The complexities of making recommendations for adoption and fostering panels: an investigation of the biographic and professional influences on panel members' decision-making and attitudes.

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Abstract

Background

Adoption and fostering panels are unique entities, in which members interpret both written documentation and verbal presentations. Applying regulations and guidance to reach recommendations, making life-changing judgments, based on conscious and unconscious characterisations of people.

The study investigates the personal and professional interplay of individuals' judgements in the decision-making environment of panels, with emphasis on the impact of personal biography.

Methodology & Methods

A constructive–interpretivist stance that individuals construct knowledge and meaning through their interaction with others is taken.

Case summaries of the panels observed across England and narrative interviews with panel members using the Biographical Narrative Interview Model (BNIM), were analysed using BNIM interpretive panels to generate broader interpretive perspectives. The interviews and observations were triangulated with panel minutes.

Findings

There was a correlation between biography and professional identity; an individual's early experiences within the family unit had a lasting effect on their role occupancy in adulthood. Biography, illustrated by personal values and beliefs, impacted on recommendation-making. Without personal reflection and external containment, conflicting positions could often be observed. Whilst panels achieved their function of providing recommendations, they had constructed a collective narrative of being impartial and balanced albeit that did not reflect reality, as demonstrated by the conduct of panel members in the performance of their roles.

Conclusion

Complex processes are at play when individuals come together in groups to make recommendations. This study rejects the view that it is possible to avoid stereotypes and generalisations, arguing that it is essential that panel members are supported to construct internal and external aptitudes to guard against unconscious influence, by the use of Effective Personal and Professional Judgement (EPPJ), intended to enable panel members to be more conscious of their own biases, and thus strive to make non-discriminatory recommendations. Agencies need to be transparent and stringent in their recruitment of panel members, examining the personal characteristics and social and personal values which drive individual and, thus, panel judgements. Key to making effective recommendations is pre-panel quality assurance to reduce adverse bias from assessors and scrutiny of reports at an effectively facilitated panel, that enables members to focus on the task.

Keywords

Decision (theory & making), values, beliefs, groups, panels, fostering/foster carers, adoption/adopters, thinking/thought. (Appendix 1)

Declaration

The material herewith presented is the result of original work. The content of this thesis has not been presented elsewhere towards any other academic qualification. In accordance with the requirements of the University of East London, this thesis does not exceed 66,383 words excluding ancillary documentation (i.e. appendices, references).

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAR	Adoption Agencies Regulation
ACPC	Area Child Protection Committee
AFCR	Annual Foster Carers Review
ART	Assistive Reproductive Technologies
ASGLB	Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BaD	Basic assumption of Dependency
BaF	Basic assumption of Fight/Flight
BaP	Basic assumption of Pairing
BAME	Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic
BME	Black or Minority Ethnic
BBC	British Broadcasting Company
BDA	Biographical Data Analysis
BDC	Biographical Data Chronology
BMI	Body Mass Index
BNIM	Biographical Narrative Interpretive Model
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CQSW	Certificate of Qualification in Social Work
CoramBAAF	Coram British Association of Adoption & Fostering
DARNE	(D = description, A = argumentation, R = report, N = narrative, E = evaluation)
DFE-RR	Department for Education Research Report
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
EPPJ	Effective Personal and Professional Judgement
FSR	Fostering Services (England) Regulations
HCE	History of the Case Evolution

IFA	Independent Fostering Agency
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer
LA	Local Authority
LAC	Looked After Child
LADO	Local Authority Designated Officer
MA	Master of Arts
NHS	National Health Service
NMS	National Minimum Standards
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
OBS	Observation
PFCR	Prospective Foster Carer Report
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SQUIN	Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SS	Sub-session
SSS	Successive States of Subjectivity
TSS	Text Structure Sequentialisation
TFA	Thematic Field Analysis
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Acknowledgements

Completing this Professional Doctorate has been like raising a third child. I started this 'parenting' journey 18 years ago and it has ebbed and flowed. At times, I entered no man's land, not sure of the direction I should follow or what the outcome would be. There were times when I felt that this Professional Doctorate did not realise that, for the most part, I had no idea what I was doing; it seemed to have no notion of the sacrifice I made to give birth to the idea nor the nurturing that was needed to see it through to completion and, no matter how much I gave it, it appeared ungrateful. On many occasions I neglected it by taking extended breaks and wanted to throw in the towel. So, for the most part, as the Jamaicans say, it was 'dragged up' rather than raised with nurture.

Time stops for no man – and, while not every child grows to be a mature functioning adult, every living child grows to become a chronological adult. Thus, I have come to the end of this journey – the completion of my Professional Doctorate which I hope will be of benefit to others and in the years to come will mature into a functional adult (body of research) that others can use in their practice and build upon.

I would like to give my thanks to all those who have assisted me to complete my Professional Doctorate: my then manager Sylvan Hunte, whose advice provided the inspiration for this journey, my supervisors – Professor Andrew Cooper and Dr Jane Herd, who joined in the latter years and Tom Wengraf, for his guidance with the research method. I would like to thank David Jacobson for his drawings and my proof-readers: Kemba Agard, Temara Sampoh, Jazz Browne, Richard Laing, Dominique Austin, Lorraine Daniels and Shomari Bridgewater, who provided both proof-reading and mathematical support. Olga Ford, Carole Archibald, Samantha Acreman, Sharon Facey, Enrico Riva and Subira Bridgewater provided practical support and many people (too many to mention) took part in the BNIM interpretive panels. As well as those who provided years of spiritual and moral support, I thank members of the Kenton Evangelical Church who have prayed for me, as well as Shirley Graham, Fiona Laing, Karlene Stewart and Ezi Beedie.

This research study would not have been possible without the Adoption and Fostering Services, who permitted me to observe their panels. I have been privileged to have been allowed to share intimate details of the lives of those I interviewed, and I am indebted to their generosity. I was unable to include all the narratives of those I interviewed; however, those not included remain etched into the vaults of my heart and mind.

Ultimately, I acknowledge El Roi (God who sees me) *'Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.' (Hebrews 11:1)* and Jehovah Jireh (the providing Lord) *'In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps'. (Proverbs 16:9)*

Dedication

This thesis is first and foremost dedicated to my mum, who left school at 14 years old and emigrated from Barbados to England at 19 years old. As a single parent, she raised four children, all of whom attended university; two are teachers, one owns his own stationary supplies business and I am a social work consultant, hopefully with a doctorate! We are testimony to her mantra *'They cannot take away your papers (education).'* She also taught me the importance of following my mind (spirit) which enables me to believe that everything is achievable.

Secondly, to my younger siblings, Natasha, Andrew and Anthony, may I continue to be your beacon of motivation.

Thirdly, to my children Shomari and Subira, who embraced my love of all that is education, history and learning, and who are the receptacles of the best gifts I had to offer them: my faith in God and my earthly and spirit-led wisdom.

Also, my late husband, Donald Rhoden, who died last year during my journey to complete this thesis and who, in death, gifted me the thinking space to write.

Finally, to those who have over the last 20 years read my yearly New Year letters, may you be inspired by my journey of faith that led to the completion of this thesis.

Man in the Mirror by Michael Jackson

(Appendix 2)

https://youtu.be/BbnV1x7cHjs

https://youtu.be/2O-mu2AhWQM

1 Introduction

1.1 Aim of this research project

This study aims to explore the judgements of panel members and panels when recommending who is suitable to become a parent (either temporarily as a foster carer or permanently as an adopter) and into which family configurations children are to be placed.

Research on juries has highlighted that an individual's personal bias often results in individual members making up their minds at the start of the process before hearing all the evidence. This would suggest these individuals are not passive in the meaning-making and decision-making processes in which they are involved. While individuals in a group can be influenced, they do not necessarily alter their views when faced with information to the contrary, which raises questions about whether individualism and group identity are at odds in a group decision-making setting.

1.2 The central research question and sub-questions:

In what ways do adoption and fostering panel members' biographies, attitudes and values influence their role and recommendation making?

The sub-questions of interest to the study are:

- What is the underlying thinking of panel members when arriving at their recommendations on the suitability/approval of foster carers/adopters and matches?
- In what ways do adoption and fostering panel members' biographies, attitudes and values influence their role occupancy and recommendation making?
- To what extent does a panel member's conceptualisation of their professionalism impact on their role in the panel?
- What are the systems, methods and techniques that impact on recommendations?

- What are the group processes at play when panels make their recommendations?
- Are panels the right structure to determine who is suitable to foster or adopt and to be placed with which child(ren)?

1.3 Why the interest in this study?

July 2020 marks my 30th year as a qualified social worker. Over that time, much has changed in social work, particularly in relation to how the role is undertaken. Nonetheless, the task of making decisions about service users' lives remains the same.

Throughout my training and career, an interest in empowerment, power dynamics and the values that inform individual decisions has remained constant. As the eldest child in the family, a lone parent at times, a team manager after five years of practice, a Service Manager and a self-employed person, I have continually been involved in making decisions about other people's lives.

The idea for this study began many years ago when I chaired a local authority adoption panel. An older male panel member, who was an adoptee from Eastern Europe considered himself assimilated into the UK, to the point that he did not believe that his, or anyone's, cultural origin should play a significant role in recommendations. When asking a question of a female applicant, a police officer of dual heritage and an adoptee who was being supported by her white, single, adopted mother, he commented, 'Clearly race was not an issue for you'. I was taken aback by his statement and, despite believing that this professional woman could speak for herself, interjected and told her she did not have to respond to that statement.

After the panel, I took the panel member aside and brought the inappropriateness of his statement to his attention, and he acknowledged this. Nonetheless, I was left questioning how panel members' personal experiences and beliefs either adversely hinder or help their recommendations, particularly as I continued to encounter professionals and panel members who acted as though their values and personal experiences had no bearing on their judgement, as though they were a blank sheet, completely impartial or, as people in the world of social care like to believe, they are 'non-judgmental' - as if the latter were at all possible!

1.4 Context of the study - the changing face of parenting

Within British legislation, it is difficult to find an absolute definition of 'parent'. The Children Act (1989) does not define who a parent is but introduces the concept of 'parental responsibility' and describes the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority that parents have for children under the age of 18.

Section 576 of the Education Act (1996) defines 'a "parent" in relation to a child or young person, as any person who has parental responsibility for him, or who has care of him.' The Cambridge English dictionary (no date) defines a parent as 'a person who gives birth to or raises a child' and parenthood as 'the process or the state of being a parent'.

Once a person has a child, they are involved in the process of parenting. They are engaged in developing and using their knowledge and skills to plan for, give birth to (or adopt), provide care for, educate and rear child(ren). Carbone (2005) recognises that:

> *the definition of parentage – and with it the determination of which adults receive legal recognition in children's lives – has become a contentious issue in family law" (p. 1295)*

Some children are not able to live within their birth families and are subject to the courts' powers in deciding their futures. Before and/or after a court decides a child's legal status, the UK has a system of adoption and fostering panels which determine with whom such children should live and where they should live.

1.4.1 Do adults have the right to be parents?

Adults wanting the identity of a parent decide between the ways they can become parents, including natural pregnancy, ART (assistive reproductive technologies), all fertility treatments and surrogacy. Boivin and Pennings (2005, p. 784) expand on the motivations for parenthood:

> *The experience of parenthood is central to identity and most people in most societies. The reasons for wanting children include to give and receive love. As an expression of the couple's unity, to give meaning or add value to one's life, for the enjoyment or pleasure of children, to carry on the family*

> *name, to be like other friends, to give in to family pressure, to pass on one's genes to the next generation, or even for the material benefits that children can bring, for example for help in old age or governmental assistance. Some motives are more common or morally accepted than others; there is consensus that when it comes to having children people have the liberty to choose when, whether, and how many children to have.*

Robertson (1996, p. 23) makes a statement relevant for this research, in that it speaks about choices for the would-be parent:

> *Procreative liberty is a negative right ... a person violates no moral duty in making a procreative choice, and that the other persons have a duty not to interfere with that choice. However, the negative right to procreate, does not imply the duty of others to provide the resources or services necessary to exercise one's procreative liberty despite plausible moral arguments for government assistance ... Nor is it a positive right to have the state or particular persons provide the means or resources necessary to have or avoid having children.*

A discussion on parenting must also include the family unit and the legislation surrounding the family. The (nuclear) family unit is widely recognised to comprise a mother, father and a given number of children. Legislation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries now recognise single people and same-sex couples as socially and legally recognised family units in which to parent children.

The Human Rights Act (1998) outlines the rights and freedoms to which everyone in the UK is entitled. Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (Council of Europe, 1950) safeguards the right of a person to maintain relationships in their private and family life. Additionally, the rights of individuals to marry and start a family are protected by Articles 12 and 16 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (United Nations, 1948).

Counterviews to such rights, as they relate to non-biological would-be parents, were put forward by The Houghton Committee report in 1972, which stated that the child was to be the focal point in adoption, and that the finding of homes for children needing them was the primary purpose of the comprehensive childcare service.

The Children Act (1989) guidance and regulations vol. 4, 5.29 state that 'no one has a right to be a foster carer and fostering decisions must focus on the interests of the child' (Department for Education, 2011b).

More recently, social work team manager and adoptive parent, Judith Acreman, stated:

> *One of the most important things is we must never forget that the child is the customer, not the adult adopters. Adoption in this country is a service for children in care - to find them new homes to help them rebuild their lives; it is not a service to find children for childless couples ... and although, of course, they are related and impact on one another, they are not necessarily the same thing. We are seeking families for children, not children for parents, and the children's needs must come first, always, which may sometimes mean adopters need to take second place if they are different* (British Association of Social Work, 2013, pp. 10-11).

While noting that parenthood may be considered to be essential to an individual's identity and the life plan of most people in society, for either altruistic or egotistic reasons, to satisfy their desire to be loved, to give love, to unify a couple and thereby give meaning to an individual's/couple's life, and often as a means to carry on the family name, the overarching aim of this study is to explore the judgements and recommendations of panel members, as they consider the journey of individuals wishing to become parents to children in public care. The unwritten remit of these panels is to ensure that the needs of the child in public care is put before the needs of adults wanting to be parents.

1.4.2 The shortage of adopters and foster carers – the disparity between children to be placed and the pool of prospective adopters/foster carers

The majority of prospective adopters have tried to become parents before making their adoption applications. Adoption enables the adopter(s) to become the legal parent of someone else's birth child. One notable change in The Adoption and Children Act (2002) was permitting same-sex couples and individuals to adopt children. In contrast, prospective foster carers have generally had birth children before applying to be foster carers. Fostering (originally called 'boarding out' in the UK) is the system whereby foster parents receive a weekly allowance for caring for children placed in their homes,

aimed at providing the child with a 'normal' home life. The Children and Young Persons Act (1969) states that 'a local authority shall discharge their duty to provide accommodation and maintenance for a child in their care'. These 'parents' care and nurture a non-biological child on behalf of the state and have 'delegated responsibility' (not full parental responsibility).

The previous section highlights the desire of adults to be parents; however, the state needs adults who want to care for non-biological children because there is both a national and international shortage of foster carers and adopters. This has led to an industry developing with the sole purpose of addressing the shortfall. Successive governments, local authorities and private agencies aim to recruit foster carers and adopters to care for children who are unable to remain within their birth families.

The Fostering Network (no date) figures note that, as of 31 March 2019:

> *78,150 children were in the care of local authorities, with 56,160 children living with foster families, and there are around 44,450 foster families in England. They estimate that nationally fostering services need to recruit 7,220 foster families by March 2020.*

CoramBAAF (no date) states that:

> *3,570 looked after children were adopted during the year ending 31 March 2019. Couples adopted 3,140 children, single adopters adopted 430 and same-sex couples either in a civil partnership or married, adopted 490 children. CoramBAAF, (2019) also highlights the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB) figures that reveal that in 2019, 1,700 families were approved to adopt and there were 4,140 children with plans for adoption of which:*
> *4% have a disability*
> *20% are from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME)*
> *57% are in sibling groups*
> *28% are aged over five.*

In recent years, the UK government has sought to address the fact that there is a growing number of children who are unable to stay within their families. In order to increase the pool of both adopters and foster carers, the process of recruitment has

become led by foster carers and adopters. Despite these changes, there remains a shortfall of adopters and foster carers, and those in the allied professions have continued to argue that there is a mismatch between the children needing to be placed and the characteristics of the children that adopters and foster carers want, suggesting a complexity of motivations.

1.5 Thesis outline

This introductory chapter outlines the reasons for the study, and the challenges of finding parents for looked after children. The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows: the literature review, in Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature relevant to a study of decision-making, drawing on theories of thought and thinking, alongside research into the acquisition of values, beliefs and morals. Given that the focus of the thesis is on panel recommendation making, the chapter includes a discussion on group theory. When making recommendations about suitability to foster or adopt, panels explore individuals' motivation to safeguard, care, self-develop, work as part of a team and commit to the lifelong process of adoption, all in the interests of children.

The epistemology used in this study is constructivism, the belief that meaning is not found but constructed. It uses the labour-intensive Biographical Narrative Interpretive Model (BNIM) to gather detailed narratives, allowing individuals to share their stories as freely as possible. The BNIM interpretive panel process which assisted in overcoming the researcher's blind spots and defended subjectivity by widening the structural hypotheses offered for each interviewee as a sense-making tool is presented in Chapter 3.

