workers form the Adoption Support Team helped support the family's wellbeing during difficulty times by scheduling additional meetings to discuss things and offer a supportive space for the parents.

> *Hayley: So that was from the local authority so they I know that they've got a post adoption support fund and they use that to get us a therapist. Uhm well if I'm honest, initially it was for me, so she was my therapist …. so, there were*

some issues that I need to deal needed to deal with before we adopted the boys so she was my therapist first which they paid for.

In Hayley's case, it showcases a holistic approach that a service took when the adoption support fund was utilised to fund therapy in order to help a parent's mental health first, which eventually had a significant positive impact on their children's wellbeing and her emotional capacity as a mother.

Andrea: As far as I'm aware there is nothing like that in Norfolk and I reached out to Norfolk County Council to ask them if they had like any meetups or groups or stuff, because again, what we could cope with is like once a month we or every other month or once every three months. You know, just family picnic in a park somewhere with a load of kids and parents who are same sex or otherwise, but just locally to us that would be great.

Lisa: Our main support at the moment is other mums that we met through therapy and got an informal group. That's the best. And I do think adoption support services could do more to facilitate support groups really, not just coffee mornings for people with toddlers, particularly for us with older adults.

What Andrea and Lisa describe above is an example of how they feel that the Local Authority and their school could provide help to adoptive same sex families by organising informal groups or coffee meetups. This was discussed as an opportunity not only to offer peer support between parents, but also as a way to create a support network and introduce the young people to other families, with whom they share a "common understanding".

9.4.2 Working Together.

This subordinate theme relates to the emphasis that participants placed on the school and its staff working collaboratively with the parents as well as external professionals that may offer additional support for their adopted young people. Whilst this theme is mostly reflected by the parent subgroup and by all participants within that, there are also some limited references in the young people group about how their parents have been quite present in their school and have regular contact with them indicating awareness of the two systems working together. For example, Ella comically talks about the very frequent email communication that her dad has with the school and how this has ensured that this contact has made the school aware of her needs as an adopted young person.

> *Ella: Yeah, like the school knows that I've been adopted and what I've gone through cause of the amount of emails Dad writes to the school.*

> *Ace: I don't think I would be able to do as much as I would be doing if it weren't for her and obviously my mums, cause they supported me for a lot even when I wanted to give up with my exams, they're just no no. Keep going. Keep going, keep going, keep going, keep going you know.*

In this extract above, Ace also hints at the collaborative approach that his mums and the school had in order to support his motivation to succeed in school and acquire the grades that he needed to progress to further education. Ace comments that even though they were "two years later", he still managed to get the grades due to both the school's and his family's encouragement.

> *Matthew: I think we'll we already have a very strong relationship with school and teachers*

> **Matthew:** *And you know we're here to support them as they are to support us, which is, I think, very important*

Matthew, one of the parents, explains how he and his husband have a very strong relationship with the school and what he calls their children's "key teachers", because they have put in the effort to foster those relationships. It is interesting to see Matthew's belief of the reciprocity of the collaboration and support between school and home and how both contexts are there to support each other and ultimately the young person instead. Matthew provides more evidence later on for the need of collaboration by explaining that "school is a very very precious resource to adoptive parents". On the other side, Matthew feels that the teachers also "seem genuinely happy to have that information, because obviously they can I think they feel supported".

> **Lisa:** *Yeah, we attended reviews we, we help with homework. There was a time also, another thing is you know trying to. I helped him get his science GCSE. I sat with him for six weeks and throughout the whole of the year I was helping him, he was getting input and he did get his GCSEs.*

Lisa's extract shows the practical aspects of parents being present in their engagement with the school and supporting their children's additional learning needs by attending EHCP annual reviews and helping at home with homework so that the learning in school is maintained outside of it too. Lisa emphasises on how she supported her son to achieve his qualifications through dedication and time spent on helping him revise for his GCSEs on top of the work that the school was doing. Lisa describes later how school allowed her to take her son off school for 6 weeks before his exams to work on preparing him for his GCSEs and expresses that "unless I've been actively involved and I was very, very involved throughout his schooling, I don't

think he would have got any qualifications". In reflection about the whole academic journey and her involvement with school, Lisa feels that she has "been much more present than I've wanted to" and how she has "probably been a pain, a lot of the time, and still am, and, you know, writing emails".

> *Hayley: So, we work really closely with the school. So, like I said, we asked for the meeting on Zoom last night with X's teachers because he had. He's had some issues lately with saying no.*

Hayley's example shows how parents can take an active role in their collaboration and engagement with the school by requesting meetings with specific teachers or the SENCo in their child's school when a behavioural issue arises so that they can work together to find a solution and a way forward in supporting the child's needs.

Another aspect of this subordinate theme was how school and the family can work together and be supported by external professionals, which can offer insights or specialist support to them. For example, Lisa describes the usefulness of the EP report that her son received after that involvement that was instrumental in identifying his profile of needs and describe what support needed to be put in place for him.

> *Lisa: And then that EdPsych report was fantastic and that helped him the next few years get his needs.*

When asked about his sons; experiences of external support, John recanted that they were able to access support from CAMHS for his son on a weekly basis to support him with his emotional needs at the time and how there was communication

between the school and CAMHS so that interventions at school were not inhibiting the work carried out by the mental health professionals.

> *John: We were under CAMHS and so he was having usually weekly, but at one point it was more frequent than that, uhm, weekly sessions down at their clinic so it wouldn't really have been appropriate to put anything else in at that time.*

In another part of the interview, John also describes his negative experiences with regards to the school acquiring the services of an EP and how this has not been possible even after his transition to secondary education despite his son's significant presenting needs.

> *John: in year 6, we were promised from the moment he joined a full EP assessment. It never happened. They kept on promising that passed that up till the end of the summer term and it just didn't happen, and nobody has mentioned an EP at the secondary school.*

9.5 School as a System

This superordinate theme relates to the experiences of support that revolve around not the young people or family explicitly, but more about the school as an organisation and how systemic elements such as whole school awareness of trauma or other factors such as school's diversity and consistency of support can make a difference in the experiences of adoptive same sex families. This superordinate theme consists of two subordinate themes: 'Understanding of Trauma: Actions not Words' and 'Diversity and Support Consistency'.

9.5.1 Understanding of Trauma: Actions not Words.

This subordinate theme was one of the strongest themes emerging from the data in both subgroups as not only it was present in all participants, but it also contained the most repeated references within each individual participants' experiences. It reflects the need expressed by the young people and parents that schools as organisations become more aware and understanding of the impact and effects of trauma in adopted children and how these needs might present in their daily school life.

> *Ace: everyone thought that I had a problem that needed to be fixed, whereas I was like I'm not car. I don't need to be fixed, there's nothing wrong with me.*

Ace shares a very powerful feeling in this extract where he expresses how he was viewed as a problem to be fixed by others in his school including staff and some students because of his additional needs. It also showcases his personal resilience and self-belief that he enjoys being different and difference does not require fixing because for him, that was his "normal".

> *John: a cultural change in which trauma is specifically recognised as, developmental trauma is specifically recognized as a disability or whatever you want to call it. That the school has a duty, a legal and a legal obligation to recognize and to respect, not to not to scapegoat and demonise and say that the child is behaving badly.*

John explains in the most clear sense how he feels that a wider systemic and societal change is required so that development trauma needs are recognised officially as some form of need that requires additional support, which is hoped to stop pathologizing adopted children's behaviour. John continues by saying that

trauma and challenging behaviour is "not something that you can punish out of children" and that by placing the blame on the child for their behaviour, it leads to situations where "children with trauma are elbowed out of mainstream education".

> *Helen: I sort of see they don't actually recognize adoption as something to alert a child to them for having certain difficulties and attributes socially, educationally and so they just let's see them is difficult children which did happen to both my children in primary school, I think.*

In a similar manner to John, Helen describes how adopted children sort of fall under the radar by school and professionals as being adopted is not automatically considered as a flag for the presence of difficulties educationally or socially, which has been the experience with both her children where she and her wife needed to advocate strongly for additional support.

> *Matthew: of course, there's a fourth group where you know "your child is just being naughty, they need to sit down and get on and do it, you know and if they don't, they get detention", which of course is the worst thing that you can do to a child that's got low self-esteem and you know is struggling.*

Interestingly, Matthew describes a specific group of teachers that he tends to meet in his family's educational journey that again fail to understand the needs of adopted children and instead treat them as "naughty". In the eyes of those teachers, adopted children are expected to behave like their non-adopted peers or be penalised with detention, which as John expressed before often leads to their exclusion from school.

> *Hayley: there was something that happened and we were coming to it from an adoptive perspective you know that's not as that out of character for Elliot*

and this particular teacher is a bit older, was like well in my experience of teaching children and we were like but what is your experience of adopted children? Because there is a difference between their behaviours and why that you know what I might have been a trigger for Elliot that might not have been a trigger for a child in the birth home.

Hayley provides another elaborate example of an instance where a teacher failed to grasp the difference between adopted children and their non-adopted peers and attributed similar behavioural expectations and motivations to them without understanding how trauma can present in behaviour.