The retelling of the nine interviewee narratives is contained in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 uses the concerns raised about panels in the Foster Care in England Review to present the observations of panels in case studies. Chapter 6 presents the analysis of data and discusses the research findings, providing evidence that individuals do bring to the decision environment their own pre-decisional thoughts and views. Chapter 7 outlines the themes that led to the conclusions and recommendations, highlighting the original contribution of the research to social work practice, identifying the need for changes in

practice and exploring areas for further research. Chapters 8 and 9 respectively include the bibliography and appendices for the study.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction: the history of the selection of adopters and foster carers

To understand the current panel system, it is crucial to understand the systems that were in place prior to the establishment of panels. A social worker who trained in 1969 and was awarded the Home Office Letter of Recognition in Childcare, becoming a Childcare Officer following two years of social work training, was interviewed. He provided a historical overview of the processes involved in the recruitment and selection of adopters and foster carers, prior to the 1976 changes in legislation:

> *'If you were approving a foster carer, or an adopter it was simply done between you and your Manager. You would write a report, which was very brief I have to say compared with what we write now. The only thing we did was police checks … and NSPCC, … The police check was done by just a letter going to local police, … they would just write back and say, no we don't know these people. Then you would do a few visits to the people and decide whether you thought they were suitable to foster or adopt. It would simply be signed off by your Manager and that was it really. There was no real independence in it because you were the Social Worker for the child, you were also the Social Worker who recruited carers and you placed the child with them. It was actually a very efficient system because children got placed much, much quicker, there was not this complicated decision-making process that we go through now, it was a much simpler process.'*

> *'… I remember a situation where we had a phone call to say that there was a baby crying in the flat…. I went round there… the door was opened, …. I went in and there were all these people… taking drugs, there were syringes…. There was a baby lying … in the middle of the floor, crying, …. I changed the baby's nappy, nobody woke up around me, so I wrote a note and left it on the mat, "Your baby has been taken into care and is going into a foster home" and telling them who to contact .... I just took the child ... round to a foster carer… I knew who took babies. I just knocked on the door*

> *and says, "Look, I've got a baby." She said, "Oh no, that's fine" … that was, kind of what we did.'*

Interviews of Child Care Officers by Prynn (2005) reinforce the above. Mary Wilson (55 and 59 – 22nd of July 1996) recalls a discussion with her manager about a placement:

> *I remember wanting to place a child with a member of the Red Devils team, … and she [manager] thought this was too dangerous he might get killed. So I produced all sorts of statistics to show that … he was more likely to get killed walking across the road than being a Red Devil … you had to convince her … usually you could get it passed her if you were strategic enough.* (Prynn, 2005, p. 21)

She went on to add:

> *My first foster home was a lady called Mrs Jones and by the time I had finished I had two of her sisters and her mother were fostering and all her various friends … and so you had a … good network of people.* (Prynn, 2005, p. 24)

Pamela Clough (58 – 21 August 1996) shared how others were not selected:

> I remember one health visitor saying they would be quite unsuitable as a foster home because they had the milk bottle on the table! (Prynn, 2005, p. 23)

In her book, *The Children's Generation*, Packman, (1975) observes:

> Considering the importance it was given and the responsibilities involved – in no other work does an 'arranger' so nearly play God. (Packman, 1975, p. 90)

In relation to fostering, Packman notes that it was the role of the officers to find, vet, match and supervise foster homes, forging links between the child, their family and the foster family. 'Matching' a child with a foster parent would involve consultation with colleagues: one colleague might have a family on their caseload which would be best matched with a child on another colleague's caseload. The Boarding Out Regulations

provided a system of making clear the expectations of workers in relation to children, for example, the frequency of social work visits.

Packman noted that the completed application would be considered by a panel comprised of agency representatives, who would make recommendations about suitability. These senior members of the Department would form a shared joint view alongside the investigating officer (the adoption social worker). It was acknowledged that, due to the responsibility of making such crucial decisions, it was better that all workers involved use their expertise and knowledge to make the decision, rather than it being the responsibility of one individual. Growing concerns about the emotive nature of adoption were explored in the Horton Committee Report of 1972. The report acknowledged that some children were never placed for adoption, due to questions of practice rather than law.

The 1976 Adoption Act required local authorities for the first time to establish adoption services in relation to the child to be adopted, the birth parents or guardians of the child and the person(s) wishing to/or who have adopt(ed). By 1984, the implementation of The Adoption Agencies Regulations (1983) (AAR), amended in The Adoption Agencies Regulations (2005), made it a requirement that each agency had an adoption panel, with the emphasis on independence, appointing independent members alongside agency staff and elected members. Many local authorities also introduced fostering panels as good practice; however, it was not until The Fostering Services (England) Regulations of 2011 (FSR) that this became a requirement. Both sets of regulations stipulate the requirements for panel membership (AAR 3, 4, 6 , 8 & FSR 23, 24) and functions (AAR 7, 18, 26, 32, 45–47 & FSR 24, 25, 26, 27, 28), in respect of approving, reviewing and terminating membership.

Adoption and fostering panels are now independent bodies of up to 10 people which meet to consider suitability to adopt or foster a child/children and whether approved adopters/foster carers are suitable to become the adoptive parent(s) or foster carer(s) of a specific child/children, and ultimately make recommendations to the agency decision maker who make the final decision. The panel meetings are held in the agency's offices (or hired venues), usually once or twice a month for either full or half day sessions. The membership of the panel includes an independent Chair, vice-chair, independent members with experience either of adoption or fostering in a professional or personal

capacity, a medical advisor, a legal advisor, a professional advisor and a panel administrator. Panels should include members with a diverse representation of social class, disability, ethnicity, race, religious affiliation, gender and sexual orientation, thereby holding a variety of values and beliefs.

A key function of the panel is to provide independent scrutiny of the agency's work. Panel members have access to reports that they read prior to the panel; on the day of the panel, members discuss the cases and compile questions for the social workers, applicants and approved applicants.

Several studies have been undertaken to investigate aspects of panel workings. Selwyn (1991) researched the assessment process for adopters when adopters were not required to attend the panel. When speaking to adopters, she found that many were critical of the role of the panel, finding the system to be distant and unaccountable. The views of adopters varied as to whether they wanted to represent themselves at the panel, although if there was a negative recommendation applicants wanted their appeal to go to a different panel. Pennie (1993) completed a study which is particularly relevant to this research, as it explored how panel practice could improve and raises the significance of the values of panel members:

> *All too often panels have spent little or no time exploring each other's attitudes and values, and as a consequence the panel can be, or appear to be, inconsistent because which cases get through depends on which panel members attend particular panels and particular meetings. (Pennie, 1993, p. 46)*

By 1992, some agencies had begun to invite applicants to attend the panel. Bingley-Miller and McNeish (1993) reported on a project aimed at inviting applicants to panels to increase consumer participation and to assist panel members to obtain more information than was in the assessment reports. The findings were that, despite the initial concerns about how terrifying the experience would be for adopters, the applicants, assessors and panel members were all positive about the service-users' involvement. Panel members also felt that speaking directly to individuals enabled them to gain a balanced view of applicants.

A study by Hender (1994) found:

> *that panel members had divided views as to whether meeting applicants had led them to change their minds. A number said it helped to confirm or clarify their view ... Others felt that ... it made it difficult to make impartial and dispassionate decisions. (Hender, 1994, p. 48)*

Pepys and Dix (2000) highlight the importance of the Chair's role in ensuring that panel members are well prepared for the panel, not only having read the papers but having identified relevant questions to ask.

O'Sullivan (2004, 2005) focusses on the inputs (reports and responses by attendees), processes (questions, answers and discussions) and outputs (recommendations, minutes and decision of the agency decision-maker) involved in adoption panels, highlighting the importance of the panel having a clear purpose and function. He emphasises the importance of panels having clear inputs in order to produce quality outputs (recommendations). Reporting on the quality assurance process, he notes how the formulation of relevant questions by the panel produced answers that facilitated the panel's recommendation.

He highlights that a key function of the panel is the quality assurance of social workers' reports. However, he stressed that panels' effectiveness could be improved if there were greater clarity by the agency as to their expectations of the panel in terms of their analysing, validating or deciding upon information presented.

The work of Clifton, Horne and Smith (2014) is also relevant to this research in that, in addition to questionnaires, they sampled adoption panel minutes, noting that the latter were not neutral documents but varying in depth and quality. They noted that panel members were more thoughtful when highlighting parental deficits, showing appreciation for birth relatives when such relatives attended the panel. The research also highlighted the considerable power differential between panel members and those attending (particularly non-professionals). The study showed that there was no indication that the panel was less focussed on the child when the birth parents were in attendance, although they were sympathetic and less inclined to think in terms of deficit in relation to birth parents, which is important when exploring issues of value bases in recommendation and decision-making.

A recommendation of the Family Justice Review (Ministry of Justice and Department for Education, 2012) included also in *An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay* (Department for Education, 2012) was that panels should no longer be involved in adoption decisions for children, in an attempt to speed up the process. However, Ofsted in its annual report that year stated, 'the work of the adoption panel was often thorough and comprehensive, where careful and detailed consideration is given to the assessment of children and prospective adopters and matching recommendations give priority to meeting the needs of children.' Its director went on to say that the most common cause for delay was the initial time taken by social workers in deciding that adoption was the right care plan for a child. Despite this counter-argument, the government has continued to hold the view that panels cause delay and are costly. As part of the government's consultation in 2012, a reduction in the size of panels was considered. Those working within the sector have called for the evidence to support such concerns, arguing that panels had sufficient members to enable them to be flexible in convening additional panels when needed. No evidence was found to support the government claims; nevertheless, they have made it clear that they would keep the matter under review. Perhaps not surprisingly, the stocktake of fostering conducted by Narey and Owers (2018) raised the issue of panel efficiency again and was opposed, this time by CoramBAAF. A letter sent from CoramBAAF to Nadhim Zahawi MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families in the Department for Education (March 2018) states:

> *The 'case' for a review of fostering panels is made in a very short paragraph with a single quote from an unnamed 'distinguished commentator'. There is no discussion of the evolution or legal basis of fostering panels. The importance of fostering panels was debated by parliamentarians and the children's sector during the passage of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The government's proposal that local authorities should be able to opt-out of having fostering and adoption panels was widely rejected ... we must conclude that contributors did not raise fostering panels as a significant area of concern. It is difficult … therefore to see how this recommendation originates from this review. (CoramBAAF et al., 2018)*

Chapter 4 of this study explores whether there is any evidence of delay in panel meetings through failure to achieve a quorum as well as the efficiency of the panels observed.

2.2 Theories of thinking

Having provided the context for the emergence and workings of panels, what follows is an exploration of ideas on the creation of thought, as a means of highlighting the contribution made by individuals in panels. Pennie (1993) attaches weight to panel members' attitudes and values, in terms of success and consequences at the panel, noting that outcomes are dependent upon which panel members are in attendance. Additionally, the chapter will consider theories of decision-making, values, beliefs, and morals as well as group processes.

Merriam Webster (no date) defines decision-making as 'the act or process of deciding something, especially within a group of people' while the Cambridge English Dictionary (no date) defines discernment as 'a feature of deciding as the ability to judge people and things well'.

The reader will be familiar with global examples of faulty decision-making: the desire to acquire wealth and power had catastrophic ramifications in relation to the transatlantic slave trade, the holocaust, apartheid, Uganda's order of expulsion and the Cambodian and Rwandan genocides. In recent times, the unwillingness of lenders to lose market share led to the mis-selling of pensions, mortgages, insurance and endowment policies which contributed to financial crises and recessions. Additionally, at a family level, the ever-increasing divorce rates and the increase in the number of children in public care and on child protection plans also highlight the problem of faulty decision-making. This research explores how individual and group decisions impact on others.

Every aspect of our lives involves thinking; our thinking includes both routine, fundamental tasks that we perform unconsciously and more conscious thoughts, relating to, for instance, personal career goals, whether we exercise, whether to go out for a meal with friends, and extending to decisions that affect others, for example, which school our children will attend or who will care for our elderly parents. Although humans are continuously in the act of thinking, whether consciously or unconsciously, in all areas of

their lives, it should not be assumed that the process of decision-making is simple and well thought out. Psychotherapy and psychological studies illustrate that the processes is complicated and complex and that the apparatus for thinking is affected, for good or ill, from birth.

Klein, writing in 1946, explored how the self was determined through a process of splitting: an infant was filled with good and bad fantasies of self and others (Klein, 1975). The infant does not initially have the mechanisms to address these conflicting fantasies but will, eventually, in its bid to survive, need to split the two. When describing the transferring of the negative internal feelings to the object (mother), Klein's 'projective identification' describes the processes by which the self is split off and projected into an object.

Projective Identification is a defence mechanism against both good and bad aspects of the self. When directed towards the good object, it aims to avoid separation, and when directed against the bad object, it seeks to gain control over the object, viewed as a source of danger (Klein, 2012). Adopting this approach allows an exploration of the experiences of panel members when making judgements and recommendations, aiming to understand how panel members project the good and bad aspects of themselves onto those who appear in front of them.

Bion, in 1962, extended Klein's work, stating that these early experiences of having needs met or not met by the mother are the foundations for later processes in relation to mental states and, thus, the capacity to think (K) or not think (-K). Bion developed classifications for thought: '(a) Preconception, this term represents a state of expectation and (b) Conception, that which results when preconception meets with the appropriate sense of impression' (Bion, 1994, p. 91). For Bion, thought pre-exists and thus is primitive (Preconception); however, the capacity to think depends on the emergence of the thinking apparatus, based on the dynamic intersubjective relationship between the baby and the mother (the container).

Bion, in his work on thinking and thought, added that the mother's capacity to take on the child's thoughts is dependent on the baby's ability to find a mental home within the mother. This holding (containing) communication by the mother demonstrates to the child that the mother can respond to and meet their needs. Conversely, the mother may not meet the child's needs. Bion, as a psychologist, was not referring merely to the

mother meeting the practical need for milk, but also to the quality of the emotional relationship between parent and child. When the mother meets the child's needs, the child experiences physical satisfaction but also a sense that they can communicate with someone who understands them. However, where the mother has not received their communication, or the child perceives that their needs have not been met, they experience frustration. The ability to tolerate frustration allows for the development of thought; if frustration cannot be tolerated, the bad internal 'no breast' leads to a psyche that avoids frustration, thus obstructing the development of thought and the capacity to think, leading to 'no thought'. The way in which thought is constructed and applied is important to this study and crucial to the understanding of the extent to which panel members are able to process information about others by setting aside their own experiences, in order to make balanced judgements about individuals' capacity to parent.

Bion, in 1961, further asserted that an individual's competence and skill development is related to early emotional experiences. The essential component for thinking is the linking of emotion to expression and expression to emotion:

> *It is convenient to regard thinking as dependent on the successful outcome of two main mental developments. The first is the development of thoughts. They require an apparatus to cope with them. The second development, therefore, is of the apparatus … thinking has to be called into existence to cope with thoughts. (Bion, 1988, p. 179)*

Baron (1994) asserts that there are three basic types of thinking, those about decisions, beliefs and goals. Thinking is the act of deciding on areas or issues about which we are unsure; to make decisions we need to search for and weigh up information and evidence that will aid us to make a judgement. Our beliefs inform our thinking and our decisions; our decisions strengthen our beliefs and our beliefs should adapt to evidence. However, if our thinking develops our beliefs, what are beliefs? They are the assumptions we have and make about the world, based on what we have seen, heard, experienced through actions and received from a variety of sources. Such ideas (beliefs) influence us and lead to the formation of our values, which express what is essential in our lives.

2.3 Theories on passions, beliefs and values

The philosopher Hume (1711–1776) wrote about false judgement and conclusions affecting actions:

> *Adherence to general rules, which has such a mighty influence on the actions and understanding and can impose on the very senses …. Nothing can undeceive us, not even our senses, which, instead of correcting this false judgment, are often perverted by it, and seem to authorise its errors. (Hume and Mossner, 1985, p. 422)*

> *'Tis certain, that an action, on many occasions, may give rise to false conclusions in others. (Hume and Mossner, 1985, pp. 511–12)*

Bentham (1748–1832) John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) explore through the concept of utilitarianism the pursuit of individual value and the development of group cultural values (Bentham and Stuart Mill, 2000; Stuart Mill, 2007). This concept of morality focusses on the potential for generating happiness for the maximum number of people. Utilitarianism is, thus, a recognised approach to making ethical decisions, especially if actions resulting from decisions are for the good of many. Kohlberg (1927–1987) created a theory on the development of morality (Kohlberg, 1958) adding to Piaget's work on cognitive development. He developed a staged process of moral (and ethical) development in terms of basic problem-solving strategies, highlighting the process of moral maturation, exploring the individual's growth and thinking about what is right and wrong.

It can, therefore, be argued that our values determine how we behave, communicate and relate to others. Our values are derived by the groups and culture to which we belong. Schwartz (1992) developed a theory of basic human values, critically examining the view that values play an essential role in human development and socialisation. He asserts that values are at the core of an individual's self-concept, including religious beliefs and views about others. Schwartz's study covered 82 countries and found that, while there may be differences in the priority and influence given to each value, ten personal values are universal regardless of the individual's culture (Knafo and Schwartz, 2004, 2008). It investigated the acquisition and congruence of values,

identifying the factors that explain why particular values are perceived, accepted or rejected.

Knafo and Schwartz (2008) argued that stereotypical views about the groups to which people belong and other groups' identities derive from family and environmental socialisation. These stereotypes are used to process and interpret the data continually received. Powell (2008) suggests that value-driven components such as demographics, the media, views on big corporations and individual (personal) responsibilities inform personal values and influence views and actions.

Writers including Rest (1994) and Rest and Narvaez (1994) extended the ideas of Kohlberg (1958). Rest argues that the distinct components of morality include sensitivity, reasoning, motivation and implementation and adds that moral behaviour requires four psychological processes to have taken place: moral sensitivity, motivation, character and judgement. This highlights the link between personal values and moral reasoning and the interrelationship between personal values and subsequent behaviour. In terms of this research, it helps examine the values that panel members bring to the panel which may inform their recommendations, the research hypothesis being that values influence thoughts, attitudes, choices and, in turn, the recommendations of the panel. Mashlah (2015, p. 160) observes that 'People attach importance to their values because they are essential parts of the process of … perceiv[ing] things' and that '…. personal values are believed to deter people from doing anything against these personal values' (p. 162).