Interestingly, the young people group not only referenced the need for deeper understanding, but also a need for this to be reflected in the school staff's actions. Below, both Ella and Ace provide examples of school experiences where a teacher's inaction to intervene showcased how the school's ethos and understanding of trauma needs were not embedded in the teachers' responses to young people.

> **Ella:** *Probably just a good understanding of like what I've been through because teachers were like, "oh yeah, we understand, we understand", but in reality, I don't think they did because they didn't like make it look like that they understand UM, but yeah.*

> **Ella:** *Primary school they didn't help properly, they were like, oh yeah, yeah, we know you're adopted and stuff, we don't, we don't really care to be honest.*

> **Ace:** *And it wasn't that she was telling the students off for making these comments. It was more feeling that she was encouraging them to make them cause she wasn't saying anything to them to stop them from making*

comments, and even though I addressed her about it, I just said this

happened over and can you do something about it. Nothing happened.

What both Ella and Ace experienced in those instances were feeling of being different and feeling insecure in school due to the teachers not actively promoting understanding of trauma and difference in the classroom and in the rest of the students. Ace explains how in his first primary school, his teachers did not understand that he had these difficulties because of his needs and he "would just be kept on being picked on just to answer questions that I personally couldn't do".

9.5.2 Diversity and Support Consistency.

This subordinate theme reflects other systemic factors in the school environment that the participants mentioned during their interviews and how these influenced their experiences of school and support. One of those factors included participants in both groups talking about the need for diversity and raising awareness of different families in school and how more diverse environments fostered feelings of inclusion and lessened feelings of difference in young people.

Ace: the family structure it was just so much easier to talk about the adoption and having two moms and everything and especially because also when you're at college, and obviously probably you find that university and everything, it's a variety of people unlike in high school you got like a small variety, but higher you can have a huge diversity of people and it's brilliant, I love it.

Ace describes how in further education he felt much more at ease to talk about both his adoptive and same sex family identity due to having a diverse

environment of people from very different backgrounds. Ace also mentions that in college, he found more adopted or looked after young people with whom he shared similar circumstances and experiences which made college a much more positive environment for him than high school was. This also inspired him to join the student union to become an advocate for other adopted and looked-after young people because "that is something that I feel that people in my, with my sort of problems, don't have that voice to speak to someone about it properly".

> ***Andrea:*** *I would hope is that there even in just their classrooms there is some at least acknowledgement that families come in all shapes and sizes.*

Andrea also highlights the need for diversity in schools and that school staff and classrooms should actively try to promote diversity by raising awareness of all types of families in children and young people. Andrea hopes that there will be a time where children will know that some families have two mums or two dads and that "really what you want is for kids to not even question that".

Another factor that participants discussed in their interviews that was contributing to their support experiences was the consistency of that support over the years or within a particular setting and the effect that changes in adults supporting the young people may have on them. In the beginning of the interview, Lisa also makes a point to emphasise how their general experiences of the support received during her children's academic journey has been "patsy at best", which reflects the essence of what the participants shared in this theme.

> ***Ella:*** *Primary school they didn't help properly, they were like, oh yeah, yeah, we know you're adopted and stuff, we don't, we don't really care to be honest.*

And then in secondary school, because I don't know if Dad told you, but I go to a secondary school who have loads of adopted and fostered kids.

Ace: *Yes, definitely. I was supported more in high school.*

The young people group particularly focussed on the differences in the quality of support received in primary school and secondary school. Ella reflects on how she felt unsupported in primary school as the school staff did not put in place the support needed for her as an adopted child, which also reflects again the inaction of teachers discussed in the previous subordinate theme. However, both Ella and Ace felt more supported in secondary school. Ella attributes that to the fact that her high school was more experienced with supporting adopted and looked after children and had more numbers of this group, while Ace attributes that to an experienced SENCo who "was always there for me".

John: *we had some family work and that went on over a period of a couple of years. Then since we moved up here, we've had a lot of meetings and discussions and absolutely no support.*

John describes how while his family lived in London, they felt that there was more support available to them from services including some family work that was organised by their school, although they did not have similar experiences when moving in Norfolk, because of continuous meetings which John felt led to no substantial support being put in place.

Lisa: *then as I say the SENCo that was at the time at XXX school left and that was a massive blow after that, I'd say there's school we wouldn't have moved them to XXX school had it been like it was after she left, cause it was mediocre at best.*

> *Helen: I never do understand it because they didn't seem to have TAs and things like that, even though she had a EHCP that said she needed support. She never got any support in the class or no one with her, and it was very strange.*

Lisa also provides an example of the impact that interruption of the support can have on the educational experience of the young person such as the loss of a key member of staff that coordinated the support for the adopted young person and acted as their trusted adult. Lisa goes to the lengths of saying how the departure of the SENCo would have impacted on their decision to move their child to this particular school. On another note, Helen provides a different example of how support can be inconsistent for her daughter as she did not receive the specified support that was included in her EHCP in that particular setting despite it being a legal obligation for any school to provide that support.

10.0 Discussion

10.1 Summary of findings

This study aimed to explore the educational experiences of young people and parents in adoptive same sex families within the English context in order to contribute to a limited but developing body of research on this area by offering a unique perspective on the phenomenon using a multi-perspective IPA approach. Five superordinate themes were found across the two subgroups of participants, which were categorised under two overarching superordinate themes reflecting the participants two focuses: the educational experiences of the families as well as their experiences of support they have received and suggestions on how to improve them.

In general, it appears that both groups of participants related to unique experiences and challenges related to their two identities, adoptive and same sex family, which seemed to influence their interactions with members of the school community in both positive and negative ways. Certain subordinate themes reflect discrepancies between the two groups, for example their identity sharing practices or response from others about those. Other themes reflect a unity in the experience of an aspect of school and support from the two groups, for example the perceptions of heteronormativity that seemed to colour the experiences of both groups in different aspects of their school life. More convergent narratives seemed to be present between the two groups with regards to their experiences of support and what each group valued as important and useful when it came to recommendations for school to put in place. These seemed to revolve around an emphasis on wellbeing and mental health as well as collaboration between the different systems in the young person's lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in order to reach a comprehensive and co-constructed level of understanding by all systems around the nature of trauma and the long term impact that it has on adopted young people. Comparing these findings with the wider existing literature on the subject, it can be inferred that in general, the study has revealed similar findings to other studies that took place in countries including France, Belgium and the United States.

10.2 What are the educational lived experiences of adoptive same sex families?

The first research question was addressed primarily by the three superordinate themes of 'A Same Sex Family Identity', 'An Adoptive Identity' and 'Protective Factors'. Participants described how they often experienced

heteronormative assumptions about their family structure or the gender roles of the parents during their interaction with others in the school community. These experiences were similar to those shared in Messina & Brodzinsky's study (2020), where young people shared that their experience included being "target of questions, curiosity, and negative comments in relation to their parents' sexual minority status". This study has implications on the wider context of society, in this part of England at least, about the view of family through a consistent lens of heteronormativity, which seems to "colour" same sex families in mystery and intrigue. Despite England being recognised as one of the countries with favourable legislation towards LGBTQ+ rights (Takács et al., 2016) including enabling same sex adoption since 2012, these findings seem to suggest that same sex families might still be viewed in society as an outlier rather than a new norm. Another key finding in terms of the participants' educational experiences revolves around the sharing practices that the two groups of participants engaged in their interactions within school with regards to disclosing their same sex identity to others. This ranged from total openness which was adopted primarily by the parents to using a more selective and guarded approach to sharing which was adopted primarily by the young people. Similar themes were found in three other studies that elicited the voices of young people in the United States (Cody et al., 2017; Farr et al., 2016; Gianino et al., 2009), that also mentioned a variance in the family status sharing practices. For example, Farr et al. (2016) talks about the reluctance that young people felt often about disclosing their family status to their peers in school as well as feelings of difference from them because they do not have a heterosexual family structure, which is similar to the feelings that Ella shared about her difficulty to reveal that she had two dads because everyone else seems to have a "mum and a dad". The difficulty of sharing their same sex family

identity experienced by the participants in this study seems to provide further evidence about the persistent presence of homophobia in school in England as evidenced in wider European studies (Hafford-Letchfield et al., 2016) and expressed by gay and lesbian parents in England (Cocker et al., 2019). Experiences of acceptance or judgement from peers and other parents expressed by the participants in this study seem to correlate again with the existing literature where the young people experienced several microaggressions from their peers due to their same sex family status (Farr et al., 2016) or felt that it affected their peer friendships after making the disclosure (Gianino et al., 2009). This similar experience is shown in Ace's reflection about his friend's reaction to him sharing that he had two mums and how the next day he felt a "completely different attitude from him", which led to a breaking of the relationship between them. What these findings provide are a new insight into the experiences of adoptive same sex families from a part of England, which can complement and be compared with international research. It also addresses one of the criticisms of Goldberg's (2012) study with regards to participants' primarily residing in metropolitan cities and how their experiences could be contrasted to a sample living in more rural contexts such the one in this study.

With regards to being an adoptive family, the participants shared their views regarding the impact that early adverse childhood experiences and trauma can have in the future development of adopted children and young people even after being adopted for many years. Several examples are referenced around the impact of developmental trauma on emotional and social skills development, academic attainment and mental health for example difficulty forming relationships, a more immature emotional presentation, situations acting as triggers for anxiety around losing the adoptive family. These seem to be consistent with Fisher's (2015) review

of the adoption literature, which concluded that adopted children's development is affected long-term both psychologically and neurobiologically, which can often present in learning and behaviour difficulties in school. Best, Cameron, & Hill's (2021) recent study also references the contrast between the societal perception of adopted children's needs vanishing after being adopted which directly contrasts with the experiences that were expressed by the adoptive parents in their study similarly to what was expressed by the parents in the current study. Both Matthew and Lisa not only voice that misconception about problems going away for children after adoption but give examples of how their own children are affected to this day emotionally by triggers even after almost a decade of being adopted. This bears significant implications for professionals and school staff working with adopted children. Constant reminders through awareness days or CPD days need to be implemented to raise awareness of how school staff's actions or external events can impact on adopted children emotional and mental health during their education even after being adopted for years. The study seems to provide further evidence for the need of schools to become "trauma aware or informed" (Gregorowski & Seedat, 2013; Maynard et al., 2019) in their practice by incorporating a nurturing ethos to address the persistent emotional needs of children and young people who have experienced trauma or adverse early experiences in their lives. Linking to this was another superordinate theme expressed by participants with regards to the unique profile of each adopted child and how an individual and child-tailored approach to parenting or schooling needs to be applied. As emphasised by those adoptive parents with more than one child like Lisa, Andrea and Matthew, they reflected on the individual strengths and challenges that each of their children faces and how one aspect of strength for one of them may be an area of need for another or about how

each of them uses a different coping mechanism in school. This bears implications

for the type of support strategies used for adopted children in schools and the

degree of flexibility applied to them as opposed to a "one size fits all" approach.

Using Bronfenbrenner's model by schools and professionals working with children

and young people can support and facilitate this approach as one of its strengths as

a model is to highlight individual differences in child development and learning.

Applying the model to each individual child and identifying the influences form the

child's different systems affecting his learning and general development can help

further understanding and put in place a tailored and child-centred support plan.

References to those needs that adopted children have which are not present in non-

adopted peers are also included in the parents' experiences. This links in with similar

findings in other studies, which have compared adopted and non-adopted peers

revealing distinct difficulties present only in the adopted group (Brown et al., 2017;

Christoffersen, 2012; Van IJzendoorn et al., 2005). Discrepancies in academic

attainment and performance have also been noted in governmental report comparing

adopted, care experienced children and non-care experienced students in different

key stages of education (Department for Education, 2017, 2019b, 2020).

A plethora of protective factors and individual strengths were also expressed

by the participants in the study including in-person factors such as resilience,

positive peer relationships and family closeness as well as external factors such as

extended family and religious community. This is an important finding of this study to

emphasise as it challenges societal narratives and previous literature findings that

focus on the negative experiences of adopted children and all the difficulties,

additional needs and challenges they face without taking into consideration the

presence of positives. For example, increased resilience such as the one expressed

by Ace in the study when faced with bullying and teasing experiences is similar to findings in Farr et al.'s (2016) study, where the young people developed coping mechanisms and felt more resilient in dealing with microaggressions in school. Family closeness and positive feelings about the adoptive same sex family were also present in Messina & Brodzinsky's (2020) European study, showcasing that despite facing challenges, adopted children in same sex families experience a high amount of positive feelings for their family and a sense of belonging especially in later adolescence. The supportive mechanism of the extended family needs to be emphasised as it can often play an important role in the experiences of parents through their journey to adoption either positively or negatively (Brown et al., 2009). For professionals including EPs and Social Workers, this finding bears significance in terms of guiding discussions with adoptive parents around their wider support network and establishing how this mechanism can be used as a protective factor for the adoptive same sex family. This theme showcases that strengths-based approach such as identifying individual factors using a Resiliency Framework (Hart et al., 2007) could prove useful for schools in order to draw out positive aspects of young people's skills instead of a constant focus on adopted children's difficulties. Although resilience is described as an individual factor in this discussion, it is acknowledged that modern literature has focussed on processes that are both individual and environmental when it comes to defining resilience as well as their interaction between them (Van Breda, 2018). As such, it would be useful to consider resilience not purely as an intrapersonal process, but as a process that will need to also be nurtured by interactions with the social environment of the child or young person including the parents, peers and school staff.

10.3 What are adoptive same sex families' experiences of educational support?

The second research question was addressed primarily by the two superordinate themes of 'Support for Young Person and Family' and 'School as a System'. A unanimous belief was expressed across all participants that the mental health and emotional wellbeing of adopted children as well as that of their parents must be placed in the forefront of any strategies or efforts to offer support to this population. Practical applications such as the trusted adult approach or a calming down space described by the young people in the study resonate with evidence-based practice in adoption literature (Bomber, 2011; Gore-Langton & Boy, 2017) offering further evidence and validity to these approaches for EP and school practices. In addition, further emphasis needs to be placed on supporting adoptive parents more through scheduling additional meetings with schools or offering services through the adoption support fund to ensure that parents continue to feel supported by services avoiding challenges such as those expressed in Sturgess & Selwyn's (2007) study about the support being "too little, too late". What this study's findings provide is a unique insight into how significant mental wellbeing is not only for adopted children in general but also specifically for children in adoptive same sex families. With the added challenges that this particular subgroup of adopted young people have to face in their daily school experience which were identified in the previous literature and also expressed in this study, it makes it clear that priority for emotional and mental health needs to be adopted. Schools may need to place "on hold" the need for academic attainment for adopted young people in same sex families despite the pressures from Ofsted in order to ensure that their primary needs for safety and belonging (Maslow, 1943) are met before engaging in their

learning. Furthermore, collaboration between external professionals such as EPs and CAMHS and school and parents were also an important finding as it showcases the need for a more systemic approach in supporting "potentially at risk" groups of children such as adopted children in same sex families. Considering the mesosystem (interactions between the child's microsystem) from the Ecological Systems theory can be a useful theoretical basis to identify which systems will need to collaborate to maximise the positive impact on supporting adopted children. This need expressed by the participants in the study reflects a more generalised need for more of this type of research, because it can help to evaluate current practices through acquiring the views of important shareholders, also linking in with the scientist-practitioner model of EP practice (British Psychological Society, 2017). Examples of collaborative work and support for parents such as the one described in Dawson's (2021) study exemplify creative ways that EP can work together with parents to support the family in a holistic way on top of any direct work with the child and the school. What this study also provides is what can be considered as examples of "success stories" when collaboration between parents and school has occurred through a relationship of communication and mutual respect such in the case of Lisa's decision to prepare her son at home for his GCSEs, which led to him achieving the necessary grades.

A general need for a deeper and more consistent understanding of trauma and the effects on adopted children was expressed by all participants, which clearly reflects the necessity for a more systemic change required within schools. It is important that this change translates to actions as expressed by the young people so that members of staff actively display those values of empathy and understanding. Similar findings were found in recent piece of EP action research that has gathered

the views of both parents and school professionals in the UK (Gore-Langton & Boy, 2017). As part of their support for adopted children, EPs can facilitate that kind of systemic change by working closely with schools and engaging in discussions with the senior leadership teams or offering whole staff training (Gore Langton, 2017; MacKay & Greig, 2011; Midgens, 2011; Osborne et al., 2009). Relational-based approaches such as Emotion Coaching (Gilbert, 2017) have been shown to enact organisational change in schools as it changes the way that staff members engage in their interactions with young people that have experienced trauma in their lives (Gore-Langton & Boy, 2017). While other relevant research has emphasised on trauma informed schools or importance of an understanding of trauma and attachment theory to support adopted young people, this study further reinforces existing literature from the perspective of adoptive same sex families but it also brings another important aspect to this. This need is expressed by both young people and parents instead of just parents or professionals working with adopted young people. It also goes one step further in emphasising that a "superficial" understanding of trauma or a "label" as a 'trauma informed school' might not be necessarily enough unless this is embodied in the school ethos and staff's actions from the senior leadership team to the class teachers and teaching staff. Moreover, the findings around the importance of school diversity for young people offer a new insight in the literature for this population as this does not seem to have been referenced before in similar studies. Regardless, it remains an important finding as it can help guide decision making for adoptive parents with regard to choosing school placements for their children. It also provides further support to the importance of campaigns such as 'LGBT History Month' and LGBT Adoption and Fostering Week' and their positive impact in raising awareness and understanding about the diversity

of modern family forms for children and young people in schools. The experiences around the consistency influencing the families' support experience in school seems to resonate partially with the findings from both Sturgess & Selwyn (2007) and Best et al. (2021) studies where themes of inconstancy or inadequacy of the support offered were also raised. This also bears implications to the need for continuous evaluation of services offered by external agencies such as the Virtual School, EPSs or CAMHS to ensure that feedback from parents is taken into consideration and appropriate changes are implemented. Participants expressed their concerns about how disruptive a change in support staff can be for adopted young people and what a profound impact it can have, which brings in the forefront again the need for careful monitoring and preparation for key transitions in adopted children's lives such as primary to secondary or secondary to further education.