If values are born out of our beliefs, what happens when values are challenged or threatened? Various studies illustrate that feelings become roused and thinking is affected. Zajonc (1980), like Bion, describes the primary (primitive) processes that affect thinking. We base our interactions on personally held views and evaluations of others and the reasons for their actions. He found no evidence that decisions are cognitive and, therefore, he hypotheses that 'affect' plays a role in the making of many decisions.

Many studies on the workings of panels support the conclusions reached by Clore and Huntsinger (2007) that judgments are less a rational and objective response to the processing and evaluation of information than a reflection of the feelings (affect) invoked. Zajonc (1980) contends that it is not possible to control the sensory experience

invoked, although it may be possible to control the expression of affect. Even when the detail of the issue is forgotten, when invoked, it is hard to forget the feelings roused. At panels this is illustrated when members refer to the fact they feel better about their recommendation having met the foster carer or adopter.

2.4 Decision theory

Abelson and Levi (1985) explored two major models of decision-making – structural and process – which are pertinent for this research as they look at how people make decisions and provide further insight into the psychological processes involved in judgement and choice. Individuals continually weigh up and evaluating information in order to make judgements:

> *In well-defined problems the decision maker must gather and process information about fixed alternatives and make a preferential choice. (Abelson and Levi, 1985, p. 255)*

Of particular relevance to this research is the concept of 'structuring by hypothesis generation', that is, when there is insufficient knowledge of the decision domain, individuals generate hypotheses in an attempt to explain why and how the problem came about and how to solve it. For example, if social workers do not provide sufficient analysis of the problem, this often leads panel members to hypothesise as to how the problem arose and what should be done to manage or alleviate the problem. However, the study highlights that there are constraints to effective recommendation making, including the application of values, ignorance of one's own values, stress, defensive avoidance, wishful thinking, the illusion of control and groupthink. These constraints have the potential to adversely affect the quality of decisions and recommendation making.

Munro's (2008) examination of the descriptive and prescriptive approaches to decision theory and decision-making in child protection is relevant to this study, highlighting the emotive and logical characteristics of decision-making and emphasising the interdependence of intuitive and analytical thinking, the former being more emotionally driven and the latter using more overt cognitive skills. She stresses the importance of a supportive and reflective thinking space for professionals to make sense of and decide

upon solutions, observing, 'People cannot avoid the biases of human reasoning; they can only hope to detect and minimise them' (Munro, 2008, p. 152).

Peterson (2009) explores the concept of rational decision-making, concentrating on descriptive decision theories which explain the observed behaviours of decision-makers as opposed to normative theories which seek to explore the calculations relating to what decision-makers are rationally expected to do.

Resnik (2002) asserts that decision theory is an attempt to explore the decisions of individuals and groups. Decisions involve three components: acts (action or non-action), states (conditions) and outcomes (which are determined by the acts and states), thus involving a choice between two or more options. The certainty of individuals and groups about the outcome(s) of acts will obviously vary. Resnik also looks at social choices and asserts that:

> *A group of individuals has two or more alternative group actions or policies open to adoption. The members of the group have their own preferences concerning the group choice. The problem is to develop a group choice. (Resnik, 2002, p. 177)*

Social scientists and researchers are discovering how real people actually behave in decision-making situations. Heuristics describes the decision-making strategies used to take mental short-cuts in the scrutinising of information and cognitive processes to make decisions. The factors influencing these include past experiences, personal beliefs, cognitive ability and social and economic factors. Decision-making is composite, including behaviours, feelings and biases, which all impact on the process of choice that leads to the decision. Normative decision theories describe how decisions 'should' be made, whereas descriptive theories pertain to 'how' decisions are made.

This thesis explores decision theory, with a focus on rational decisions, rather than right decisions.

> *In many cases it seems impossible to foresee, even in principle, which act is right until the decision has already been made (and even then, it might be impossible to know what would have happened had one decided differently. (Peterson, 2009, p. 5)*

Additionally, Lord, Ross and Lepper (1979) argue that people tend to make judgements based on stereotypes and personal theories rather than data. Once their views or decisions are formulated, despite evidence to the contrary, people tend not to alter them:

> *People who hold strong opinions on complex social issues are likely to examine relevant empirical evidence in a biased manner. They… confirm evidence at face value while subjecting disconfirming evidence to critical evaluation and as a result, draw undue support for their initial position from mixed or random empirical findings. Thus, there is considerable evidence that people tend to interpret subsequent evidence to maintain their initial beliefs. …… this effect may include a propensity to remember the strength of confirming evidence but the weaknesses of disconfirming evidence. To judge confirming evidence as relevant, and reliable but disconfirming evidence as irrelevant and unreliable, and to accept confirming evidence at face value while scrutinising disconfirming evidence, hypercritically. (Lord, Ross and Lepper, 1979, pp. 2098–2099)*

BodenHausen and Wyer Jr, (1985) also found evidence that people use stereotype-based expectancy when processing information about the stereotyped individuals and that, therefore, stereotype-based impressions formed the basis for judgement and decision-making.

Wray and Stone, (2005) explored the differences between making decisions about oneself and others and found that the degree of risk-taking was correlated with societal values and the level of concern about the perceived positive or negative outcomes of the decision. This finding is relevant to the work of panels, as society places great weight on the need to safeguard and protect children. Panels operate within social-care settings; as such, it is important to highlight studies undertaken relating to the recommendation making processes within such settings. Klein (2017) identifies that there is a need to develop expertise and skills by engaging with the information and professionals to create goals that can be evaluated. Case feedback is obtained and collated to help recognise similarities to previous decisions and learn lessons from previous decisions, whether good or bad, for future cases. These points were reinforced by O'Sullivan (2011): decision-makers can prevent 'confirmation' by regularly questioning their assumptions and by seeking out information that casts doubt on those assumptions.

Therefore, social workers can and should be assisted to develop analytical and intuitive reasoning. De Bortoli and Dolan (2015) state that the decision-making process is informed by a combination of professional judgement and empirical elements, which improves cognitive processes.

In addition to the social work research on decision-making cited above, a review of studies on the decision-making of jurors is beneficial, due to the similarities with the panel process. For example, Hastie and Pennington (1992) developed a model to explain the decision-making of juries. The process comprises three steps, the first of which is story construction, based on the information given and personal 'knowledge'. The story's coherence is dependent on whether there is one story or several and the lack of a single, unique story can cause uncertainty. If there is one coherent story, this story and explanation are accepted, and decisions are possible. In the second step, the judge presents the alternative verdicts to the jurors, outlining the legal parameters available. Finally, returning a verdict involves decision-making for the group. The coherence and organisation of the story as recalled by the jurors impacts on the decision-making rather than the legal framework and 'support the claim that stories are the mediating mental structures that lead to decisions in the juror's judgement task' (Pennington and Hastie, 1992, p. 202).

These findings could apply to the complex recommendation making processes of fostering and adoption panels. Panel members formulate stories based on the information presented in the panel papers and the verbal responses of the presenters and can, at times, fail to focus on the legal remit provided by the regulations and guidance. O'Sullivan (2004) observes:

> *The panel performed an important and valuable function ... However, its work could be more effective ... [with] clarity as to whether adoption panels are decision-making groups, in the sense of being recipients of information that the membership analyse, or groups that validate decisions made by others. (p. 50)*

Carlson and Russo (2001) highlight the fact that, as a result of prior beliefs, jurors interpret and evaluate information in a biased way, leading to pre-decisional distortion, and note that they fail to take into consideration the instructions of the judge. Bornstein and Greene (2011) point to the unique nature of the jury system, in that laypersons are

expected to evaluate evidence and come to a collective decision individually. Their study suggests that jurors evaluate the information presented based on personal experience and knowledge; the emotiveness of jurors affects information-processing and decisions. Equally, Bornstein and Miller (2009) found that judges' religion and other background factors influence decision-making. This is significant as, historically, the view has been that judges are dispassionate, basing their decisions on legislation and evidence. An alternative view of the biases of individuals is put forward by Pigott and Foley (1995), who observe that, although there may be differences in memory about the evidence presented, jurors tend to be self-aware and less personally biased during their deliberations, due to the need to publicly articulate their reasons for their views on a case. Jurors are more inclined to change their original views in favour of a majority decision in line with other jurors. Of course, minimising personal bias and pre-decisional distortion may also give rise to 'groupthink'.

2.5 Group theories

As adoption and fostering panels are group decision-making systems, this thesis has focussed on the work of Bion and Janis, as the former, in particular, places weight on the role played by individual processes.

2.5.1 Experiences in groups

In his 1961 research into groups, Bion stated that every group, however casual, meets to do something. The research asserts that the individual's ability to think impacts on their capacity to think within the group and, in turn, on the collective ability of the group to think or decide. Individuals will bring their emotions (thinking/thoughts) to the group, which forms a melting pot of emotions. The group and its culture will be based on the underlying emotional impulses of individuals in the group.

> *… the group can be regarded as an interplay between individual needs, group mentality, and culture. (Bion, 1989, p. 55)*

> *Whatever it may appear to be on the surface, that situation is charged with promotions which exert a powerful, and frequently unobserved, influence on the individual. As a result, his emotions stirred to the detriment of his judgement. The group, accordingly, often wrestle with intellectual problems*

> *that one believes the individual could solve without difficulty in another situation. (Bion, 1989, pp. 39–40)*

He distinguished between a 'workgroup' in which individuals cooperate and focus on the task for which they come together and what he called basic assumption groups. A workgroup is involved in a real or basic task (the primary task) and characterised by a high sense of reality and cooperation among its members.

As will be seen in Chapter 4, panel members desire, at a conscious level, to offer something that they see as valuable to the panel process, as illustrated by Hafsi (1999):

> *People come to groups with the positive preconception that participating in a group will help them to enhance their [academic] knowledge and knowledge about themselves… They come with an idealised representation of the group, the content ... The group is expected to provide them with ... warmth, understanding and friendship. (p. 97)*

However, when under pressure, groups can begin to operate at the unconscious level, becoming closed to external realities and operating as if they were meeting for a different purpose. Bion called this the 'basic assumption group' and identified three types of basic assumption groups (emotional states): dependency (BaD), pairing (BaP) in which the development of the group focusses on the pairing of two members and fight-flight (BaF) in which the group is fighting off or fleeing from an internal or external enemy. Through observations of different panels, the study will explore whether the panel is functioning as a 'workgroup' or as a basic assumption group, with the latter indicating degrees of dysfunctionality. The observations of Chapter 5 illustrate how the panels functioned in relation to the various assumptions.

2.5.2 Groupthink

Groupthink is said to occur when a group makes decisions, some of which are faulty, because pressure within the group leads to a deterioration in functioning.

Janis (1982) proposes that groupthink is:

> *A mode of thinking people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, where the group members' striving for unanimity*

> *override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action….mental efficiency, reality testing and moral judgment. (p. 9)*

Inasmuch as individual freedom of expression becomes less important than group cohesiveness:

> *a characteristic appears to be, remaining loyal to the group by sticking with decisions to which the group has committed itself, even when the policy is working badly … members consider loyalty to the group the highest form of morality. (Janis, 1982, p. 11)*

> *a group whose members have properly defined roles, with traditions and standing operating procedures that facilitate critical inquiry, is probably capable of making better decisions than any individual in the group who works on the problem alone. And yet the advantage of having decisions made by groups are often lost because of psychological pressures which arise when the members work closely together, share the same values, and above all face a crisis in which everyone is subject to stresses that generate a strong need for affiliation. (Janis, 1982, pp. 12–13)*

Janis identified symptoms of groupthink as over-estimation of the group's power and morality, an illusion of invulnerability, closed-mindedness and stereotypical views of non-group members, discounting warnings or information that may lead to the members reconsidering assumptions. In such groups, there is pressure to be uniform and to self-censor members who express dissenting views; individuals within the group guard against any conflicting information coming into the group and hence create a shared illusion of unanimity. Baron (1994) adds to Janis's work by stating that irrational and biased thinking is evident in a closed group.

Janis also considered steps to take to avoid groupthink, such as recommending that everyone in the group evaluate ideas critically and examine all alternatives, allowing a second-chance process or extra time to be devoted to the issue, before finalising decisions. He also asserts that group meetings should be chaired periodically by a different facilitator or leader. The impartiality of the leader is crucial, requiring them to conceal their opinions from the outset. Consideration should be given to using a small-team approach from time to time, with members working in pairs or threes. Another

approach would be to allow colleagues who are not in the main group to participate in discussions periodically, so that the group can gain the perspective of an 'outsider'. Other options include consulting an outside expert, who could observe the group in action or, at each meeting, randomly selecting a group member to act as 'devil's advocate'. Finally, the group should periodically spend time considering how well it is functioning by exploring feedback from others. Baron states:

> *True active open-mindedness shows itself only after some tentative commitment to one side has been made. Those who still seek out the other side before jumping to a conclusion are the real actively open-minded thinkers. (Baron, 1994, p. 35)*

2.6 Chapter summary

The literature review has taken the reader sequentially through the theories and literature relevant to the study, focussing on thought-creation, formation of beliefs and values, and the impact of cognitive and emotion-driven recommendation making as individuals and as part of a group.

The studies mentioned above, on both juries and adoption and fostering panels, highlight the importance of thorough preparation on the part of panel members in reading paperwork and identifying relevant questions, and the need for training and support that will help in the making of recommendations, specifically in relation to the assumptions and prior thoughts and values that individuals bring to their recommendation-making.

The theories identified enable an understanding of how values and beliefs inform individual and group thinking. The notion of 'good' decision-making needs to be reflected upon in order to strive for consistency in recommendation-making, as individuals recognise the power of decisions to do good or harm.

The following chapter moves on to discuss the methodology used to investigate how and why personal biographies affect role occupancy and effectiveness in a group recommendation-making environment.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction: constructivism/interpretivism

This chapter presents an overview of the methods used to undertake the study. The key assumption of the research framework is based on a constructivist epistemology, which challenges the objectivist perspective that there is one external truth (Crotty 1998) (Table 3.1). Fisher (1991) believes that personalities and behaviours are contingent upon how each of us attributes meaning to events. He goes on to say, constructivism enables social workers to avoid issues of whether someone is right or wrong, correct or incorrect but, instead, to examine the consequences of holding a given position. In modern-day social work, where there are limited resources and where social workers are not encouraged to think independently, agencies and their policies often conflict with the principle of client self-determination. From a constructivist perspective, all sets of interest are valid, but this does not mean that all interests are supported. Fisher adds that, when considering clients self-determination, social workers must see themselves as active rather than passive agents of social policy.

Table 3-1 Research framework

Purpose of the research	To explore the underlying thinking (understanding and interpretation) of panel members when arriving at their recommendations on the suitability/approval of foster carers/adopters and matches
Paradigm (belief system)	The idea that there is no single reality of truth because individuals create reality by constructing it in their minds. Therefore, reality is subjective rather than objective and absolute. Individuals interpret and construct reality based on their experience and interactions with others and the environment. *'Nothing is self-evident. Nothing is given. Everything is constructed' (Bachelard and McAllester Jones, 2002, p. 25)*

	Put differently, constructivism is the generation of one's own meaning through subjectivity, learning by constructing, creating, inventing and developing one's own knowledge. According to Jean Piaget (1986 – 1980) 'every method of recording experience … presupposes an intellectual activity partaking of the construction of the external reality received by the subject' (Piaget, 1965, p. 362). *'The action ceased to be simple in order to introduce the beginning of differentiation between means and ends, and the simulation of things to the south becomes construction of relationships between things.' (Piaget, 1965, p. 173)* Piaget goes on to say that individuals construct new knowledge from their experiences through the process of accommodation and simulation; that is, when experience contradicts internal representation, individuals either change their perceptions or continue to act on their expectations. Individuals learn either from their own experience of failure or from other failures.
Ontology	The research and the subjects embrace different realities as there are multiple realities, which are constructed through our different lived experiences and interactions with others. Through inter-subjectivity, meaning is developed experientially and socially. The constructivist/interpretivist approach is best placed to explain why individuals receive and interpret the same situation differently, noting that things become real when constructed in the mind.
Epistemology	As a theory of knowledge, constructivism is a meaning-making theory. Reality must be interpreted and discovered

	by exploring the underlying meaning of events. That is, knowledge is not found, but is constructed and developed through the relationship and interaction between the researcher and the participants. Meaning and subjectivity are explored and developed by the researcher through interviewing and observing the participants. Corroborating any findings with the use of direct quotes, the research interacts with and in the data collection.
Theoretical perspective	Interpretivism - the way the individual makes sense of the material and how they receive the material. Individuals construct new understanding, using current or prior knowledge that, in turn, influences new knowledge. Learning is active rather than passive, the act of negotiating to understand in light of what is being experienced.
Methodology	Narrative Research - meaning emerges through the collection and analysis of the data – an inductive process, e.g. BNIM Interpretive panels. *'.... refers to any study that uses or analyses narrative materials ... It can be the object of the research or a means for study of another question'. (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998, p. 2)*
Method procedures/strategy to analyse and conduct the research	Interviews (using BNIM model) Panel observations Documents (panel minutes)

3.2 Choice of method

Any method chosen to conduct research and thus answer research questions must generate the right type of data and be both rigorous and transparent. For this study into the complexity of recommendation-making, narrative, as described by Wengraf (2004)

was used, adopting both a current and historical perspective, leading to an understanding of the personal experiences, life-histories and lived situations of the research participants.

It would be remiss to focus on the specifics of the BNIM model without positioning the model within the broader context of other narrative methodology, processes and narrative researchers. The telling of stories dates back centuries and is part of most civilisations.