11.0 Strengths and limitations of the current study

This study presents with certain strengths in its contribution to the already existing literature, but it is also not without its limitations. As stated before, this study is the first of its kind in the UK to focus on this particular subgroup of adopted children (in same sex families) and elicit their unique experiences going through the education system, discussing the protective factors and challenges that they have faced during that time. In addition, the older age of the young people has allowed for them to draw on experiences over a longer period of time including primary, secondary and even further education, which allowed for rich data that was not just limited to a specific stage of education system. The multiperspective nature of this study including both young people and parental voices allows for triangulation of experiences and a more rounded understanding from more than one perspective.

Finally, this is the first study to explore and evaluate the experiences of support received through eliciting both parents and young people's perspectives. This contributes to a better understanding of the support required for adopted children in general complimenting recent research on this subject (Best et al., 2021), while addressing for the first time additional support required specifically for adopted children in same sex families taking into consideration the unique needs that have been recognised in the literature before for this subgroup.

One of the limitations of this study as with other studies using IPA methodology is the small sample size of participants that participated in the study which limits significantly the transferability of the findings to the wider population. This is even further impacted by the uneven number between the young people (two) and parent (six) group which created an uneven representation of between the two groups, in addition to the fact that both young people participants also presented with often contrasting experiences and views. As such, a larger sample for the young people group would have allowed for more diversity in opinions and experiences to be shared in the study. In addition, all the participants resided within the East Anglia Region, with the majority living within Norfolk, thus further limiting the transferability to the rest of the UK as families in other parts of the country may have had different experiences and as such future research could draw on a nationwide sample. However, it is important to bear in mind that some theoretical transferability may be possible when using IPA when positioning the findings of the study within established literature (Smith et al., 2009). This might make it possible for readers to enrich their own understanding of the experiences of this population through meaning making and allow the application of these findings in their own context based on their own judgement. Another limitation to be considered would be the self-

selection and opportunistic sampling method and how this could have influenced the participants that chose to be part of the study. For example, a degree of bias may have led to participating families that may have had particularly negative experiences at school, which again might not be reflective of the wider population. However, IPA methodology is more interested in deepening understanding in the individual level rather than the generalisation of findings.

Another major limitation was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the remote nature of the interviews with the participants. This may have constructed a barrier towards building a deeper rapport with participants in an in-person context, which could have influenced the level of the experiences shared during the interview. In addition, the remote nature of the interviews may have created a barrier for the participation of some young people which may have found the experience more daunting and stress provoking than having the chance to meet someone in person. This was certainly the case with one participant family, where the young person chose not to participate due to not being able to handle the stress of the remote interview process. Finally, despite all efforts made from the participant to reduce the impact of their own preconceptions and views on the subject during the analysis the findings, the double hermeneutic process of the IPA (Alase, 2017) within the study may still have been affected on a degree as complete "bracketing" of these views is impossible.

12.0 Implications for future research and EP practice

While this small-scale study introduces new findings in the literature for this particular population of same sex adoptive families using both the young people and

parental perspectives, it would be useful for future research to improve triangulation of the findings by including the views of teachers and school considering the emphasis on educational experiences. This could allow for a deeper understanding of the experience of education as a same sex adoptive family by co-constructing the experience from two important and distinctive perspectives in the young person's life (school and home) including their own (Larkin et al., 2019), which was not possible for this study due to time limitation and other restrictions. In addition, it would further increase the transferability of the findings for future studies to include a larger and national sample of adopted young people and same sex parents to allow for families from multiple parts of the country to be represented similarly to (Guasp, 2011).

Reflecting on the future implications for my practice as TEP and hopefully newly qualified EP and the EP profession, this study is hoped to put in the forefront the need for EPs to be proactive with regard to monitoring the needs of adopted children as well as those in sexual minority families when having discussions with schools. Offering staff training and opportunities for systemic discussions with school's senior leadership teams could be used to ensure that all staff understand the impact of trauma as expressed unilaterally by the participants in the study and how it can affect young people long-term even years after adoption. To this end, the findings of the study will be used by the researcher to create a tailored training presentation around the unique profile of adopted children with an emphasis on the needs of those in same sex families, which will be offered to local schools.

13.0 Conclusion

This study was one of the first in its kind to explore the educational experiences of adoptive same sex families in school as well as their experiences of support that they have received in an English context by eliciting the voices of both the young people and their parents directly. In general, similar findings to American and European studies were found in the experiences of adoptive same sex families in education identifying challenges with their double identity as well as protective factors that are both internal and external, thus giving further support to the universality of experiences for these families in the Western world. What this study contributes to is offering a unique insight into a subgroup of adopted children that has not been considered in the English literature as extensively. It also reaffirms the focus that school as a system and professionals including EPs, Social Workers and CAMHS need to place on supporting the needs of these families by adopting a deeper understanding of their lived experiences and the often-invisible impact of trauma.

What is hoped to be achieved through this study is an effort to bring those voices to the forefront of researchers and educational professionals as well as their individual profile which should not be forgotten or grouped together with other care experienced groups of children. Despite difficulties in recruitment for this group of adopted children and ethical considerations attached to doing research with children and young people, it is hoped that this study has proven how important it is for more similar research in this area to be explored and for researchers to persevere in order to get the young people's voices heard. Finally, it is important to remember that heteronormativity appears to still be a dominating perception in English society which leads to experiences of homophobia and judgement despite legislative and

organisational efforts to tackle it. Due to this, discussions about the experiences of

gay and lesbian adoptive families including general LGBTQ+ families and promotion

of anti-homophobic and anti-bullying practices should always be a constant part of

the dialogue in English society. This is especially true for educational organisations

such as schools as they can have a profound impact in shaping the minds and

attitudes of young children thus influencing future societal behaviour.

Part 3: Reflective Chapter

1.0 In search of a research subject

Finding the topic that was eventually going to turn into my thesis study was not a natural and automated process for me as some people already have their main areas of interest before they begin their doctoral studies. For me, this wasn't the case and I only discovered my interest in doing research on adoptive same sex families in the beginning of my second year of studies following the advice of my then FWS to choose a topic that I am passionate about and means something to me. There were obviously other factors to consider such as a need for this in the literature and finding the "gap" as many of my tutors advised during that process.

At that point in time, I was reading a book called "Gay Dads: Transitions into Adoptive Fatherhood" (Goldberg, 2012), which I came across by chance online and decided to purchase due to my own personal interest in finding more about what are the experiences of gay couples that have decided to become fathers through adoption. At that point, this was purely driven by my personal curiosity due to being in a same sex relationship myself and considering adoption in the future. However, while reading this book, I started noticing limited mentions to the educational experiences of adopted children and almost no mention to any support offered to them from external agencies such as EPs or as called in the United States, School Psychologists. It was also evident this research was done from the perspective of the parents, but the voice of the young people themselves was missing. Furthermore, one of the criticisms of the research in the book was that the majority of participants were located in big metropolitan cities which creates automatically a more accepting and more diverse cultural and sexuality background. This got me thinking how it would be interesting to explore the experiences of this population in a primarily rural

County such as Norfolk and if those would be different or similar, which prompted me to delve into the UK-based literature on adoptive same sex families. Much to my surprise, I discovered that internationally the literature on this topic is limited and that it is even more limited in the UK context. I had finally found the subject that I felt passionate about and was also a "gap" in the literature: Adoptive same sex families.

The next challenge would be to find the direction of my study and start formulating initial research questions, which would encapsulate what I would be focussing on from a very board topic, always trying to link this to the EP profession and context. As such, I decided to delve again into the literature on the subject and look at other similar studies and their recommendations for future research. Most of the UK-based research was done through the parental perspective, with some of this conducted by social workers (Cocker et al., 2019), however no research I found had explored at how EPs can support this particular population or what were their experiences of support. A combination of these findings along with being influenced by an article of a European study (Messina & Brodzinsky, 2020) that elicited the voices of both young people and parents in adoptive same sex families over a course of time led me to my research questions: eliciting the educational experiences of adopted young people and their same sex parents as well as looking at their experiences of support that they have received or found desirable included by professionals such as EPs.

2.0 My connection to the subject

The next thing to consider after findings my research subject was my strong and personal connection with both the subject and any findings that may emerge.

Doing an exploratory, inductive study such as this one and using an IPA methodology, it is crucial to approach the research and the data you collect with as less preconceptions as possible (Smith et al., 2009) especially when you are involved in the analysis phase of your findings. My close connection to the topic being in a same sex relationship and sharing a lot of aspects with the population I was interviewing made it difficult to approach this with a "clean slate". I had to ensure that I was being constantly reflective and reflexive throughout the journey of my study by keeping a frequent reflective journal and exploring personal feelings and preconceptions that could have affected the way I formulated my research question and conducted my analysis. At certain times after specific interviews, I remember that the impact from some of the things that were shared was significant on me emotionally and I had to seek supervision to explore that further and reflect on this. At times, I decided to also take breaks from engaging with my research for example during the interviews, transcription and most importantly the analysis stages so that I was able to return to it with a "fresh look". One of the things that encouraged me while reading about the process of IPA is that for most researchers, it is almost impossible to completely keep in check these preconceptions as you are engaged in the double hermeneutic process and consequently you are conceptualising meaning to someone else's meaning of their own experiences. Thus, the researcher is really involved in that analytic process, making it difficult to completely detach from the data, which positively reinforced my original choice for using IPA for my study.

3.0 Ethical considerations

There were important ethical considerations that needed to be addressed and outlined in my ethics application before gaining approval from the Committee to

move forward with my study. A very important consideration as with all research involving children and young people is to ensure that there is informed consent by not only the parents of the study, but also the young people themselves in taking part. Ethically this created a dilemma as both of my young people were old enough to be able to communicate directly their intention of participating or not and making an informed decision, however parental consent still needed to be obtained for both themselves and their children and as such communication was primarily conducted via the parents. For one of the participants and because of his age (19 years old), I was able to seek contact information and communicate the young person directly after speaking to the parent to seek their written consent. In addition, before interviews with the young people began, I always reconfirmed their willingness and explicit consent to participate despite having received the consent forms as an added measure to avoid instances of potential coercion or pressure by parents to participate.

Another consideration was around ensuring that confidentiality for each participant is maintained due to interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams and each participant interviewed separately when two members of the family participated. At the same time, ensuring the young people in the study remain safe at all times was also crucial as the content of the interviews could be particularly emotive and the interviewer would not be present in the same space. As such, the following measure was taken in the beginning of the young person interview, where it would be expected that the parent would also be present to ensure that there is an adult present in the household and after this is confirmed, the parent would exit the room and close the door so that the discussions between the researcher and the young person are not overheard. Proximity of the adult though was crucial in case the

parent needed to intervene after an emotive discussion or at the end of the interview if the young person required emotional support. During the interview, one of the young people became upset after sharing a personal story that happened a couple of years ago. He was able to continue the session but towards the end, I wanted to make sure that he was feeling well and had the support he needed around him. The young person acknowledged his feelings and shared his coping strategy to deal with the impact of this discussion. As an additional follow-up measure, I also informed his parent, who I was interviewing afterwards, that they should also check on the young person to ensure that they were feeling okay afterwards. Finally, following the procedure stated on my ethics and participant information form, I signposted to Norfolk Post Adoption Support Service and Just One Norfolk, Children and Young People's Health Services for additional support if required.

4.0 The struggle of participant recruitment

In discussion with previous TEPs and now qualified EPs about their thesis journey, it was evident that while the whole process feels like a "mountain" as expressed in one presentation and can be stressful, one or two parts of the thesis might be significantly more stressful than others and this is down to individual experience. For me, that stressful part was participant recruitment that not only created elevated levels of stress and brought me close to a breaking point, but it also affected the rest of my thesis journey during my third year.

In my original plan, I had decided that I would try to recruit through the Post Adoption Support Team in Norfolk as they primarily work with adoptive families and they had expressed in previous discussions that they also support a number of local

same sex families as well, which made me hopeful about my recruitment effort. However, I overestimated the willingness of adoptive families to participate in my study as well as the easiness of getting sufficient numbers for my study, which I was warned about by my supervisor in our initial research supervision meetings. After spending the Summer of 2021 and beginning of September trying to recruit, I had only secured one family that was willing to participate and only the parent was willing to participate due to the young person finding the remote interview daunting and stressful. This created significant stress as it impacted my research in two ways. Firstly, my original plan was to recruit dyads of parent and young person from families so that I have two perspectives within one family unit. However, as I discovered later on, I had parents that expressed interest in participating without their children due to a variety of reasons including young age, presence of significant SEN, stress around the remote nature of the interview. Secondly, I had specified in my ethics form that I would recruit only through the Post Adoption Support Team, but due to limited interest and after discussion with my research supervisor, I decided that I needed to expand my recruitment efforts to include additional organisations in the East of England including the Norfolk Virtual School, AdoptEast, which includes further local organisation and the Norfolk EPS service. However, that required further amending and reapproval of my ethics application, which also delayed the process further. Despite these expanded recruitment efforts, only two dyads were recruited, which led to the decision to also recruit standalone parents that wanted to participate in order to get sufficient data for my study. Ending up with an imbalanced number of young people and parents in my study.

Whilst I was successful in securing enough participants for my study to proceed and for an IPA methodology, I struggled to accept the changes that this

meant for my project. I was very passionate form the beginning in eliciting the voice of adopted young people in same sex families, however I was able to only recruit two people and was afraid that their voices would be lost in the overwhelming amount of data, thus needing to change my project. In supervision and upon further reflection and research into multiperspective IPA, I realised that by changing the analysis process slightly, I could still maintain hopefully the strengths of the two voices in the findings, which I describe in the section below. However, it also showed me how difficult it is to recruit from a specific population such as adopted young people in same sex families due to both inherent factors such as additional difficulties, low self-confidence and hesitation due to family structure to share stories, but also external factors such as the impact of COVID, remote nature of research interviews and the complexities of ethics around research involving young people in "vulnerable" populations (Gore-Langton & Boy, 2017; Lewin & Lewin, 2004). This may partly explain the reason why limited amount of studies internationally have managed to include the young person's or child's voice in studies of adoptive same sex families.

Final reflection on this concerns the most stressful point reached in this journey when I was considering changing my project completely due to limited recruitment and having this discussion with my supervisor. The concept of completely changing the focus of the study or even topic during the Autumn term of my third year, when most of my TEP colleagues were already analysing their interview data drove me to a desperation point. It seemed impossible to start over again on top of keeping up with my increased responsibilities to my placement provider as a third year TEP. It also created a sense of disappointment as I felt really passionate about my subject and the purpose of my study, which I considered really important and privileged to do. Thankfully, this "worst case scenario" was averted by

several brave participants that decided to share their stories with me, which taught me to never lose hope and to persevere even when your research might seem like impossible. It also taught me another valuable lesson, which I hope to impart to fellow and future TEPs, which was that each TEP's thesis journey is so unique and the time frames so tailored to each study. There is no need to compare and despair like I did. We all get there in the end and I am proof of that.

5.0 Process of analysis

Doing the IPA analysis was a completely new process for me which I personally found daunting at first as my confidence around my research skills have always been in question within myself. I found that it was a constant process of trial and error as any "good researcher" knows often happens whilst conducting research. One thing that I found was helpful for me was sticking to reading and re-reading the IPA book by Smith, Flower and Larkin (Smith et al., 2009) and really familiarising myself with the analytic process using the steps outlined in the book. It was interesting to see that I was clear that I wanted to engage with the Interpretative Process and ensure that I was not doing something that resembled more of a Thematic Analysis rather than IPA. As stated by Tuffour (2017) in his critical review article about IPA, the most significant criticisms in the literature include "conceptual and practical limitations" including the diminished importance placed in the role of language in the analytic process. However, Smith et al. (2009) rebutted this criticism with the argument that language is intertwined with the process of meaning making in IPA. Indeed, this link between language and the analytic process was constantly present in my mind when I started engaging in making the initial comments on the

transcripts paying attention to linguistic features and the importance of words chosen by the participants to convey their meaning to me.

Another interesting element was the potential impact of the introduction of analytic software like Quirkos in my process, which was suggested to me as a tool to facilitate the process. Whilst excited to use it, it became clear very soon that the process wasn't working for me and I had skipped one of the very first steps of IPA, the initial noting of 3 types of comments: descriptive, linguistic and conceptual. Whilst I thought was doing exactly that and had started to progress in my thesis, I was indeed picking out emergent themes before really engaging with the data and applying the principles of hermeneutics in the process. This created a feeling of constant questioning in my head around the process and decided to seek further advice, however I felt that no-one was actually able to advice on how specifically to do a multi-perspective IPA-based analysis. In fact, this is often one of the common criticisms found in the literature about IPA regarding the "ambiguity" surrounding the processes as well as the lack of standardisation (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Thus, I decided to stop the process and go back to the basics of re-reading the materials by Larkin and re-evaluate the steps I had taken so far. The interesting conclusion that I reached was that the introduction of the "helpful" research software was the catalyst in being led astray. In fact, I came to the realisation that I was trying to get my analysis to fit around the use of the software instead of getting the software to work around my analysis and see how it would contribute to make it more accessible for me. Once I realised that, I decided to start from the beginning and do everything in paper and pen format, stripping back to the basics and following the instructions of the authors and the model to the letter. What I experienced doing this was a new-found depth in my understanding of the data and what my participants were telling

me when reading their stories, which made me realise that I was finally "immersed" in my research data. From that point, I found it less challenging to pick out repeating patterns in the data and tease out potential emergent themes, which were helped by the initial comments during my first two reads of each transcript.