The use of narrative as a means of conducting research emerged in the twentieth century. The use of biographical research within an interpretative paradigm was developed by the Chicago School of Sociology. Narratology, the study of narrative, was invented by Tzvetoan Todorov in 1969. Todorov (1939–2017), a French historian, philosopher and sociologist built on the work of Vladimir Propp (1895–1970), a Soviet folklorist and scholar. Bruner (1993) developed a theory of narrative as a construction of reality:

> *Folk psychology is about human agents doing things on the basis of their beliefs and desires, striving for goals, meeting obstacles. (Bruner, 1993, pp. 42–43)*

> *People narrate their experience of the world and their own role in it. (Bruner, 1993, p. 115)*

From the 1990s, researchers began to develop techniques for conducting narrative research; Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal (2004) developed some useful principles of data analysis and biographical case reconstruction. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) highlight the benefits of narrative as an epistemology and method of capturing the subject(s) with their three-dimensional approach: time, space/situation and relationships (including that with the researcher). The work of Wengraf (2004) on BNIM, which is the methodology used for this study, is discussed in detail below. The approach of Riessman (2008) lends itself to the analysis of narrative and identifies three options for analysing the data: structural analysis, dialogue and performance analysis, and thematic analysis. Narrative research is not without its problems or critics, given that individuals narrate their stories and experiences in different ways at different times.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Interviews

Qualitative researchers conduct individual interviews to explore the interviewee's perspective.

Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) is a research method that has been in use for more than 20 years and is one form of narrative interviewing. It was adopted for the study for its narrative and interpretive standpoint, along with Riessman's (2008) approach to thematic analysis, with its emphasis on the content of 'what' is said more than 'how' it is said; the 'told' rather than the 'telling'.

As stated earlier, narrative is a means by which individuals give a written or spoken account of themselves, and this study will explore the distinction between 'life as narrated' and 'life as lived' (Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal, 2004). As narrative analysis begins with the storyteller, it can be considered the 'meaning-making' process, focussing on the 'person' rather than the process and, in so doing, providing insight into how others interpret the world. The study aims to consider each narrative individually and collectively through cross-case theorisation, by exploring the similarities and differences between them and, thus, identifying themes. The study will explore 'how narrative analysis takes us much further into the private world … help[ing to] think what the intervention represents' (Riley and Hawe, 2005, p. 233).

BNIM is one form of narrative that explores and interprets the meaning of how and why individuals tell their stories, in the ways they do. The BNIM model has two distinct components: an interview technique and an analytical strategy. While both parts are structured, it is the latter which proves to be more technical and process driven.

BNIM as an interview technique:

BNIM is a type of semi-structured interview which allows participants to recount their story. The technique begins with Sub-session 1 (SS1): a Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative (SQUIN) (Wengraf, 2004). The open question seeks to elicit a narrative from the participant(s), similar to Hollway and Jefferson's (2013) application of free association. This allows participants to speak freely, saying what they want. The

22 interviews, conducted in SS1, varied in length from 13 minutes to 2 hours, which reflects how different participants made sense of 'the story of your life'.

Below is the SQUIN used for the research:

> *As you know, I am researching the lives of people who are part of adoption and fostering panels. So, can you tell me the story of your life, including being a member of Panel, up to now all those events and experiences that are important to you personally. Start wherever you like, I won't interrupt, I will just be taking some notes in case I have any further questions for after you've finished telling me about it all.*

Sub-session 2 (SS2) involves the researcher taking a few minutes at the end of SS1 to go through their 'field notes', identifying areas/questions to follow up from SS1 to obtain more in-depth data about Particular Incident Narratives (PINS) that the participant mentioned. Again, a set technique is used, with the researcher using specific words and phrases to elicit these PINS.

The SS2 allows the researcher to probe deeper, exploring PINS. There is a structure and format to the wording of any questions, mirroring the participant's words from SS1, allowing interviewees to reflect upon the account or story shared. The length of the SS2 varied from 1 to 2 ½ hours. The researcher then begins the process of transcribing SS1 and SS2, a long and arduous task which produces reams of data. As the intensity of concentration needed to conduct BNIM interviews can be draining, both during and for some time after, re-reading the transcripts alongside the field notes aids supervision and undertaking the ten-stage analytical process.

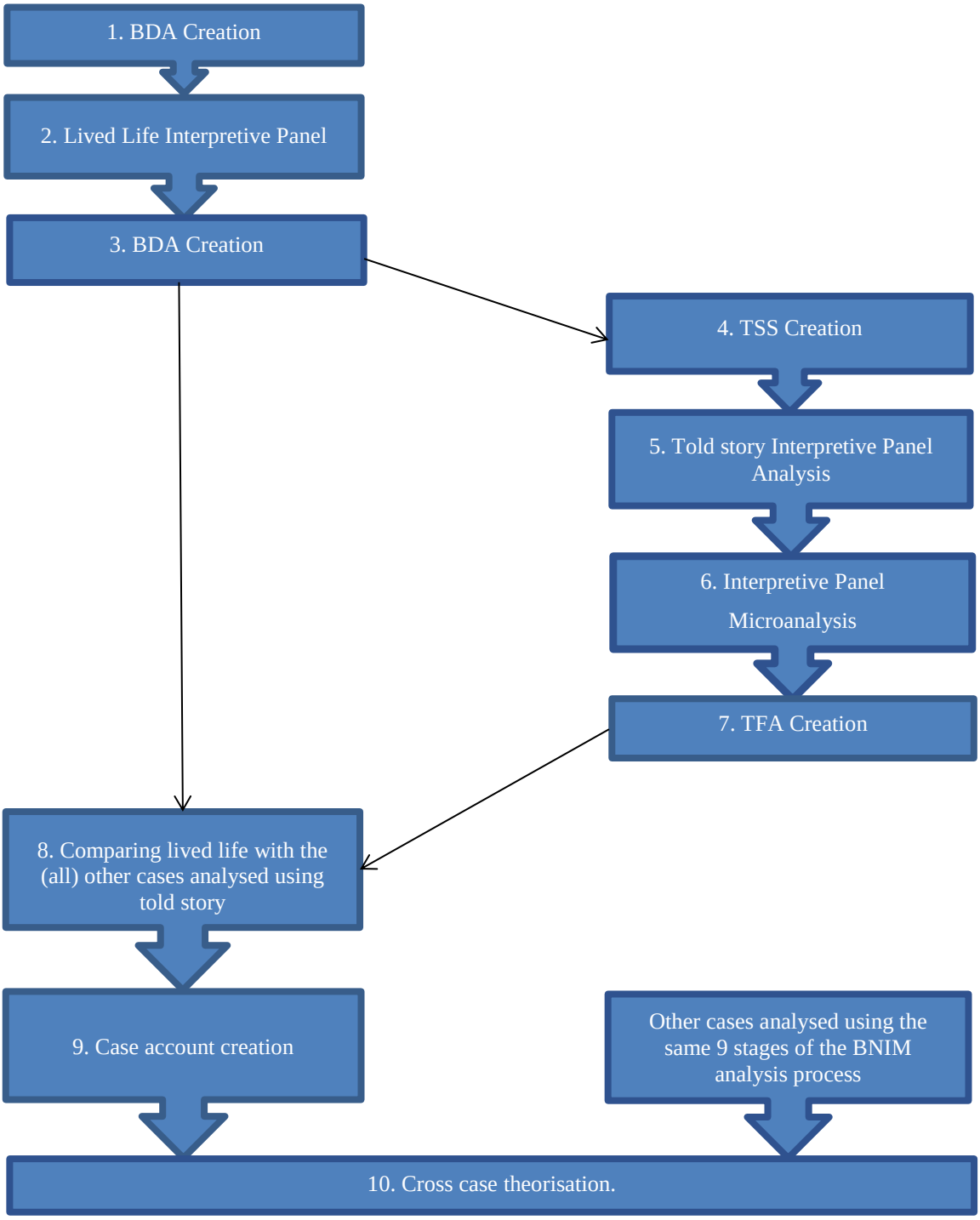
As mentioned above, the model allows for the addition of a third sub-session: outside of the formal interview process, the researcher can contact the participant/interviewee to request additional information. For the study, SS3 was used to contact the nine interviewees/participants to verify the chronologies that the researcher had compiled; four of the participants did not respond.

BNIM as analysis:

The structure of BNIM analysis was both a blessing and a curse: a blessing in that the clear processes gave a structure which was helpful, but a curse because the techniques

and processes illustrated in Wengraf's (2001) Qualitative Research Methods and the BNIM Short Guides can be difficult to follow, despite attending two five-day training sessions run by Wengraf before submitting the research proposal and again after undertaking the interviews as well as several one-to-one physical and telephone support sessions. Wengraf explains that students can lose their understanding if they don't use the model.

Figure 3-1 Illustration of the ten stages of the BNIM analytical process



The diagram simplifies the process of case reconstruction showing the two threads of the case history: the living of the lived life with any patterns, probing into how and why the interviewee lived their life in a certain way; and the telling of the told story with its patterns and scrutiny of what influenced the way the story was revealed during the interview. The simplicity of the diagram belies the amount of work that goes into this process of analysis, as explained below.

1. Biographical Data Chronology (BDC) creation – it is the task of the researcher to go through SS1 and SS2 identifying the facts of the story told in terms of situations and experiences in chronological order. Where possible, in SS3, interviewees are asked to review what has been compiled and the researcher chronologically puts the data into the 'chunks' needed for stage 2.
2. Interpretive panel analysis – the interpretive panels are important to the BNIM analysis process. Each panel should ideally consist of 5 to 6 people who are similar (on one panel) and dissimilar (on the other panel) to the interviewee. For this study, the panels were representative in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. Each panel lasted approximately 2 ½ to 3 hours. A variety of methods were used to recruit panel members, from email recruitment to discussions with supervisors and two panels (BDA and TFA) were held for each interviewee. The panels were co-facilitated with a colleague who co-scribed. The benefit of having a supporter was considerable and necessary, to allow thinking space and, at times, to address issues of physical and mental exhaustion from having to deal with panel members' intrigue and desires to know what happened to each interviewee, as the researcher held the 'secret' of the full narrative.
   These 'future-blind' panels are presented with the chronology 'chunk by chuck'. The panel members hypothesise on the data chunks to develop alternative hypotheses to that of the researcher. Riessman (1993) stresses that the representation of the narrative is ambiguous, due to the role played by the researcher and the researcher's interpretation of the data. The panel's input ensures there is more than the researcher's interpretation alone. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) emphasise the importance of checking the researcher's subjectivity and misinterpretation of the data:

... researcher and researched as anxious, defended subjects, whose mental boundaries are porous where unconscious material is concerned. This

means that both will be subject to projections and introjections of ideas and feelings coming from the other. It also means that the impressions that we have about each other are not derived simply from the 'real' relationship, but what we say and do in the interaction will be mediated by internal fantasies that derived from our histories of significant relationships. (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, p. 42)

3. As individuals, panel members are encouraged to create different meanings for the data presented to them. Chunks were presented, allowing the panel to devise experiencing, structural and following hypotheses on each interviewee. The study highlighted how individual panel members generated both similar and often different thoughts about the narrator (the interviewee). An example of this can be seen in the case of RM (Appendix 5): two chunks identified her as being a civil servant. The panel hypothesis was that she was a spy; this notion continued for a long time without the panel being able to think differently. Each hypothesis was noted and viewed as credible until it was supported or refuted, as the story unravelled in subsequent 'chunks'. At the end of the allotted panel time, panel members write their individual analysis of the case.

   BDA creation: armed with information from the panel, notes and the chunk-by-chunk analysis, the researcher formulates a summary of the pattern of the lived life and is then able to complete the first column of the three-column summary.

Steps 4–7 mirror points 1–3 above, capturing the told story. The researcher goes through the transcript of the narrative using the procedure known as DARNE, identifying when there is a change in the way the story is told, utilising a text sort. The Text Structure Sequentialisation is explained below:

- D = description
- A = argumentation
- R = report
- N = narrative
- E = evaluation

The data gathered in the text sort/TSS, is placed in 'chunks' and used in the second of the interpretive panels, again to formulate and explore hypotheses

relating to how the story was told, using the three types of hypotheses mentioned above.

Despite all the above the benefit of the panel(s) cannot be underestimated in the BNIM analytical process (Wengraf 2008) as a whole and for the research study:

> The principle that there should be a panel … counter-hypothesing is crucial to all work … you will need to move beyond the hypothesis which your own intuition and common-sense will normally provide and restrict you. (Wengraf, 2004, p. 258)

The Telly Flow Analysis emerges from the information gathered from the interpretive panels alongside the researcher's summary notes. The researcher is then able to complete the third column of the three-column summary.

8. The researcher returns to the transcript of the interview to identify the subjectivity of the interviewee in statements of earlier 'states of mind' made by the interviewee. Known as the Successive Stages of Subjectivity (SSS), the model emphasises the need to examine the past subjectivity of the storyteller to understand the case history. The researcher adds the information to the middle column, completing the three-column table. (See Appendix 5 for an example of a 3-column summary).

9. Case account – the results of the analysis of the 'lived life' and the telling of the 'told story'. Columns 1 and 2, along with the original transcript, are used to create the case account and provide a description of how the case history has evolved, also known as the History of the Case Evolution (HCE).

10. Cross-case theorisation – Stages 1 to 9 should be completed for all cases that form part of the study, enabling cross-case comparison. Narrative research does not attempt to compare cases, but to make generalisations based on individual narratives.

Similarities and differences in the case evolutions

What are the similarities between, for example, a pair of cases? How do these similarities differentiate these cases from others in the study? In which way does one case evolve differently from the other(s). The researcher reflects on these comparisons, which will lead to the emergence of a more inductive 'comparative theory'.

Changing subjectivities and situation:

The subjective statements from the transcripts in the earlier analysis stages 1 to 9 are used by the researcher to explore how the story could have been told or experienced by the interviewee. Examples include OO, FF and YP describing their experience of racism and being bullied and YP and FF relating their views of being an Asian woman, both exposed to discrimination but finding their niche as professionals.

In total, I undertook 22 BNIM interviews and one historical gathering interview (see Chapter 4 Data – Interviews and Appendix 6).

Figure 3-2 Panel members selected for the study

The pie charts below illustrate the profile of the 22 interviewees in terms of age, ethnicity, gender and occupation, as well as the type of Agency they sit on and the location where they sat as panel members.