The next challenge during the analytic process was the organisation of emergent themes in subordinate and superordinate ones and looking for similarities across participants. The intricacy between a multi-perspective IPA design compared to a regular IPA design lies in adding another layer of analysis, which extends to looking at connections not just between participants, but also among different groups, in my case young people and parents. What was very clear to me from the beginning was that I wanted to ensure that the voices of the 2 young people that participated in my study were not lost in the analysis when looking for common themes across the group of parents which was larger in number. This created a dilemma and doubt when organising the themes of each participant as I started with the young people as I had to check myself constantly to ensure that I wasn't creating themes to follow that underlying agenda and was indeed sticking close to the research material. The way that I found to accomplish that was being reflective and writing down my thoughts after each transcript was analysed and before moving on to the next one. This helped me put those thoughts "to rest" and allowed me to start my next transcript with a clearer head and less preconceptions guided form my previous participant's words. It is my hope that by doing this, it has allowed the analytic process to produce emergent themes that are driven by the experiences of the participants applying an unbiased interpretation, even though Heidegger (1962) argues that a researcher cannot escape preconceptions and prior experiences affecting the hermeneutic process. Paying attention to all those cognitive processes

by remaining reflective during the IPA process was crucial to allow me to engage fully with the meaning making process as the role of cognition in phenomenology is often misunderstood or not explained in IPA literature (Tuffour, 2017). One of the factors that could inhibit this, I found, was my dual role as a researcher and a Trainee EP. What I mean by this concerns that underlying potential agendas that led into the creation of this project, which is to understand the experiences of this group of families and see what has worked and has hasn't. Another part of these "underlying agendas" was noted by my research supervisor during one of our initial discussions around my analysis noting the absence of positive factors or elements in my analysis of one of the young people. Whilst this could have just been what the data was showing, an interesting reflection came from that discussion around ensuring that there is a balance between negatives and positives and not an overemphasis on just discovering "negative themes". This made me reflect on the potential challenges of the dual role and how as EPs, we are often concerned with identifying need especially in groups of learners that have consistently been identified with additional needs (i.e. adopted children), but as a researcher it is my job to stay true to my participants' stories and experiences without putting a subjective spin on it.

6.0 The impact of the research journey

This research 'journey' has been a long and at times challenging one, but I feel privileged to say that I have come out in the end with so many benefits and knowledge that will guide me in the future. These benefits I feel concern not only my professional day-to-day practice but also my competence in conducting future research as it is my aim to continue to further research in this area. Starting in my

first year of studying, it was clear to me that despite having completed a Master's level dissertation before, I was still sitting clearly within the position of 'conscious incompetence' (Rogers et al., 2013) when it came to producing a doctorate level thesis. However, I can now say with confidence that I have been successful in planning, conducting and writing up a research project and apply the skills of the scientist practitioner. Through experiencing the process first-hand, I am now able to reflect on the different parts of the research, identify strengths and limitations of my own study as I have done in the previous chapter and be able to justify the decisions I have made in each part. This has developed my general skills of applying criticality to research articles that I read and identifying areas of questioning and development. Thinking about this developing skill using Haring and Eaton's (1978) 'Instructional Hierarchy', I would say that I have reached the stage of 'generalisation' to be bale to apply the skill from my own study to others. Whilst my own study has its limitations, I feel that I am now better equipped to approach future research with more clarity and criticality in order to improve it. A significant impact that this research has also had on me was to allow me to trust the process to be driven by the data and feel confident that the end result reflects an interpretation that has allowed the voices of the participants to shine through. Feelings of incompetence or doubt were present frequently during the analytic process and having no exact "manual" of how to complete a multi-perspective IPA analysis proved stressful because of this. As a result, I had to learn to "let go" of my need for absolute certainty and trust that by immersing myself in the data again and again, the experiences of the young people and parents would be represented well. I can now say that I have accomplished this to the best of my ability and would love to think that my participants feel the same.

In terms of my practice, a significant lesson that I have learned was to adopt a cautiousness when I hear the word "evidence-based practice" and approach it with a curious stance. This leads back to the development of my criticality skills that I mentioned above. Being able to apply this skill going forward, it would also affect the way I practice as an EP and the ability to evaluate an intervention or strategy and its effectiveness before incorporating into any of my reports or verbal advice. Being an EP is a lifelong journey of self-development and learning, but I now feel better equipped to apply more scrutiny to my learning and reading on new practices in the profession before adopting them as a practitioner. Finally, another effect of completing this research was the connections that I was able to forge with the local organisations and people supporting adoptive families that helped me recruit my participants. I feel that these connections will be useful to develop my role further with a focus on supporting adopted young people through joint collaboration with the LA and charity organisations.

7.0 Research implications for future practice

When choosing this project as my thesis research study, it was very clear to me that I wanted to not only provide a new insight and contribution to the limited international and UK literature on adoptive same sex families, but also for my findings to become building blocks to slowly enact change for future practice. As such, I have reflected on the ways I would like to incorporate the important stories that were shared with me during this study into my practice. One of these ways will be to make a point of always including the question of adopted children into my planning meetings and general discussions with school SENCos and head teachers to ensure that adopted children and young people are not forgotten and their

learning needs are monitored by the schools and the schools' EP. As such, I have

created a template for my planning meetings that has a distinct section called

"Adopted children", which I use to inquire about general numbers of adopted children

in school and the school's experience with supporting adopted children, which was

expressed by some of the participants as an important deciding factor for them in

their choice of school. In addition, I also inquire about subcategories of adopted

children such as those in same sex families to try and identify pupils and families that

require additional support. Finally, under that section, I have now started asking

about any additional training on trauma required by the staff to ensure that all

members of staff are "trauma informed", which is an established evidence based

practice for supporting children that have experienced developmental trauma

(Maynard et al., 2019) and it also reflects my participants' theme of 'Understanding

of Trauma: Actions, not Words", reflecting their unanimous need for school to

develop their knowledge on the effects and impact of trauma in adopted children.

This practice will also be disseminated and shared with the EPs in my service in

hopes of bringing the same level of attention to adopted children across all the

schools and between practitioners.

Linking to this last point, my research findings will additionally be used to

develop a tailored training to be offered to schools with regards to effective ways of

supporting adopted children and young people through primary and secondary

education. The content of the training will be influenced and guided by the

superordinate themes of the study and the experiences expressed by the

participants themselves, as well as complimented by similar literature, thus

contributing to already existing evidence-based practice in this field (Gore-Langton &

Boy, 2017). The additional unique element included in the developing of this training

will be the inclusion of a section dedicated to adopted children in same sex families and their unique profile of strengths and needs identified in order to raise more awareness of this subgroup of adopted children. Finally, as part of the CPD requirement for practitioner EPs and my own personal commitment to bettering myself as a professional, it is hoped that this study will be the beginning of future studies on the topic of adoptive same sex families as well as adoption research in general in the hopes of building and accumulating this knowledge into a Specialist EP role dedicated to supporting this population.

8.0 Proposed dissemination

I am hoping to disseminate my research locally to within my EPS as part of continuous professional development for the service but also as part of wider planning strategy for creating a specialist role for adopted children. The findings will also be disseminated to the participants as specified in my consent forms as well as the Norfolk Post Adoption Support Team and the Virtual School. Finally, I am hoping to publish my study with relevant journals including Educational Psychology in Practice and hopefully Adoption & Fostering, which I feel fits my subject area.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Ethical approval

EDU ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER 2020-21

APPLICANT DETAILS	
Name:	**Achilleas Dalamagkas**
School:	**EDU**
Current Status:	**EdPsyD Student**
UEA Email address:	**ghu19cau@uea.ac.uk**
EDU REC IDENTIFIER:	**2021_03_AD_RC (amendment)**

Approval details	
Approval start date:	**23.07.2021**
Approval end date:	**31.07.2022**
Specific requirements of approval:	

Please note that your project is only given ethical approval for the length of time identified above. Any extension to a project must obtain ethical approval by the EDU REC before continuing. Any amendments to your project in terms of design, sample, data collection, focus etc. should be notified to the EDU REC Chair as soon as possible to ensure ethical compliance. If the amendments are substantial a new application may be required.

Victoria Warburton EDU Chair, Research Ethics Committee

Appendix B – Participant information forms

Achilleas Dalamagkas
Trainee Educational Psychologist
11/02/2021

Faculty of Social Sciences

School of education

University of East Anglia

Norwich Research Park

Norwich NR4 7TJ

"Same-sex adoptive families; what school is like for us". Shared experiences of adopted young people and their same-sex parents about their school; a multi-perspective Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT – Parent group

(1) What is this study about?

You and your child are invited to take part in a research study about the experiences of adopted young people and their same-sex parents regarding their children's education and available support. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are the primary caregiver parent of an adopted young person in a same-sex relationship. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you and your child want to take part in the study. There is also a consent form for your child to complete to acquire their consent to participate in the project. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about. Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling me that you:

✓ Understand what you have read.
✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
✓ Agree for your child to take part in the research study as outlined below.
✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
✓ You have received a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researcher: My name is Achilleas Dalamagkas, Year 3 Trainee Educational Psychologist, School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia.
I am being supervised by Dr Sarah Hatfield, Tutor, School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia.

(3) What will the study involve for me and my child?