Figure 3-3 Gender of interviewees

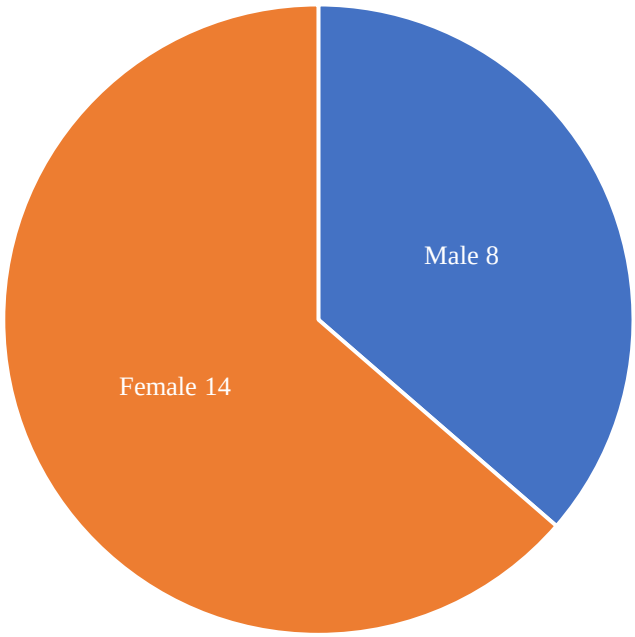


Figure 3-4 Age of interviewees

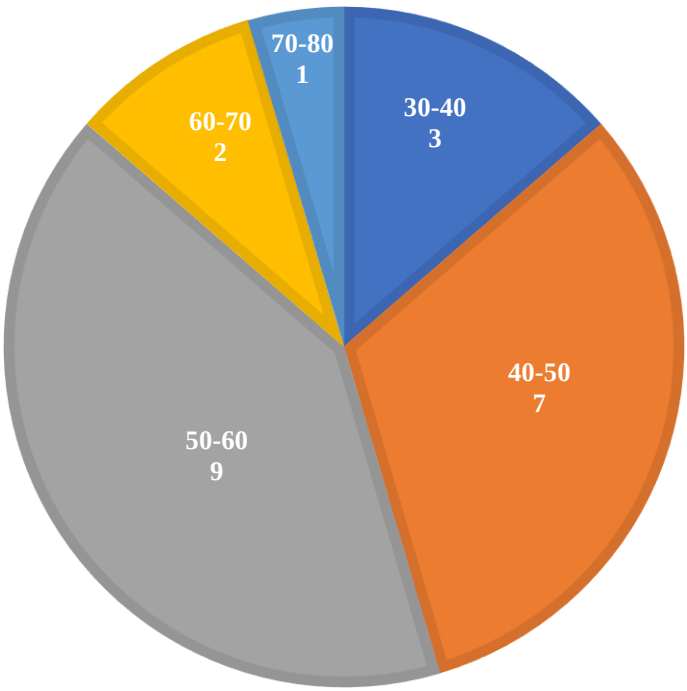


Figure 3-5 Occupations of interviewees

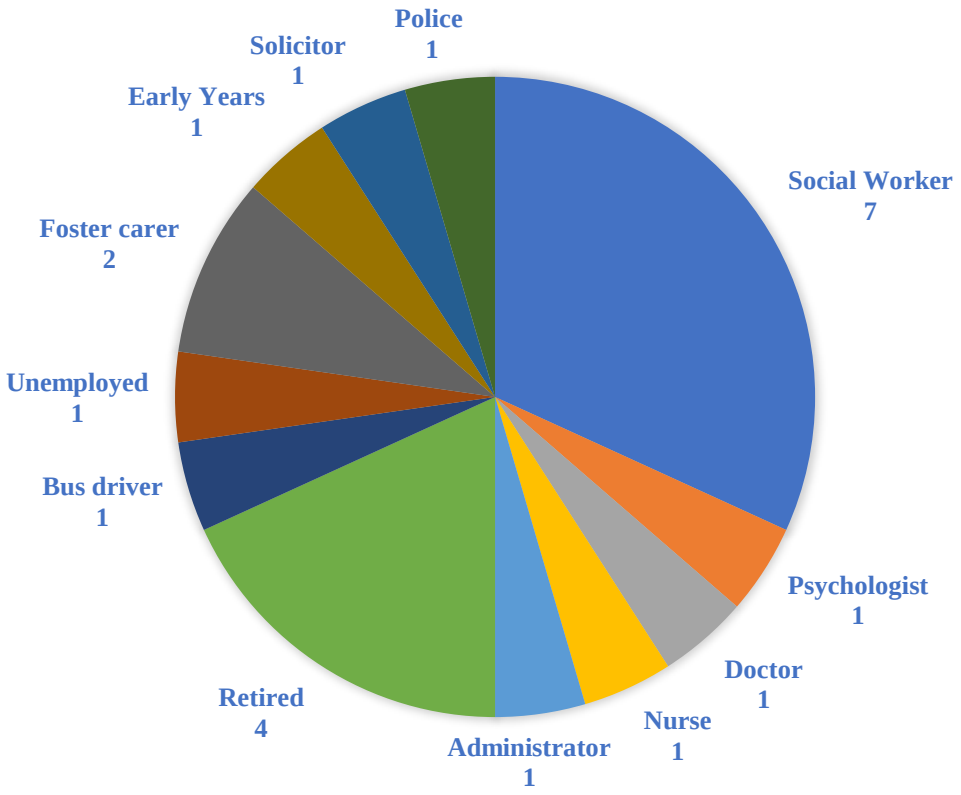


Figure 3-6 Ethnicity of interviewees

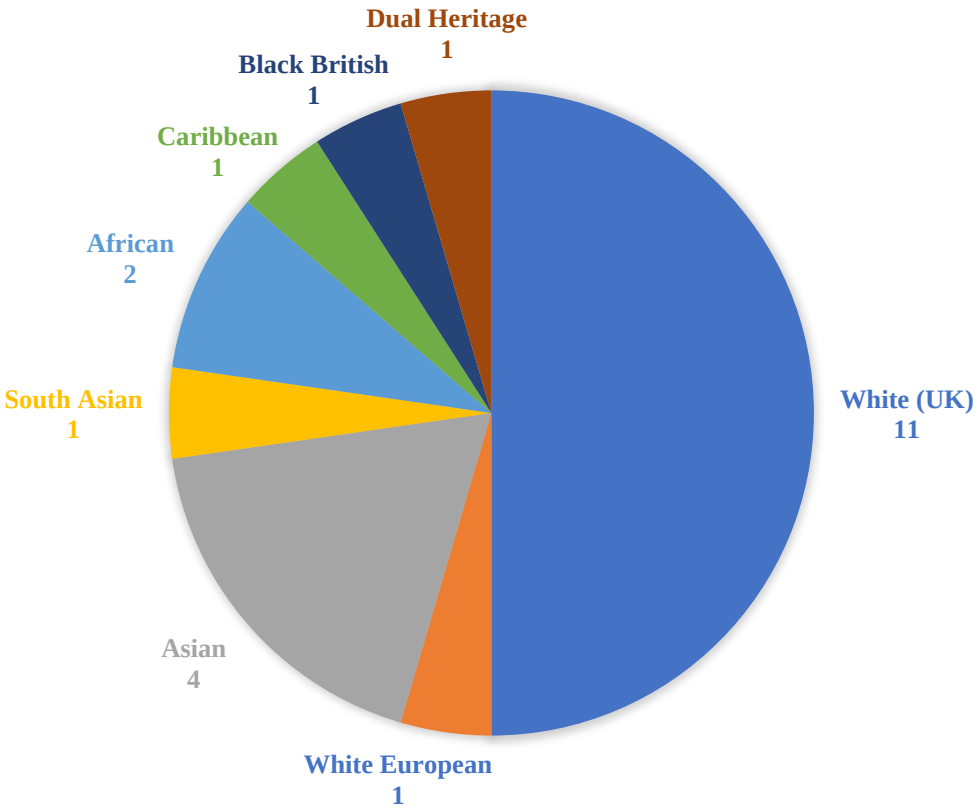


Figure 3-7 Region where interviewees are panel members

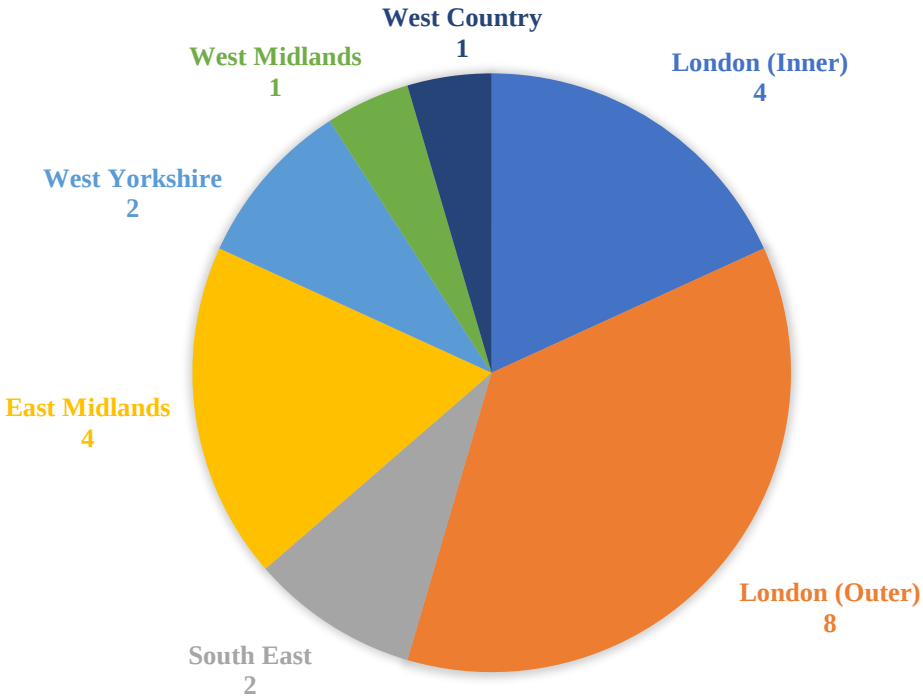
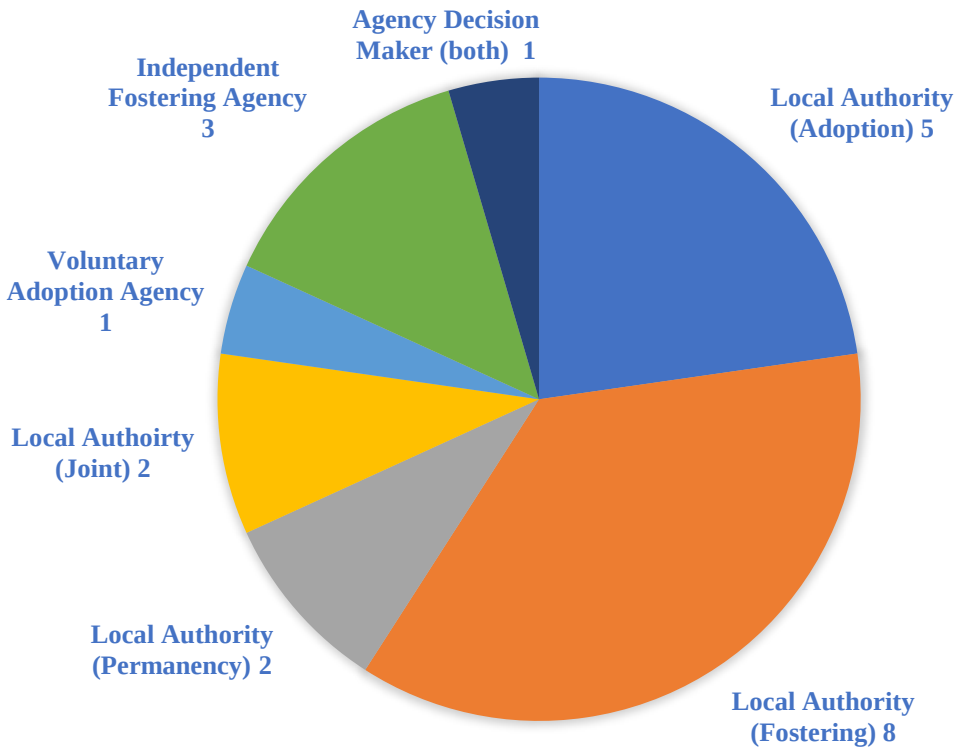


Figure 3-8 Type of panel that interviewees sit on



3.3.2 Panel observations

Having decided upon the method to be used to 'find out', the collection stage began as an 'insider', as I am a Panel Chair. I contacted agencies both known and unknown to me to explore their willingness to be involved in the study. The aim was to observe panels I had not chaired, or agencies with whom I had no prior working relationship. This was challenging to organise, due to the concerns and possible suspicion of some agencies as to my motivation for wanting to observe and what would done with the findings.

The challenges were varied: one local authority had agreed to take part in the study through its ethics process; however, on the day of the observation, the Chair and Advisor objected to the observation, so another agency had to be identified. There were challenges in the process: despite informing all agencies of the intent to audio-record the observation, two panels did not consent to being recorded on the day of the observation. In a practical challenge, an Independent Fostering Agency hundreds of miles away held an evening panel, requiring me to take an overnight train home. The above examples illustrate the need to observe and gather information 'where the participant(s), are in terms of time and space' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

In total, eight agencies and fifteen panels were observed; in all but one agency two panels were observed.

Pie charts below depict the panels observed by type and region of the country.

Figure 3-9 Region where panel observations occurred

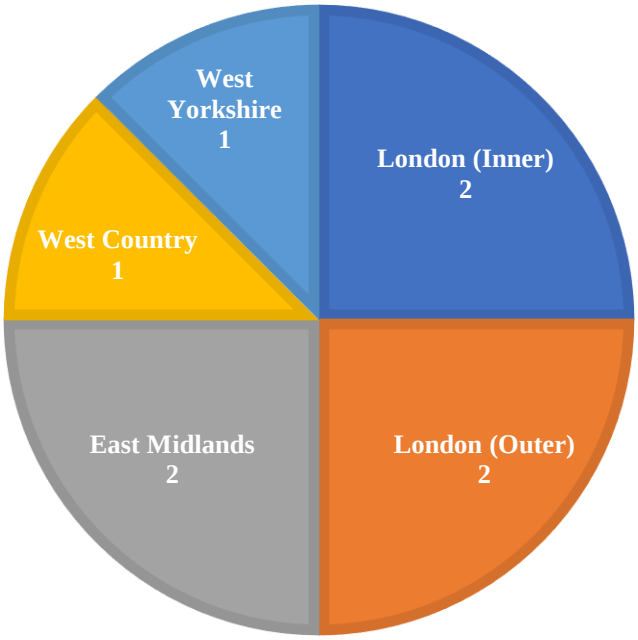
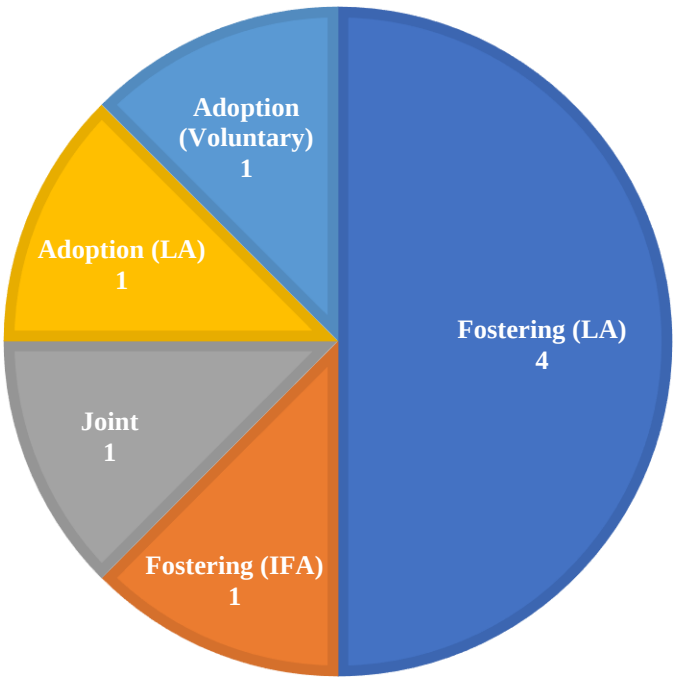


Figure 3-10 Agencies observed by type



3.3.3 Documentation – panel minutes

Minutes were requested from all the panels to obtain documentary evidence of the meeting and provide a means of obtaining direct quotes whilst adhering to the need for confidentiality. It is not usual for observers to receive copies of the minutes as they play no part in the recommendation-making process and are not required to comment on the accuracy of the minutes.

The majority of panels sat for over four hours, so the minutes assisted in verifying the accuracy of the observation fieldnotes.

The quality and length of the minutes varied from panel to panel. They highlighted the competency and skill base of the panel administrators, in terms not only of their ability to record what was said but also their understanding of the work of the panel. The accuracy of the records of the meeting assists the Agency Decision Maker in making their decision(s).

3.4 Ethical issues

1. Anonymity – The importance of protecting the anonymity of the research participants needs to be emphasised. A coding system was also adopted within BNIM to denote an interviewee, e.g. BNIM_017_S_M_50-60. The number is chronologically based on the order of the interview; the first letter identifies the region they come from, their gender is denoted by the letters M or F and the next two numbers give their age bracket. For all the panels observed, panel papers were provided on the day; therefore, there were no concerns about confidentiality or prior knowledge of the cases being presented. The research agencies were protected by the use of a coding system, e.g. OBS_002_L_A(July), where OBS denotes a panel observed. The number represents the order in which the observations took place; the first letter identifies the panel region and the final letter the type of Panel: A denotes adoption; F denotes fostering; J denotes joint and I denotes independent. Finally, the month of the observation is placed in brackets. Whilst the minutes assisted the triangulation of the study data: any information taken from the minutes was anonymised and assigned to the panel or interview, using its code. The minutes were kept secure and only used for the research study.

2. Consent –All interviewees, agencies, panel members, presenters and applicants had access to an information leaflet about the research and, if they were happy to be observed, they needed to sign a consent form. Everyone seemed aware of the research, had been sent the consent forms and either signed them in advance or on the day. At almost all panels, the presenting social workers and those attending appeared to have been told about the research. Consent forms were generally given and signed on the day, before entering the panel.

3. Professional Competence – in all but one agency the entire panel was observed. At that panel, without consulting with others, the Chair and Advisor decided that the case was 'too sensitive' to have an observer present.

4. Expertise' – – on a number of occasions the Chairs of the panel, knowing that I am an 'experienced Chair' and asked my advice and view on cases. Panel members also found it challenging to respect the observer role, drawing me into discussions both generally and specifically about the cases presented.

5. Audio-recording – Interviewees and panel members were informed that the interviews and panels would be audio-recorded, thereafter stored in a safe place and used solely for the research and, eventually, disposed of safely. . As mentioned, all but two panels agreed to this; in those panels where it was agreed, the individuals signed consent forms.

6. Emotional well-being – Care was taken to respect individual participants' rights, dignity and diversity. While participants consented to be interviewed, due to the BNIM model used, there was no list of prescribed questions. The interviewee, therefore, did not come to the meeting prepared, and the interviewer did not know what would be shared. Social-work skills assisted in managing the non-verbal cues and the emotions of some interviewees.

7. Safety – Allowing sufficient time for the interviews was key, as well as conducting them in a suitable and safe environment in order to remain sensitive to the information shared, conscious of the potential need to provide emotional support during the interview if needed or to signpost interviewees to sources of help. Some interviewees described the interview as cathartic or similar to a therapeutic session.

8. Misrepresentation - undertaking qualitative research and, specifically, using an interpretive model means that the version of 'truth' is a construct of the researcher. In recording a participant's narrative, strenuous efforts need to be made in the 'retelling' of the story to ensure that it resembles, as far as possible, the teller's story. The BNIM model facilitates the verification of the information; however, it is still possible that the participants may not 'see' themselves in what is presented by the researcher.

3.5 Sampling

As interviews were intended to be the primary data source for the research, one person was selected from each of the roles identified in CoramBAAF's publication *Effective Fostering and Adoption Panels*. Interviewees were recruited by word of mouth and flyers. The response was overwhelming, and several people had to be turned down as research participants; however, some contributed through participation on the BNIM Interpretive panels.

There was an excess of data, given the 22 interviews, 15 observations and 18 BNIM panels, and this excess was the subject of many doctoral supervisory discussions. The study sample was narrowed to those interviewees that were also observed, reducing the sample to eight interviewees, plus a ninth who was not observed, as Wengraf suggests, for cross-case theorisation. This sample selection led to a representative group in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, occupation, type and region of the panel.

3.6 Triangulation

The narrative research model poses some difficulties in validating findings through cross-verification; the study recognises that this may impact on what can be drawn from any findings.

Denzin (1973, p. 301) identifies four types of triangulation: investigator, methodological/data, source and theory. The study did not allow for investigator or theory triangulation to be conducted – as the research is for a Professional Doctorate, there are not multiple researchers, nor the time to consider two potential theories: case study or narrative. The study used a combination of methodological/data triangulation – gathering data from interviews, panel observations and documentary analysis of the

panel minutes, as well as source triangulation – gathering data in different settings, for example, geographical location, participants' homes, and various workplace settings, weekdays or weekends. Panels took place at different times, some during regular working hours and some in the evening. Additionally, the participants were of different sexual orientations, races, ages, classes and genders. Added to this, the research covered several regions of England. The credibility of the study's findings is based on this triangulation which enabled a fuller understanding of all the data.

3.7 Reflexivity

The act of undertaking research means that influences occur that can generate errors or bias in the data produced. Rosenthal (1966) wrote about the 'experimenter effect' which can be interactional or non-interactional. The former relates to what is observed by the researcher, such as the observer missing, not seeing or inaccurately recording elements. When interacting, the researcher may bring to the research their psychological and social characteristics; for a social worker, it is possible that an understanding of trauma may lead to an overly sympathetic view of an interviewee. The 'expectancy' effect is made evident by non-verbal communication and facial expressions, which could be observed by the interviewee, such as, in this study, in the long interview with SL which, on reflection, could have been due to nervousness about conducting the first interview or to genuine interest in SL's fascinating narrative.

The personal thoughts and professional experiences that led to this research study and the attempt to make conscious the bias, values and experiences brought to the study are shared in Appendix 3 Personal inspiration for postgraduate study. Strauss and Corbin (1998) highlight that researchers often have life experiences similar to those of their participants which are useful to draw upon, as these give insight and possible meaning to what the participants are describing. Qualitative researchers need sensitivity rather than objectivity; they need to be insightful, attuned to the relevant issues, events and data, whilst being aware of self (subjectivity) as the data is interpreted. Researchers must always be conscious that personal and professional experience can either enhance or hinder sensitivity. Prior knowledge can assist the researcher in realising the significance of data but can also lead to the researcher forcing ideas on the data; as Dey (1999, p. 251) noted 'There is a difference between an open mind and an empty head'.

The paper *Race and Reflexivity* (Emirbayer and Desmond, 2012) makes some important observations relevant to this study:

> *Our investigation into race and reflexivity is meant here to serve as a response to challenges arising more generally, whether in respect to race itself or other principle of division such as gender, class, religion or sexuality… what the vast majority of thinkers typically have understood as reflexivity has been the exercise of recognising how aspects of one's identity or social location can affect one's vision of the social world. (p. 577)*

Every individual holds beliefs that are instilled into them, which underpin their thinking and, in turn, inform philosophical assumptions which influence the framework and theories used to interpret the world:

> *In presenting the original value theory, I defined basic values as trans-situational goals, varying in importance, which serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or group. (Schwartz, 2017, p. 52)*

In research, this is the axiology: the role of ethics and values. Acknowledging the value-laden position of being an 'insider' is important in relation to the personal values and subjectivity brought to the meaning of the study and research findings:

> *Needless to say, behind each sociological question inevitably stands a whole host of background questions. When sociologists attempt, without questioning their questions, to address such issues, they implicitly affirm the legitimacy of these threads of enquiry. (Emirbayer and Desmond, 2012, p. 579)*

3.8 Chapter summary

The chapter has summarised the philosophical, methodological and ethical basis of the research and presented the theoretical framework of constructivist interpretivism which asserts that individuals construct and interpret meaning from interactions with others; what is known cannot be unknown but should be owned and acknowledged. Emphasising the complex processes involved in thinking, the chapter acknowledges that the interviewees bring to the study their own interpretations of the meaning of their

lives and the panel role. Likewise, the researcher with or without 'insider' knowledge brings their own biases and subjectivity to the data:

> *A reflexive stance informs how the researcher conducts his or her research, relates to the research participants, and represents them in written reports. (Charmaz, 2006, p. 158).*

The chapter has highlighted why and how the data for the study has been collated and analysed and has described the use of BNIM, with its use of interpretive panels. Chapter 4 presents the restorying of the nine narrative interviews, incorporating the interviewees' accounts, the interpretative panel's hypotheses and the researcher's reflections, in order to reflect upon the conscious and unconscious emotional states aroused in undertaking the panel task.

4 Narratives: Aspects of the self brought to panel

4.1 Introduction

Panels were first introduced by the 1983 changes to the adoption regulations, implemented in 1984, which required agencies to have an adoption panel. This was followed in 1989 by the requirement to have a fostering panel, implemented in 1990. Over the years, various sets of guidance and regulations have followed that amend or enhance the expectations of panel constitution and function.

The Adoption Agencies Regulations of 2005 (Section 3 (1) 5) state that an Agency must establish an adoption panel. These regulations were amended by the Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations of 2011 which define the constitution of the adoption panel, with Section 3 (1) a and b outlining the professional advisors, and Section 4 (1) and (2) the appointment of other panel members. The Adoption National Minimum Standards (Department of Health, 2003) Standard 11.1 defines membership constitution, the qualities and experience of members and the training they should receive to undertake the task.

The Statutory Guidance on Adoption (AAR 3) 1.27 states:

> *Each agency must maintain a list of persons whom it considers suitable to be a member of an adoption panel. There is no limit on the number of people who may be included on the central list. Having a pool of people with different skills, experience and qualifications allows for the most appropriate members to be drawn upon to consider individual cases and reduces the likelihood of panel meetings having to be postponed, whilst retaining knowledgeable and experienced members without the need to wait for a vacancy to occur to appoint a new member to the list. (Department for Education, 2013, p. 20)*

The Children Act (1989) and related *Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services* states:

> *The fostering service must ensure the fostering panel has sufficient members; and that individual members have between them the experience and expertise necessary to effectively discharge the functions of the panel. As far as is practicable, panel membership should reflect the issues under consideration, and … include people with experience of fostering, education, short break care and family and friends care; be gender balanced and reflect the diversity of the local community. People who are, or have previously been, foster carers in circumstances relevant to the matters being considered by the panel are likely to make a valuable contribution to the panel's discussion as are their sons and daughters and people with experience of being in foster care themselves. The education and health of looked after children are also matters which are likely to feature in panel discussion, and where the panel will benefit from the contribution of people with expertise in these areas. Elected members, as representatives of the corporate parent, may also make a valuable contribution as panel members. (Department for Education, 2011b, pp. 39–40)*

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, Section 23 (1) and (7) set out the amended requirements for the constitution and membership of a fostering panel. The Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (NMS) 14 (Department for Education, 2011a) Section 14.8 also identities the number, skills, knowledge and experience of those on the central list.

Twenty-two panel members were interviewed, adopting the constructivist and interpretative stance described in the methodology chapter, to explore and analyse the conscious and unconscious influences that individuals use to construe the world and contribute to recommendation-making in panel. Nine accounts are outlined below.

4.2 Lost ‘all about identity’

4.2.1 Case overview

Born in 1948, SL was the second child of her birth mother and is a quarter Jamaican. Her parents’ relationship was a war-time affair, her white English mother having had an extra-marital relationship with a dual-heritage man of Jamaican origin. In the 1940s–1950s, mixed-heritage children and the white women who had relationships with black men were shunned. SL’s birth mother already had a white child with her husband, so she placed SL for adoption.

SL experienced emotional abuse from birth from having a birth mother who felt unable to accept her and the children’s home deeming her ‘unadoptable’ due to her race. SL was eventually adopted but experienced physical and emotional abuse from her adoptive mother. SL’s home life was marked by being given adult responsibilities, leading to years of depression and a negative view of adoption. At primary school, and in the local community, she was physically, emotionally and verbally taunted and bullied, and was not accepted by her adopted extended family.

4.2.2 Aspects of the presented self

Phase A: Pre-adoption

At 10 days old, SL was left by her mother in the children’s home in which she was born in, to be cared for by the staff and eventually adopted. SL spent the first year of her life in the children’s home and then became a foster child, cared for by numerous nannies and childminders, as her foster mother worked.

Phase B: Homelife: Fostered and adoptive

Aged 2, SL was adopted by her foster mother in 1950. Her adoptive mother was a single working-class nurse who provided for the family from her earnings, accepting no money from the state for either her adoptive or foster children. In the subsequent years, she gained four adopted siblings, who were all legally adopted and shared the same surname. They were from different ethnicities and some were physically or mentally disabled. Other children joined the family temporarily, as fostered siblings.

Between 5 and 11 years old, SL was bullied and singled out at primary school due to her darker complexion. Her white adoptive siblings would distance themselves from her in public. SL also experienced stigma in the community throughout her childhood and adolescence due to her appearance. Secondary school was initially difficult, but one teacher was a positive influence in guiding her to her later career as a primary school teacher.

From 6 years old until 18, when she left for university, SL was responsible for caring for her younger adoptive siblings: she collected them from school, looked after them in the evening, cooked, cleaned and ironed for the family.

Phase C: Teaching - an alternative helping career

At the age of 18, SL left home for university, to study to become a teacher. By 21, she had qualified as a teacher; first, working briefly in secondary school, having been wrongly advised at university that secondary teaching was the only option for her, and then working as a primary teacher for 18 years.

During this period, SL began to experience poor mental health and suffered from depression; this depression continued until the age of 63. Although she lived away from home once she had trained and was working, SL continued to support her adoptive and foster siblings over the weekends and in school holidays.

Phase D: Finding self: searching for birth family

In 1976, aged 38, following the changes in adoption legislation, SL began to search for her birth family. She accessed her files from the children's home and received photos of her father and seven generations of his family. She did not do much with the information obtained from the files, as she left the UK soon after to spend three years volunteering in South Africa.

From 1994 to 2004, SL underwent extensive counselling, alongside meeting and getting to know some of her birth family, particularly on her paternal side.

Phase E: Experiences worthy of sharing

In her late 50s, SL contributed to a book on adoption, expressing in poems and prose her experience of being transracially adopted. Aged 62, SL became an adoption panel member, having been headhunted to join an Independent Adoption Agency panel and,

aged 65, she joined local authority adoption and fostering panels. In her 60s, SL became a guest speaker on a University social work course and on adoption preparation courses, sharing with students and prospective adopters her experiences of transracial adoption.

4.2.3 BNIM interpretive panel structural hypotheses

Although her basic needs were met, SL may have experienced low-level neglect, for example, living in chaos. She had an adoptive mother who was both physically and emotionally absent, which led to her experiencing disrupted attachments and, perhaps resulted in SL turning in on herself to cope with life and becoming depressed. Possibly, living in a transracial placement where her dual heritage was not accepted led to an unclear sense of identity. Perhaps the experience of a positive role model in her life alongside her inner resilience led to her accessing education as a route out of her situation.

4.2.4 The self brought to panel

Stage 1: Unadoptable

In her early years, SL experienced abandonment and rejection at the hands of the adults (mother figures in her life) who were supposed to care for and protect her. This became a pattern throughout her childhood, adolescence and periods of her adult life, in which she felt emotionally neglected and unwanted as a result of her sense of being abandoned by her birth mother, as well as feeling neglected, abused and unsupported by her adoptive mother:

> *'Another thing about our childhood – we were in placement because we were unadoptable. It was either race, ethnic issues or disability or educational challenges.'*

Stage 2: Ongoing depression, throughout life

Although she initially struggled at school due to behavioural issues, SL was academically able and went on to leave her adoptive family to go to university. Despite academic success, SL experienced depression from the age of 19 to 63 and is of the view that this ongoing depression throughout her life stems from a childhood of being misunderstood. SL's sense of duty and responsibility led to a life of meeting other people's expectations of her. From 1994 to 2004, she 'explored the whole of her life

with a really sympathetic and professional private counsellor which helped her to feel happier in life', and so does not suffer from depression as previously. The counselling also helped her come to terms with her resentment of her adoptive mother and her childhood, the burden she carried for the caring and emotional responsibility for her adopted siblings and her feelings of inadequacy.

She appeared to take pride in her work, noting that she only took one week off in eighteen years of working as a teacher. She shared how she had supported both her birth and adoptive mothers as they aged, and her partner who died of cancer. Professionally, and as a volunteer, she cared for vulnerable children and dependent adults.

SL appeared unable to face the reality of some of her experiences, often quickly explaining away others' behaviour towards her – seemingly having learnt to hide her feelings:

> *'My sister who is nearer to me in age – M – she is white British and she wouldn't go on the bus with me and she would not sit on the same area of the bus as me because she was so embarrassed. Not embarrassed by me as a person but that her friends had to know she was adopted and that she had a sister who was of mixed heritage.'*

> *'We were taught from very tiny that we were adopted … She [adoptive mother] always made very clear that she wasn't our birth mother because she didn't want people to think she had had illegitimate children.'*

Stage 3: Changes in Adoption Legislation

Over a span of 16 years, from when she was aged 46 to 62, SL traced her maternal and paternal family, finding family members who looked like her, which helped her to 'feel complete' and meeting members of both her maternal and paternal extended family, her siblings and birth mother. Her search led her to the discovery of her 'given name' which had been hidden from her by her adoptive mother. SL did not disclose her discoveries to her adoptive mother:

> *'Every time I went down she [adoptive mother] would say "have you met your mother yet" or "I could help you" and I would think "no you can't help me anymore because you don't want to help me and I don't want your involvement."*

> *I had grown up learning how to keep secrets from her… I never shared anything personal with her.'*

Throughout the interview, SL shared the obstacles she had faced: her adoptive mother hiding a letter from her birth family; not having access to her birth certificate; being left alone to read through her files as a social work colleague deemed that she was 'intelligent' and therefore did not need help; not being able to share with certain members of her adoptive family (her sister M and her adoptive mother) that she had found her birth family. SL was noticeably distressed at points, which is no doubt why she sees the importance of ongoing life-story work and the accuracy of case recordings and other reports as of crucial importance to an adoptive child.

Stage 4: Coming to terms with life

Throughout the interview, SL evaluated, reflected and theorised about life and her experiences, particularly her sense of the importance of belonging, which has persisted throughout her life. It seemed to her that her birth mother did not want her because she would not fit in (on account of her mother having had an affair with a black man and SL being the bi-racial result of this affair). She felt resentful toward her birth mother and remembered wondering in her teenage years why her birth mother did not have an abortion. She believed that her birth mother wanted to forget; even in later life they did not have a mother-daughter relationship, and she recalled her mother's words when asked who SL was: *'someone she had known forever'.* Coupled with this, she had a difficult relationship with her adoptive mother:

> *'We were very concerned about the lack of real care … and the fact that she wanted another child and we considered that she wanted another child to help look after the house as this was what we did as children. We did the cooking, the cleaning, the childminding and all that kind of stuff.'*

SL stated that, but never explained why, she has never married or had children, although she did explain why she would never adopt or raise children as a single parent.

After ten years of private counselling and exploring her life, SL wrote a piece for a book on her experience of being transracially adopted. Before working on panels, SL was sceptical about adoption and even in the early days on panel was uncomfortable about being on panels, and 'didn't want to rock the boat'. She has expressed concern about

certain processes in adoption and is worried and frustrated about some matches made at adoption panels, especially those which are transracial or intercountry.

Stage 5: I don't know whether I was white or black: the link between childhood experiences.

SL recalled meeting her paternal first cousin, describing it as 'incredible and wonderful' to see someone who closely resembled her to the point that they could pass as sisters:

> *'To actually see someone who looked like me – because I had lived in this family when none of us looked like each other and we'd grown up with people saying, "That can't be your sister."'*

This appeared to give her a sense of value, belonging and acceptance. SL grew up feeling inadequate and wondering whether people would accept her; only after at least a decade of extensive counselling, and meeting some of her birth family, did she seem to begin feeling happy about who she was as an individual. She simply wanted to identify with someone, especially as she did not feel very proud of her white, English mother, as she felt so rejected by her. Nonetheless, SL shared that, in those last 8 years [of visiting her mother in the nursing home]:

> *'I grew to love her, and we had a fantastic time although she never acknowledged me, she would say that I was someone she had known forever – that was a priceless comment.'*

Again, SL appeared unable to put her own feelings first, explaining her birth mother's behaviour towards her by identifying that her mother would have felt keeping her to be difficult, because she was very proud, a very unmaternal person and accepting that her mother just needed to put SL behind her. Instead, SL sought to find her identity in being proud of her black heritage and embrace that part of herself.

> *'I pushed my identity much further to my father's family because they were very open and accepting.'*

4.2.5 Interview reflections

Winnicott (1990), writing in the 1960s on the 'good enough mother' is instructive when reflecting on SL's narrative, as it emphases that, throughout the interview, SL gives the

impression of an adult looking back on childhood reflecting on the absence of a mother figure able to 'hold' her. To the outside world, SL appears intelligent, confident and accomplished; the study highlights the vulnerable child within. Her panel demeanour is one of immense knowledge, but she lacked an assertive quality and was unsure of her abilities and worth. This was reflected in her interview: there was a desire to please, to help, shown in statements such as, 'Is there anything else that you think you want me to say?' Overall, SL is a quiet, unassuming, reflective and resilient woman who has experienced adversity and loss but manages these in a dignified and outwardly positive manner. Her early life is marked by rejection, a lack of demonstrative love and the experience of being ostracised in school and the community in which she lived. Although she tried not to blame her white adoptive siblings for not supporting her in public, the fact that SL differentiated their behaviour was clear in the interview. As an adult, her three years in South Africa were also marked by bullying: one of the black married leaders wanted a relationship with her and, when his advances were not acknowledged, he became hostile to SL to the point of making negative references about her mixed heritage.

4.2.6 Summary of the case

SL's case represents how materially, emotionally and physically impoverished beginnings have had a lasting impact on her life. Once she became a panel member, aged 62, she noted her discomfort, initially, about commenting on certain subjects in this new position:

> *'It was very uncomfortable for me in the beginning because I was still saying to myself that children should never be taken away from their birth families and if they are taken away from their birth families they should be allowed to be in a foster family where they retain their identity. It was all about identity really for me.'*

SL was careful about what she said so that her own emotions did not emerge. She felt as though she were at risk of exposing herself as someone who was damaged and bitter about her life experiences and perhaps not suitable to be on the panel.

In terms of her identity, SL has struggled with the divided and varied aspects of herself: intelligent and capable versus vulnerable; black or white rather than dual; adoptee

versus foster child; child versus home help; birth daughter versus visitor and volunteer versus mistress. This reflects the relevance of Klein's (1946) work on the process of splitting, as highlighted in the methodologies chapter; the struggle for infants and adults coming to terms with different and competing aspects of the self.