You and your child will be asked to participate in a remote interview via Microsoft Teams regarding yours and your child's experiences of their education and school as well as any support that you are aware of that is available to you and your child as an adoptive same-sex family. The interviews will take place in your house in a private room with the door closed to ensure

confidentiality of the discussions taking place. For your child's interview, it is expected that you will be present in the beginning of the interview so that the researcher can verify that there is an adult present in the house and then you will need to exit the room and close the door but maintain in the property in case the young person becomes distraught and requires immediate emotional support, which the researcher cannot provide due to the remote nature of the interviews. There will also be an initial brief meeting via Microsoft Teams so that you can get to know me before the interview and ask any additional questions that you may have. The interviews with me will also be recorded using the record function on Microsoft Teams so that I can use this to transcribe the interviews later. During later stages of the project, you will also be given the opportunity to review the transcripts from your interviews to verify their accuracy and ensure that you are happy for them to be included in the project.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?

The preliminary meeting on Microsoft Teams is expected to last about 30-45 minutes and the interview meeting for each parent and young person is expected to last between 60-90 minutes. In total, your commitment to participating in the study will require 1 hour 30 minutes to 2 hours and 15 minutes per person.

(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with me or anyone else at the University of East Anglia or any organisations that you are a part of now.
If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by contacting me and requesting to withdraw from the study and for your data to not be used for the purposes of the study.
You are free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want me to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview. If you decide at a later time to withdraw from the study your information will be removed from my records and will not be included in any results, up to the point I have analysed and published the results.

(6) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Aside from giving up your time, another potential risk by participating in the study includes the discussion of potential emotive and personal experiences that may have an emotional impact on you or your child during or after the interviews. However, you have the absolute freedom of what you share with me and you should not feel any pressure to disclose anything that might create emotional harm to you. You should be aware that if there is a disclosure of safeguarding concern for your child, the researcher will seek advice from his supervisor and follow Local Authority Safeguarding Policies. If required, the researcher may offer you support in liaising with the Designated Teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children in your child's school. If further support is required after the interviews, please find signposting information to the following relevant organisations which offer support for both you and your child:
Norfolk Post Adoption Support Service - 01603638343

https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/children-and-families/adoption-and-fostering/adoption/support-for-adoptive-families
Just One Norfolk, Children and Young People's Health Services - 0300 300 0123 (general line), 07520 631590 (parent line)
https://www.justonenorfolk.nhs.uk/mentalhealth

(7) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

The potential benefit for you as a participant includes the opportunity to express your own opinions and experiences and raise awareness about the unique strengths and challenges of your child's education as an adoptive parent in a same sex relationship, which may not be as represented in the wider society.
In addition, it is hoped that the findings of this study will be used to influence policy and Local Authority processes by raising awareness for this group of students. This is hoped to lead to more appropriate and tailored support to be offered to this group in their educational journey.

(8) What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to me collecting personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation Act and the University of East Anglia Research Data Management Policy (2019).
Your information will be stored securely, and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but the publications will not contain yours or your child's name or any identifiable information about you. In this instance, data will be stored for a period of 10 years and then destroyed
I will be the only person to hold the Microsoft Teams recordings of the interviews and I will store them in my password protected personal computer under encryption. These will be deleted after transcription. Codes and pseudonyms will be assigned to the participants for the purposes of reporting the data and I will be the only person holding the coding key for the participants to protect their anonymity. After participant recruitment, only the allocated codes will be used to refer to participants in discussions with the research supervisor to protect your anonymity. While the raw data and will be only be seen by me, analysed data may be shared with the research supervisor for learning purposes. Pseudonyms will be used when referencing to the transcripts so that the transcripts cannot be linked to specific participants to guarantee your anonymity. After the completion of the research project, recording will be the data will be kept for a minimum of 10 years for publication reasons and will be stored on the UEA OneDrive system according to the UEA Data Management Policy.

(9) What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Achilleas will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact him on a.dalamagkas@uea.ac.uk

(10)   Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell me that you wish to receive feedback by contacting me and requesting it directly. This feedback will be in the form of a One-Page Summary report of the findings of the study. You will receive this feedback after the completion of the thesis and approval from the UEA has been obtained to disseminate the findings to the participants. This is estimated to be around the summer of 2022.

(11)   What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved under the regulations of the University of East Anglia's School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee.
If there is a problem, please let me know. You can contact me via the University at the following address:
Achilleas Dalamagkas
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ
a.dalamagkas@uea.ac.uk
If you would like to speak to someone else you can contact my supervisor:
Sarah Hatfield, Sarah.Hatfield@uea.ac.uk
If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Yann Lebeau at Y.Lebeau@uea.ac.uk.

(12)   OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?

You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and contact me directly via email to let them know of your willingness to participate. There is no need to contact the organisation that has distributed the information to you to let them know of your participation. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the 2nd copy of the consent form for your information. Please be aware that the recruitment of the participants will follow a first-come first-served basis until the necessary number of participants have been completed.

This information sheet is for you to keep

Study Information Sheet: My school experience

Hello. My name is Achilleas Dalamagkas and I am studying at the University of East Anglia. I am doing a project to find out more about what you think and feel about your school and any support that you might need or want from school or other professionals.

I am asking you to be in my study because you are a student with same-sex parents.

You can decide if you want to take part in the study or not. You don't have to - it's up to you.

This sheet tells you what I will ask you to do if you decide to take part in the study. Please read it carefully so that you can make up your mind about whether you want to take part.

If you decide you want to be in the study and then you change your mind later, that's ok. All you need to do is tell me that you don't want to be in the study anymore.

If you have any questions, you can ask me or your family or someone else who looks after you. If you want to, you can email me at *a.dalamagkas@uea.ac.uk.*

What will happen if I say that I want to be in the study?

If you decide that you want to be in my study, I will ask you to do these things:
- Come along to a video call using your home computer at your home with your parent to meet me virtually and ask me any questions.
- Come along to a second video call at your home again but on your own this time, where I will ask you a couple of questions about what you think and feel about your school and any support that you feel you would like to have.

When I ask you questions, you can choose which ones you want to answer. If you don't want to talk about something, that's ok. You can stop talking to me at any time if you don't want to talk to me anymore.

If you say it's ok, we will record our video call using the Microsoft Teams record function.

After the interview, you will be able to review what we discussed and take anything out that you do not want me to include in my project.

Will anyone else know what I say in the study?

I won't tell anyone else what you say to me, except if you talk about someone hurting you or about you hurting yourself or someone else. Then I might need to tell someone to keep you and other people safe.

All of the information that I have about you from the study will be stored in a safe place and I will look after it very carefully. I will write a report about the study and show it to other people, but I

won't say your name in the report and no one will know that you were in the study. Some of the things that you say may be used in my report, but I will not use your name when I include them in my report, but a fake name that you can help me choose.

How long will the study take?

Our first video call to meet each other and ask questions will take about 30 minutes. You can stay for all of it or a part of it. If you talk with me about what you think school is like in our second video call, this will take about 45 minutes or so.

Are there any good things about being in the study?

We think you'll like talking about your school experience as a young person with same-sex parents and you will also be helping us do our research.

Are there any bad things about being in the study?

This study will take up some of your time and you might also want to talk about some stuff that can be more difficult to talk about, but you are free to decide what you want to share with me.

Will you tell me what you learnt in the study at the end?
Yes, I will if you want me to. There is a question on the next page that asks you if you want me to tell you what I learnt in the study. If you circle Yes, when we finish the study we will tell you what we learnt.

What if I am not happy with the study or the people doing the study?

If you are not happy with how we are doing the study or how I treat you, then you or the person who looks after you can:
  • Write an email to my tutor *(Sarah.Hatfield@uea.ac.uk).*

OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?
If you're happy to fill in the 2 forms below and give number 1 to your parent to send it to me. You can keep this letter and the form 2 to remind you about the study.

This sheet is for you to keep

Appendix C – Consent forms

Study Sheet: My school experience

Consent Form 1

If you are happy to be in the study, please
- **write** your **name** in the space below
- **sign** your **name** at the bottom of the next page
- put the **date** at the bottom of the next page.

You should only say 'yes' to being in the study if you know what it is about and you want to be in it. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign the form.

I, ...[PRINT NAME], am happy to be in this research study.

In saying yes to being in the study, I am saying that:

✓ I know what the study is about.

✓ I know what I will be asked to do.

✓ Someone has talked to me about the study.

✓ My questions have been answered.

✓ I know that I don't have to be in the study if I don't want to.

✓ I know that I can pull out of the study at any time if I don't want to do it anymore.

✓ I know that I don't have to answer any questions that I don't want to answer.

✓ I know that the researcher won't tell anyone what I say when we talk to each other, unless I talk about being hurt by someone or hurting myself or someone else.

Now we are going to ask you if you are happy to do a few other things in the study. Please circle 'Yes' or 'No' to tell us what you would like.

Are you happy for me to record **videos** of you?   **Yes**   **No**

Are you happy for me to **audio record** your voice?   **Yes**   **No**

Do you want me to tell you what I **learnt** in the study?   **Yes**   **No**

………………………………………………….   ………………………………………………………
Name   **Date**

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (1ˢᵗ Copy to Researcher)

I, ………………………………………………………. [PRINT NAME], agree to take part in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:
- ✔ I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- ✔ I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researcher if I wished to do so.
- ✔ The researcher has answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- ✔ I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researcher or anyone else at the University of East Anglia or any organisations that you are a part of at the moment or in the future.
- ✔ I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.
- ✔ I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- ✔ I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.
- ✔ I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my or my child's name or any identifiable information about us.

I consent **for both me and my child** to:

- **Audio-recording**   YES   ☐   NO   ☐

- **Video-recording**   YES   ☐   NO   ☐

- **Reviewing transcripts**   YES   ☐   NO   ☐

- **Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?**
                                                          YES   ☐   NO   ☐

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: _____

☐ Email: _____

....
Signature

....
PRINT name

....
        Date

Appendix D – Semi-structured interview schedule

The interview questions are being phrased in an "open" manner consistent with the researcher's chosen methodology (IPA). The research will also be using prompts during the interviews such as "Tell me more about…", "Can you explain what you mean by…" in order to elicit further data from the participants and enable a richer and more in-depth picture of the participants' lived experiences without using guiding questions.

For the young people group:

Question 1: How has school been for you so far as a young person with same-sex parents?

Areas to explore using prompts: peer relationships, experience of school events i.e. Father's / Mother's Day, sharing of adoptive / family sexual minority identity, experience of homophobia, experience of learning

Question 2: Have you ever had any support in school and if so, what are your thoughts about it?

Areas to explore using prompts: knowledge of available support for young people, positive or negative experiences of receiving support, types of support received i.e. Support from school, external specialists, peer support, family support, additional ideas for support required

For the parents' group:

Question 1: What are your experiences regarding your child's school as an adoptive same-sex parent?

Areas to explore using prompts: child's peer relationships, relationships with other parents and staff, experiences of school events i.e. Father's / Mother's Day / Parents' evenings, experiences of prejudice or homophobia, child's learning, experiences of sharing sexual family minority status

Question 2: What are your experiences of available support for you and your child as an adoptive same-sex parent?

Areas to explore using prompts: knowledge of available support for young people, positive or negative experiences of receiving support, types of support received i.e. Support from school, external specialists, peer support, family support, additional ideas for support required

Appendix E – Example of initial stages of analysis on transcript

Below are examples of the initial stages of analysis of a transcript including conceptual **(black),** descriptive (blue) and linguistic (red) comments on the right side as well as the emergent themes on the left side of the text.

further away.
Achilleas
Yeah wow.
Ace
Just like everyone got start their own journey, but I don't want it to be that soon.
Achilleas
I know it felt it feels like you losing a bit of a part of you doesn't it? No, I get it. I did get it. It's just hard, definitely.
Ace
It is, yeah.
Achilleas
Uhm, so I guess my next question. So yeah, I guess it sounds like you've never had really difficulties making friends. It's come quite easy to use, so I guess my next question to you is how was it for you to sort of the experience of sharing your adoptive status? And then obviously your family status as well with your friends over the years. Has it been? How has it been for you, just in general?
Ace
Uhm, So I'm I'm gonna go through the whole listings so primary school in my old primary school it was difficult you know already having the label of the as people would put it, the weird kid. And that was difficult, but it was like I don't really wanna add to the difficulty as well, so I used to make up this story as every every, every boy who has two parents of the same sex probably might do. "Oh my dad lives there." No, I know, I know he doesn't live there that someone else's dad, but to me same house. Yeah, that's where my dad is that's that's why... All my friends, like I said before reception knew that I didn't have one, everyone else, that is what's that. My second primary school, a lot easier. Uh, we kind of like I say, everyone was a bit more, you know, friendly. Everyone was interactive and also I made my... it is kind of a cousin, kind of a cousin so I had a bit of family in the new primary school. I think I would still see him, so we still have our own little dude's, he's coming over tomorrow for a little bit of a Halloween do, but uhm, so primary school 2nd primary school that was all easy to say more things that I needed to say that I wouldn't have been able to do in my old primary school. Uhm, I think it also might have had something to do with the two years I had out just kind of a fresh, start fresh doing new, you know new people jump right in, done, get friendly with people and everything you know. Uh, then high school high school high school? Everyone's really nervous about year seven. There's always that one kid who's just like Yep, let's go. You can make transit come up. Yep, that was me. Great.
Achilleas
You were the excited kid weren't you?
Ace
I was and by the end of the week everyone had been had probably had enough of just this very hyperactive young kid is that, yeah, let's go. Let's go so my attitude towards education had changed. You know, through that those experiences in my second primary school, it's just like, right? This is what education should be. Everyone is very nice here, year 7 so nothing to worry about. Well, though admittedly the first day I was absolutely terrified, but that is, that is everyone's natural reaction because I mean, you're going into a high school with big kids but yeah, I mean again, just jump in with two feet and you'll be fine point, uhm and. Yeah, I made loads of mates in high school. And yeah, no. Then that incident with the kid. It was just a one. You know. Everyone else is really understanding about it. You know they will take my side about it just so we have no idea why he's doing that you know but and then college came and everyone, just like I said, who? Who was I? Right, so this cutting in that we've got do. Cause I mean when people are saying things if they if they do and they and they have in high, in College in my three years of being there "oh Ace you must be

Handwritten annotations (left margin – emergent themes):
Lying about family status
Importance of connection with people
Personal Action
Leap of Faith
Glass half-full

Handwritten annotations (right margin):
Sharing of same sex identities as an added difficulty
generalisation of his behaviour (justification?)
Selective sharing of identity/family
Ability to start fresh
imp Action, not passivity
Resilience, bouncy-back,
Positive exper. changed to attitude towards education
Terror for transit to highschool

Achilleas

Started perfect, so right now I guess we can start so this is going to be a bit more of an open discussion really. I know he obviously was interview that I was mentioning but my questions are very open ended so it it's not going to be like me barrage with questions. So let's start with the first one, which is. What are your experiences regarding your child school as an adoptive same-sex funding and the educational journey so far?

Lisa

Yeah. She's like, OK. Well, I've only got my experience as a, as I am so when you say yes that I could tell you generally about the experience which is being patsy at best, I don't, I suppose. I don't really think that the negative experiences that I've had have been due to same sex. I don't know, I haven't experienced any direct discrimination that I've been aware of. I tend to be someone who neither expects nor looks for that, so I think if you have a confident demeanour and you "oh this is how I am and this is what it is", you perhaps in time get... I don't know, maybe I'm not that sensitive to it. I don't know. So most of the difficulties that we've had with education has been about lack of resources, lack of services, lack of understanding. In particular teachers do not seem equipped to read and understand the special needs of say my children, and I don't think their needs are, well, some of their needs are fairly mainstream, like the ADHD. So you go to parents evening and they say to me this is when Ace was at his high school I think. Ace needs to concentrate more. I think you well, we know that his problem. Do you see what I mean?

Achilleas

yeah yeah.

Lisa

That's pretty minor, uh, and then I think the difficulties for the children been adopted in terms of how that's impacted on them, there's been a lack of proper assessment of that. My daughter is 21 now and they've just decided to reassess, she was assessed at aged 5 last time you know, she said and educational and healthcare plan throughout, but they've only just decided. And then that brings other problems because we've had her assessed by a psychology group that you may know of in Norwich 'Help for psychology', not specifically for that, but the social service social worker suggested them, but the education or the local authority won't accept those reports for the purposes of education healthcare plan. They say she's gotta be properly assessed by someone from education, but there isn't anyone. As you probably know, as an educational psychologist, I don't think you'd any difficulty getting work. There is no, there's very few educational psychologists available. So there there's some of the issues. When they were younger and at school, which I think is where your focus is more, it was just the constant. Uh, some teachers were very good, the schools... We moved our children, we moved my older daughter from the local comprehensive to one 15 miles away because it had a really good Special Education lead there, you get what, SENCo they are called, I think. She also taught maths, she was very good, you might have come across her, Heather Taylor, she's very good and where my daughter was at XXX in Dereham and they were clueless, really, Jasmine was able to or she was checking out her maths to do number bonds to number 10 although she passed her SATS maths without any problem and was quite able. That's how much they didn't really understand or assess and allowed her to. If you like she was getting her emotional needs met by being treated specially, but a maths was... So we moved her and she went to Litcham and that was great for the first year or s and then the head master changed and they got rid of the lead SENCo and the person they replaced it with was really someone who was also the deputy head and climbing up the pole and not really that interested to be honest, it's just the name and so the main help we got was from a teaching assistant who acted in that role and she was very good. But as you

[Handwritten annotations in margins:]

Not discriminated as same-sex.

Lack of understanding of 'adopted' needs.

Inconsistent support

Multiple layers of needs

Lack of consistency due to experiential/external factors

Inconsistent support

Being treated the same as non-same sex

Difficulties around understanding of needs?

Lack of assessment of 'adopted' needs

"Patsy" support?

Bureaucratic limitation and policy Reinforcing "patsy" support

Choice of school based on good Senco

Emphasis on SEMH Overlooking Learning.

Seeing past the need, deeper understanding.

Being and advocate for her children

→ More life disruptions?