Although an effective panel member, SL clearly reflected upon her struggles with this role, due to her own experience of adoption. SL is able to share with others, articulating her journey and her reasons for asking particular questions on panel, ensuring that her contribution is managed well because she is able to 'name' her own issues. This is particularly pertinent with issues relating to name changes, life-story work and transracial placements.

4.3 Conformist – 'in my life I had to balance my work and life'

4.3.1 Case overview

HY was born in 1956 in a region of East Africa that was colonised by Italy in the 19th century. For hundreds of years Europe has sought to exert its influence over parts of Africa, as seen in the Scramble for Africa and, following the end of World War II, the West sought to influence countries which had previously been influenced by communism. For many countries, this led to decades of civil war. HY was born into a country characterised by political unrest and lived up until the age of 21 in warring countries.

HY identified as a migrant, his immigration journey lasting from the time he was 18 to when he was 27. Throughout his life, HY has lived with unrest, change and loss. He has attempted to normalise his experiences by assisting others to navigate aspects of their own life; however, it does not seem that he himself has emotionally come to terms with his own life.

4.3.2 Aspects of the presented self

Phase A: Immigration Journey

HY spent his childhood in his home country before leaving his family behind and moving to another East African country in 1974, aged 18. After spending three years there, HY left Africa in 1977, age 21, for Italy where he lived for a number of years

before finally settling in the UK in 1983. When he first came to England, HY was taken to the refugee council for help, because he did not know anyone in the country. HY stayed at the Refugee Council centre for ten to eleven months, spending time learning English.

Phase B: Helping and working within the community

When he was 31, HY started to play more of an active role in the community, improving the lives of refugees within his community. He started working in social services, specifically in fostering, through which he attended numerous meetings.

In 1987, he became the first Chair of an East African community support organisation and between 1987 and 1989 he assisted local authorities to recruit East African foster carers. In 2002, aged 46, he stopped working with unaccompanied minors and refugees. In 2012, aged 56, HY became one of the founding members of a foster carer association in the local authority where he fostered.

Phase C: Managing work and home life changes

Family life for HY started in 1990, when he married, aged 34; within two years, he and his wife became foster carers and parents. In 1992, his wife also gave birth to their first son, who was disabled. Three years later their second son was born. After working for several years, HY took a break from work in 2004/5, at the end of which period, his wife was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, aged 49. Due to his first son's deteriorating health, HY spent another year out of work caring for him. His son died in 2007 when HY was 51 years old.

Phase D: Establishing a new professional life

Whilst working for the Refugee Council between 1993 and 1995, HY studied for a MA in Development Studies at East Anglia University.

HY offered his services again to the community in 2001 when he became a school governor at his son's special needs school. In 2002, HY changed jobs and worked as a manager for a Housing Association.

4.3.3 BNIM interpretive panel structural hypotheses

It is possible that, having started life in turmoil due to the unsettling experiences in his country of birth, HY experienced trauma. Perhaps, having left his family, he felt resigned to the fact that, despite attempts, he would never see them again. Once he came to the United Kingdom, he began to feel settled, having set up a community group.

Perhaps HY felt driven by doing the right thing; he comes across as committed, dedicated and resilient. Despite this, he may perhaps be left feeling angry or guilty, mixed with homicidal thoughts.

4.3.4 The self brought to panel

Stage 1: Journey to fostering - the experience of migration

Although he did not share how he became an interpreter, HY was exposed to fostering through interpreting for the local authority. Having gained knowledge of fostering when he was supporting local authorities in their recruitment of foster carers, alongside his wife's sisters experience of being fostered, HY was motivated to become a foster carer himself:

> *'Later on, when I got married in 1990, then in 1992 we said why don't we apply to be foster carers and since then, basically, we have been foster carers. Our children, our 2 children were born into fostering.'*

His own experience of being a refugee, alongside his wife's career in residential childcare and his sense of responsibility for others, particularly those who had had similar experiences as refugees, appeared to be his motivating force. HY explained that he and his wife, at the time of the interview, had been foster carers for over 22 years. They both used the knowledge from their respective jobs to support and improve the lives of the children in their care. Both engaged in supporting their community by setting up a group home.

Stage 2: Raising awareness

> *'Funny enough, my wife, before she arrived here, two of her sisters came into the country as unaccompanied minors. When she arrived in the country, she took responsibility to look after them, so they were discharged … they lived together.'*

HY stressed the significant difference in migrant experiences between East Africans and the Vietnamese 'boat people' in terms of their migration to and assimilation in the UK and, specifically, their cultures and how they were treated by the local population on arrival and by the local authorities who were tasked with supporting them. In HY's experience and professional opinion, other ethnic and racial groups were given more support by the local authorities and fostering services than black people. East Africans encountered complications and adversity. HY related first-hand how leaving one's own country and settling in a new country in pursuit of a better quality of life was an arduous and potentially distressing experience. Turning to the wider community, he narrated that East Africans became victims of high levels of covert and overt racism in the UK and were too often not provided with enough support in their resettlement, although he observed that the experience in the UK was still much better than his experience in Italy. He felt that no matter how long you lived in Italy, you were still not accepted due to your colour. In the UK, the discrimination tended to be based on the assumption that all black people were the same, not taking into account that the experience of Africans and Caribbeans were vastly different in terms of food, language, culture and religion. HY's position has provided him with a platform to raise awareness in combatting generalisations about racial similarities which fail to consider ethnic differences:

> *'Because I was saying black on black is not enough, it doesn't take into consideration the cultural and linguistic background. At the time, you know, I was getting into trouble with them because I was saying, you know, placing, say, unaccompanied minors from East Africa with a Caribbean or a Caribbean child with East African foster carers, who don't speak the language, who don't know things of the culture etc. How does that work?'*

HY appears to take pride in his work, paid and voluntary, in his community and shows his effort and zeal in aiding others. This was particularly highlighted at the end of the interview when HY mentioned his contribution to a Social Work Handbook for working with refugees. HY stated he was given a small acknowledgement in the book, but other colleagues said that the two white female authors

> *'are just exploiting you, ... If that helps somebody, gosh then that is fine, if ... one child, if that enlightens some people; that is more than enough for me. I am not*

doing this to get money, and I did not get a penny, yeah, because again, I had my job,'

Stage 3: Family life

HY on several occasions during the interview raised the importance of balancing his work and home life. At times he appears to have found it very difficult to achieve this balance. It was unclear whether this was due to HY being particularly focussed on his career or simply due to the demands of his given jobs. His family life was clearly adversely affected, as there were times where he reduced his working hours, changed jobs or gave up work:

'My second son, … he was going to primary school. He said to his mum, "Oh Dad comes very late in the evening, too much work. … I found him a job, in our school there is a coffee shop and there is a sticker there saying that they need somebody to work there." That made me think, I need to balance work life and when I went back, I went to a lower level earning organisation.'

There was a sense of pride when HY talked about each of his sons at different points in the interview. However, this appeared to belie the fact that family life has been filled with major issues.

'Well, yeah, after my son died, … the second son, he is fine, he is very healthy. He is at Uni doing his 3rd year and is doing Chemical Engineering at Newcastle University. … my wife developed Parkinson's, … she had early retirement. In my life I had to balance my work and life first because of our son and now because of my wife's advanced Parkinson's, so I gave up my job, this was over 2 years ago, to look after her.'

HY showed the first signs of emotion when talking about his eldest son, who was born with physical and learning disabilities which led to his early death.

'Well, he was a very, very happy boy, he … used to laugh a lot. He gave us a lot of, you know, happiness in our lives … but when it was getting a bit too much for my wife, I just had to give it up for a year. I stayed with him, at home, for 11 months and that was the best of my life and we really had a good time.'

HY has had to stop working, resigning from his last service manager post in mental health services and taking early retirement aged 57 in 2013 due to his wife's illness. HY reflected on the fact that his family life has not had long periods of joy but has been filled with sadness and unfortunate circumstances, adding to his experiences of loss and separation, in his earlier life.

Stage 4: Professional knowledge - voluntary work in the community

Although HY did not talk about his early educational experiences, he appears to be someone who has striven to develop himself, as illustrated by the attempts he made to improve his spoken English. HY experienced language barriers and second-language acquisition difficulties in the UK, given that English was not his native tongue, and had issues communicating with others in English. Despite this, HY laboured to improve his English and communication skills and subsequently overcame this initial difficulty:

> *'Oh goodness. I think it is very, very difficult when you come to a country. You do not know anybody, and I thought at the time, you know, … If you do not understand the native people, you do not know the language. I thought back home we studied English, but it was not good enough … in first 10-11 months I studied English. I was listening to radio, that is when I started listening to the Archers.'*

Due to HY's background and experiences as an immigrant, he is conscious of what problems there are in the community for people who migrate to the UK. Alongside his professional and voluntary knowledge are the areas of immigration and housing. HY's primary focus throughout his career has been working directly to improve the lives of less fortunate people, particularly children and young adults.

In 2013, HY became a member of the local authority's joint fostering and adoption panel and, in 2015, he became vice-chair. In 2016, HY became a panel member on an Independent Fostering Agency panel.

4.3.5 Interview reflections

HY's account of his life was very orderly and precise; the interview gives a sense that he did not give any emotional content to what he relayed. The entire interview illustrated a man who had experienced much adversity throughout his life; starting from his early beginnings of being born in a country that at the time was experiencing civil

unrest, leading him to flee. HY gave no information about his life and family in East Africa, as if his life began when he emigrated to Europe.

> *'Gosh where do I start, this could take us hours. Okay. I will start with the most relevant experiences related to my role as panel member. Myself and my wife, we have been foster carers since 1992, 23 years.'*

Although he would often use the term 'home' to describe his homeland, there was no sense of whether he had ever returned or whether he had been in contact with any family members since leaving aged 18.

HY has faced struggles and complications in both his personal and professional life; his son's disability and death and his wife's illness have impacted on his career path. His employment affected his family life and was not linear due to family issues.

Throughout the interview HY sought to align his thoughts with mine, with comments such as 'you know' and 'obviously'. On reflection the fact that HY did not share his emotions hindered my ability to relate to him and left a disconnect with him. His demeanour was very formal and official; it was difficult to establish his character and I oscillated towards describing him initially as grandiose and pompous before settling with the notion of him being 'compliant'. It was though HY engaged in the task rather than the emotion of being interviewed, which fits with his apparent sense of duty and responsibility and a willingness to help others perhaps at the expense of his own well-being.

The study interpretation of HY's compliant personality comes from a sense that his narrative illustrates someone who has had to assimilate into various cultures and countries in an attempt to fit in and be accepted. He has sought to be almost like a chameleon in changing and adapting to his circumstances. This is perhaps described best by HY when he says:

> *'Well, I think that by nature, I am an optimist, … financially we are okay, we can manage, and you know, at our age. We are not working to become millionaires or whatever, but I think just to have a decent life and to give a decent life to our son and do some modest things, you know. I was not disappointed that I couldn't follow my career and what for; you know, … it becomes meaningless, you know, what I was earning before and yeah, it was becoming meaningless. It was more*

about quality of life rather than, you know, having a very hectic life, with a lot of collateral damage as you go along, yeah.'

4.3.6 Summary of the case

HY's case reveals what could be best described as an emotionally repressed individual. HY's interview reflects his desire to suppress the no-doubt difficult memories and thoughts relating to his early childhood, born in a war-torn country, and his early adult experiences of immigration and racism. Only sharing the aspects of himself that he felt that the researcher required, or that perhaps were more palatable for himself. On one level, HY is conscious that his life experiences were such that there was much to share, but he also limited what he shared:

'I have left out all the details otherwise we will be here for a very long time.'

The fact that HY does not show how he really feels in his narrative may reflect his early life where the society in which he was born, held back its feelings about not being independent, after years of colonial rule. HY's life appears to be one of compliance and conforming to society's expectations. This may well have been his norm and, as such, his adult life illustrates a sense of responsibility for others and not being able to pursue to the full his own ambitions and wants.

In short, having been a migrant himself, he has knowledge and an understanding of the issues facing refugees. The foundations of his career lay in this affinity to immigrants and his work in serving the community.

4.4 Socialist – 'I could…'

4.4.1 Case overview

RM is the youngest of six siblings, born into a Glaswegian working-class family. Both her parents had worked, but her account implies that, due to his disability, her father had stopped working.

On leaving school at 16, RM worked as a civil servant in Scotland and then moved to England, where she has spent the remainder of her adult life.

After many years working for the civil service, RM took a career break when she had her second child; she worked from home as a foster carer, before returning to work after retraining as a social worker.

4.4.2 Aspects of the presented self

Phase A: Experiences gained from family life

RM was born in 1957 and grew up in a large, Scottish, working-class stable and secure family, with a financially disadvantaged upbringing. She was the youngest of six siblings, there being an eight-year gap between her and the fifth child. RM's father had mental health problems, specifically agoraphobia, and was largely housebound.

Phase B: Gaining independence from family

RM left school at 16 and began working for the civil service in Scotland. Aged 21, in 1978, she moved from Scotland to London where, for the first time, she met a disabled person, who had multiple sclerosis, and black people. RM became a Women's Rights Union Representative.

Phase C: Ups and downs of family life

By the time RM reached the age of 23, in 1980, she had married and had a daughter. Within a few years she became a divorcee and was a single parent before marrying a second time in 1984.

Phase D: A new family, miscarriages and becoming a fostering family

Between 1984 and 1992, RM and her second husband had three miscarriages before her second child, a boy, was born in 1993.

Aged 36, when her daughter was 13 and their son was three months old, RM and her husband became foster carers. By the time their son was six months old, two children were placed with the family, staying with the family for three years.

Phase E: Change of career, becoming a foster carer

At 46, RM trained to become a social worker and, in 2003, she became a part-time fostering social worker. In the same year, she became the social work representative on the fostering panel. Two years later, in 2005, RM became a manager.

In 2007, RM left the local authority to work for a leading fostering charity before managing a small independent fostering agency until 2011. At this time RM returned to the local authority as a Panel Advisor.

4.4.3 BNIM interpretive panel structural hypotheses

RM led a life devoted to wanting to do good. RM knows what she wants and is very independent and self-reliant as a result of starting work at 16. She has perhaps experienced trauma and loss following her failed marriage and miscarriages and may have feelings of guilt associated with her children and a naive childhood view of her mother.

4.4.4 The self brought to panel

Stage 1: Career civil servant

Speaking of his fatherly presence and guidance, RM said that her father was the man who had time to sit with her and talk to her about values and ethics, and his role modelling informed her social conscience. RM stated that being the youngest of six, with her nearest sibling eight years older, meant that all her siblings seemed very grown up in comparison to her and, therefore, quite distant. She commented on wanting to be like her dad and do what he did informally: she wanted to work in environments that helped others. RM joined the Civil Service at the age of 16, naïvely believing that she could 'just go and help people'.

Although she did not state during the interview why she left Glasgow at the age of 21, she moved to London seemingly to gain her independence and in search of her own identity. RM was exposed to different cultures and individuals and she clearly did not move too far away from her working-class origins because she soon became a Women's Rights Union Representative. This appeared to be her way of trying to identify with marginalised people and trying to improve society based on the influences of those she admired growing up, such as her father.

RM left the Civil Service aged 37, admitting she did not love her career. She became a stay-at-home mother and, out of economic necessity, a foster carer. Feeling that she could do better than the social workers she came across as a foster carer, RM eventually trained to be a social worker at 40 years old.

Stage 2: Creating a different kind of family

Despite at times describing a childhood that she enjoyed and admired, RM mentioned a sense of loneliness from being the youngest child where there was a wide age gap, a degree of working-class poverty and also a sense of her mother not always being present, seemingly because she was working because RM's father was unable to, which gave RM a sense of wanting something different.

> *'I was quite insecure; I suppose in my own self-belief.'*

Her sister, who was a foster carer, had encouraged RM to become a foster carer in order that RM could be at home with her new-born son. RM and her husband wanted her to be present but did not consider the 'loss of her son as a child growing up in a fostering family'. Coupled with the fact that she had had to return to work four months after having her daughter, and the difficulties of conceiving a second child following three miscarriages, it would appear that RM wanted to spend more time with her son. RM mentions the palpable sense that she might not be able to have a child. She recollects being put in hospital wards with mothers who had babies and 'wailing', with heightened emotions as a result of losing babies through miscarriages. As such, RM's motivation to go into fostering seemed to be fuelled by her desire to be a stay-at-home mother for her own son.

> *'I genuinely thought, oh crikey, I won't be good enough, they won't want me, you know.'*

RM and her family fostered for eleven years. RM described this experience as being, overall, fun and rewarding, 'sharing the love', and maintained that they had great times as a fostering family. She spoke about her children getting a lot out of being part of a fostering family, particularly her daughter, and said that she and her husband 'did not know how to be/act like adults' when they stopped fostering.

Stage 3: Joined social work profession due to perceived inadequacies of social workers

RM's earlier socialist roots were demonstrated by the fact that she became a Women's Rights Union representative, which she spoke of proudly during the interview. One of the main reasons RM became a social worker was that she felt that she 'could do better' in comparison to some of the social workers she had had contact with as a foster carer:

some did not know the children, made false promises or unrealistic plans and did not write up supervision notes, and she felt little empathy with those workers. RM did admit that she had met some 'fantastic' and inspirational social workers who she had learnt from and who helped her to realise that social work was the right career for her. It also seemed that an underlying sense of the early desire to help others that her father had given her contributed to her decision to change profession and to become a social worker.

RM's previous struggles in trying to find where she fitted in, both in her family and later in her career as a civil servant, also manifested themselves once she entered the social work profession and searched for a career path in social services that best suited her.

> *'When I did change and become a social worker, that was very, very, very much the right career move for me, the right career path for me … had I had some career guidance or insight I might, I should have probably done it earlier, you know, it was late.'*

After two years, in 2005, she said she found her place and became a social work manager for a local authority in the voluntary and private sector.

Stage 4: Impact of fostering

RM reflected on a degree of self-doubt, in relation to her son, which began to surface over the course of a decade between 1993 and 2003, when she came to realise the impact that her and her husband's fostering had on their son, who was only a baby when they initially became foster carers. These doubts showed in her insecurities; she was honest about her own self-belief, or lack thereof, and genuinely thought that she would not be good enough as a foster carer or that they [the authorities] would not want her as a foster carer:

> *'I think my son paid quite a price to be part of a fostering family… With the way I did it because I am also a bit of a perfectionist.'*

RM stated that the effect and burden, as a biological parent, of sharing your attention and affection with other children, is like 'sharing mother's/father's lap'. She also

mentioned the impact on their biological children when the foster children moved on if they had formed positive relationships with RM's own children.

> *'He never verbalised, I hadn't noticed, nobody thought anything, and I had to kind of, the lack of insight … That was my first realisation of the impact on him, which I had not even contemplated ... I think how well we actually prepare people for practical realities of the task that is my big question.'*

Stage 5: Contribution to panel

In 2007, RM left her local authority job and accepted a role on a panel. During this period, she worked for a fostering charity and managed a small independent fostering agency. She developed and trained a number of panels before returning to local authority work in 2011. Despite these achievements, RM stated that it was never about promotion for her, that 'nothing she ever does is about that' but it was about her genuine passion for the task at hand.

In relation to the panel, RM identified that she wished to contribute significantly and prove herself when it came to her professional career. Her sense of pride in being a panel member showed, despite her role as the non-voting Panel Advisor. RM said that she did not overly exert herself, but at times she admitted feeling 'close to the wire' while sitting on panel. Undoubtedly, her own experience in advocating for others in her union role, being a foster carer and now being a social worker manager mean that she is used to being able to speak out and put across her opinions and views. The comment below highlights RM's awareness of groupthink processes on the panel:

> *'If somebody with a different prospective does not speak out, which is what I used to do … I sometimes think nobody ever checks that kind of collective flow of, that so often happens.'*

4.4.5 Interview reflections

Although RM was reflective to a degree, there was little evaluation of herself and her reflections appeared to be superficial. There was a real sense of her being competitive and trying to prove herself as being better than others. The study highlighted a sense of self-righteousness, especially when RM talked about her reasons for qualifying as a social worker. Throughout the interview, she repeatedly stated *'I could'*. This

competitiveness and desire to prove herself is illustrated in a number of ways: her desire to be like her father; becoming a foster carer like her sister; believing that she could be a better social worker than the ones she experienced; and her view of her first Panel Chair (admiring her as a black strong woman at the same time as challenging her demeanour). Freud's view of the Oedipus complex was added to by Jung when he proposed the Electra complex, which describes the feelings of the daughter towards her father and her rivalry and hostility towards her mother, seem best able to illustrate the intense feelings that arose when reflecting on this interview, which revealed a sense of RM feeling threatened by the loss of love.

At the same time, RM's desire to do well, and for her life to have meaning came across in the interview. The study would suggest that RM had spent her life trying to 'repair' her life and the lives of the children and people she has come into contact with as a civil servant, foster carer and social worker. She also exuded self-pride, feeling that she was 'politically correct' and self-aware in terms of the experiences of disadvantages that others may have.

4.4.6 Summary of the case

RM portrayed herself as having a strong sense of identity, primarily due to her Glaswegian heritage, as a result of being raised in a family proud to be working-class. She appears to have a desire to align herself with others who have experienced discrimination or difficulty because of their identities. RM appears to have had an idealistic view of her father, who was a pillar in the community; she describes him as disabled but a 'local hero' who supported others. She admitted that it was only upon becoming an adult and raising her own children that she realised that the pedestal on which she had put her father was unrealistic and, to some extent, unfair on her mother.

> *'There was some tension created there because my mum was like saying while dad's out, she's keeping the six kids and doing all the rest, he's being the local hero… At the time I just thought mum was judging him very harshly, because to me he was my hero too… My perceptions change as I became a woman and a parent myself… I was thinking as a father he was perfect, as a husband I would have probably divorced him, you know sort of on reflection.'*

RM has learnt a lot of life lessons through her marriages, divorce, parenting and miscarriages. RM's life typifies the impact of loss, perhaps due to feeling the absence of a mother figure in early life.

RM started her working life as a civil servant aged 16, hoping to help others. She then became a foster carer and, more recently, a childcare social worker. The study highlights that being the youngest child in a large family might have led RM to try to find herself through trying to 'rescue' others, due to what was missing in her own childhood: sibling contact, as she was not close in age to them, and perhaps also the presence of her mother:

'I mean I wanted to be the one that saved everybody.'

4.5 Nonchalant – 'that is not what I wanted to do'

4.5.1 Case overview

EP is the younger of two siblings born to working-class parents, who had him late in life. His life follows a similar trajectory to that of his father in that he lived in the same part of the country for the whole of his life. He is educated, has worked in the same profession throughout his working life, is married and has a family. He and his wife adopted two daughters before becoming foster carers; they adopted one of their foster children and EP is now retired.

4.5.2 Aspects of the presented self

Phase A: Position in the family

EP was born in 1960; his only sibling, an older sister, was born in 1951. His mother was a housewife while his father worked down the mines.

Between the ages of 16 and 20, EP experienced his father retiring in 1976, and coping with the death of his mother in 1980.

Phase B: Making the grade

During the academic year 1971/72, EP passed his 11+ exams and went to grammar school. In 1979, after passing his A level exams, he went to university, from which he graduated, in 1982, having been awarded a 2:2 degree.

Phase C: Joining the force 'as an ordinary graduate'

In possession of a degree, aged 22, EP joined the police force as an 'ordinary graduate'. Three years later, in 1985, he took and failed the sergeant's examinations. By 1986, EP had become a road traffic police officer, moving in 1999 to work as a constable in fatal road traffic collisions.

Phase D: Family Life

In 1997, with his wife, EP adopted two daughters. In 2005, the couple became foster carers. In 2009, aged 49, EP and his wife adopted their foster son.

Phase E: Retirement: using knowledge and skills differently

Three years later, in 2012, after a career spanning 30 years in the police force, EP retired and became a member of the adoption panel.

4.5.3 BNIM interpretive panel structural hypotheses

EP appears a generous, open and realistic person but has lived a strained life and is reflective of his experience of loss. He is a person experienced in life, someone who has had a varied career and a personal life journey of ups and downs. EP is determined to keep going despite loss and disappointment. He does not show a great deal of emotion or reveal much but he is reflective. EP is academically bright; he is a successful middle-class citizen and has significant relationships within his family.

4.5.4 The self brought to panel

Stage 1: 'First in family to go to university'

EP described having a relatively happy childhood; free to do what he wanted when he was younger. Coming from a working-class background, EP was the first in his family to pursue higher education and attend university. Both his parents had left school at 14 years old and his sister, despite passing the 11+, did not go on to university.

Although university was the first time he had been away from home, he realised that his mother, a housewife, had prepared him well for life. He knew how to wash his clothes, look after himself and budget so he coped well away from his family, characterising himself as an 'able' student. His mother was always at home, 'doing everything' and EP believes that he has inherited some of her traits.

EP had aspirations of a forensic career but poor guidance at school and no family knowledge of higher education meant that he began a degree which would not give him the correct or necessary credentials for the career he wanted to pursue:

> *'When I was at school, … I wanted to be a Forensic Scientist and the careers advisor obviously misunderstood or didn't understand what I wanted to be. He thought I wanted to be a Pathologist, so I was advised to do medicine, … I didn't get into any medicine courses. I was offered the biochemistry by the university and I thought, oh that sounds okay, I went and did that.'*

As a result, he found himself with a biochemistry degree and no advice about what he could do with it. During the interview he gave no indication as to why he joined the police force. However, it became evident during the overall narrative that, much like the other decisions in his life, his chosen occupation did not come about because of clarity or decisiveness in relation to what he wanted. EP's university place and degree clearly bought his parents much pride:

> *'I suppose that I was quite proud really, I know my parents were proud of me. Yeah, yeah, I think they were quite proud, came to see me at graduation.'*

Stage 2: Finding the right fit – 'that really suited me'

EP's demeanour and the narrative of his life highlights a person who is, essentially, not confrontational. His reflections on his relationship with his sister highlight some internal if not external areas of confrontation, which it appears EP has had to deal with from a very early age. He described a difficult relationship with his older sister and believes that he was used by her whenever there were breakdowns in her relationships with the men in her life.

> *'I was only ever in favour when there wasn't a boyfriend and she would then take me out or do something with me when there wasn't anything else to do.'*

In a different way, he also described other relationship difficulties, in that he appears to have accepted the behaviour of others without challenging them or the relationship. Firstly, for example, he describes that, due to his father's working hours, they had very little contact. EP described his primary caregiver as his mother and, only after her

death, in his father's latter years, did EP understand the reason why he and his father did not have a close relationship:

> *'... when I was young, he would sleep in the morning ... he didn't sleep for very long. All I can remember was, ..., we would do a little bit of something and then he would go to work ... I did not think it was unusual at the time, I just thought that was normal because that was how it was. It was not until much later, when I grew up, I suppose, when I became an adult, I realised that he was working nights because he got paid more for working nights. That was to provide for us. I always thought he was a bit of a distant father really, but he was not. He was just providing for us the best way that he could really.'*

In EP's relationship with his wife, she seems to have been disappointed with his career choices. In his relationships at work, he has seemingly been happy to assist others even though they have moved up the career ladder due to his support.

> *'Oh yeah my wife has told me quite regularly because other people got promoted, she thought I was better than them. I am but that is not what I want to do ... She wanted me to be Chief Inspector of the world, she thinks that I have wasted my degree.'*

EP came across as someone who did not necessarily have great expectations of himself or life; however, he was able to carve out aspects of his work:

> *'No and I am quite happy that I never got promoted, other people are quite disappointed.'*

Although not able to follow his dream career, EP comes across as adaptable and, thus, was able to find an area of police work that best suited his personality. The area of work he wanted to follow, forensic science, involving collecting traces of evidence for use in court, has similarities with the role of a fatal road traffic police officer, who is involved in collecting and investigating evidence that may well be produced in court. He enjoyed being the person who went out to meet the public, dealing with people in relation to fatal road traffic collisions. Having lived and worked in the local area, he was able to recollect numerous stories and memories of the hundreds of cases he had been involved in and shared that he cannot drive without triggering a memory of someone dying in a car accident.

'Most people wanted to interview suspects; they wanted the confrontation of it. While I was happy doing that, my passion was for the witnesses and the victims, ... I did really well, and I impressed everybody.'

Stage 3: Creating a family

EP and his wife, who was a nursery nurse working in a hospital, were unable to have birth children. He did not explain in any detail why they experienced difficulties; however, he expressed and recollected the loss.

'The feelings of infertility that come back ... they will come back, not it might, it will, at some point it will come back to you. ... It is like, what would ours have looked like, would he have had blond hair? It can be the strangest things that trigger it you know, would ours have done that? Sometimes it is enough to bring you to tears but other times it is just a passing moment.'

EP's journey to becoming an adopter was difficult, in as much as he and his wife were not initially accepted, and their case eventually became public. Their case appeared on a news programme exposing the difficulties they had with an agency. However, he and his wife were able to adopt two daughters in 1997, after 'falling in love with them' when a social worker told them about the two girls. He recalled taking them out for the first time, and the realisation that they had now created a family struck him when his daughters called EP and his wife, 'mummy and daddy'.

Although he and his wife have three adoptive children, EP did not describe his marital relationship with the same warmth with which he spoke about his love and admiration for his children. Reflecting on their parenting styles, he was insightful in relation to his father and felt there were many similarities in their approaches. Though EP stated that he was not as distant as his father, he admitted that elements of his past perhaps linger and affect his personal life in terms of his relationships with his wife and children. He drew a comparison with his own relationship with his father when talking about the adoption of his son, in that EP was roughly the same age as his father had been at his birth. As he has grown older, EP has gained a better understanding of what life was like for a man, and specifically his father, in the 1960s and 1970s.

EP explained that he always thought his father was distant and only realised that he had loved him all his life when he got older:

> *'Because he had always just been there in the background, prior to that but then when I sort of realised what he was doing, I suppose it brought us a bit closer but he had retired by that time as well and so he was a bit more available as well. As I got old, we sort of grew more together I suppose. Unfortunately, my Mum died when I was quite young, I was only about 13 so my dad was the only one left so that grew us together as well. He wasn't overly demonstrative.'*

He and his wife became foster carers in 2005, mainly fostering teenagers. They were asked to foster a baby and, unable to let him go, they adopted again.

> *'Unfortunately, we fell in love with Thomas and we adopted him, which wasn't in the grand scheme of things because I intended to retire, and my mortgage would be paid off... but anyway.'*

Stage 4: Being on panel

EP's eldest daughter works alongside professionals working with adopted children and, because of this, she was made aware that the county council were looking for panel members. She informed EP who subsequently applied for the post and was successful, becoming an adoption panel member in December 2012, after retiring from the police force earlier that year.

In terms of EP's impact on panel roles, he sees himself as there to advocate on behalf of adopters and is happy supporting the vulnerable.

> *'I think one of the most frustrating things is when the professionals aren't straight with you. We have got to do this, okay but why?'*

He tries to ensure that adopters have fully understood the task at hand and that they have the right level of support from Childrens Services. Because of his police experience, EP feels he can be factual and succinct, a good listener, able to decipher the details and raise relevant questions, having identified the issues that are of concern to him.

4.5.5 Interview reflections

No doubt due to his police experience, much of EP's interview was in a reporting style; however, he did not appear to be intentionally guarded and there was a fair degree of

reflection on his part in relation to his early family relationships with his mother, father and sister. EP is clearly willing to help and support others in any way that he can as illustrated by the decision he and his wife made to become foster carers; his daughter's support of other looked after and adopted children; his becoming a panel member and, latterly, his willingness to take part in this research study.

EP's reflectiveness illustrates someone who has successively worked through the depressive position:

> *he had actually a strong capacity for love and a great longing for a good and complete object … a characteristic feature of his personality was the desire to love people and trust them.' Klein (1946, p.16)*

EP's interview demonstrates his ability to explore, albeit briefly, his relationship with his sister, father and mother. He accepted the inability of all three to meet his needs due either to meeting their own or to loss and there was no sense of feeling persecuted by them (the feelings associated with being attacked). EP was also able to be honest about the occasional reminder of his own feelings of loss, associated with infertility, when reminded of this on panel. Arguably, EP represents the panel member who is able to come to the task with their own past but still engage effectively.

4.5.6 Summary of the case

EP's case highlights the experience of an individual who on the surface, appears to have a 'low-key' life. His life, chronologically, education, work, family and retirement reflect order and an orientation towards family life and helping vulnerable people. To some extent, EP comes across as a people-pleaser; however, this does not appear to be because he wants to be liked but more because he does not see much purpose in 'rocking the boat'. I was left with the impression that his non-confrontational approach tends to afford him the ability to achieve what he wants whilst at the same time not aggravating others by coming across as competitive. EP has achieved what would be expected of the average person in terms of a job, family and financial security. In trying to live up to expectations of him as a son, brother, husband, father and employee, EP has sometimes made the best out of less than ideal situations. He is quite pensive about his life and seems content, overall, with the course his life has taken.

4.6 Average 'I was very average, very middle of everything'

4.6.1 Case overview

SM's family comprised of younger fraternal twin siblings and his parents. His family were Unitarian Christian and his father was a minister.

SM's life is that of a white middle-class male; he appears to have had a stable life, enjoying the educational privileges of his social class and, whilst he was unclear of his career path, he navigated himself to a lifelong career in social work.

Although his personal experiences of life did not include discrimination or hardship, he appears to have a sense of his relatively good fortune compared to others.

4.6.2 Aspects of the presented self

Phase A: Early Life

SM was born in 1960, the first child of his parents, and he was followed by twin siblings.

Phase B: Formal education

When SM was aged 14, the family relocated from the South West of England to the East Midlands, and he had to change schools. He completed his 'O' levels and 'A' levels at the same school and, aged 18 went to university. Aged 21, in 1982 he completed his social studies degree and then travelled abroad for the first time. On his return, he experienced a few months of unemployment.

Phase C: Work as an unqualified social worker

In 1982, SM worked at a night shelter for homeless adults before, in 1983, starting work in a residential children's home where, after about seven years, he became the manager of the unit.

Phase D: Becoming qualified

Aged 29, SM took a year out of work to return to university to complete a one-year course and qualified as a social worker the following year, in 1990. SM returned to residential work in a managerial role.

A few years later, in 1993, he left residential work to become a leaving-care social worker. Over the next seven years, SM worked as a social worker in the youth court and then in fieldwork, before applying to be an adoption social worker.

Phase E: Management by any means

SM was unsuccessful in his application to be a field work manager in 2002 and was again unsuccessful the following year when he applied for another management role. Nine years later, in 2012, SM was appointed as one of two staff employed to be Panel Managers/Advisors.

4.6.3 BNIM interpretive panel structural hypotheses

SM is perhaps resilient, self-reflective, enterprising and self-reliant. He has experienced challenges and upheaval and has an attitude of 'so far so good'. SM eventually settled down in a successful job and had a straightforward, privileged white and conventional life, coming from a stable background with access to opportunities. SM presents as comfortable in his identity. Perhaps as the eldest he had to lead by example and do what would be considered 'the right thing'.

4.6.4 The self brought to panel

Stage 1: 'My life, in relation to panels or anything'

SM shared his narrative, largely, in a reporting style, giving basic bullet points and occasionally offering a level of self-evaluation. He appeared to be trying to second guess what was wanted or needed to be heard.

SM oscillated between recollections of early-life experiences at church and school, and experiences at work. He shared that, although he did not have his own birth children, he had become a step-grandparent. He spoke proudly about being a grandparent but said nothing about other relationships in his life. SM highlighted events and people but gave no significant detail as to how these individuals impacted on his life.

Mindful of how big the next challenge (retirement) will be, SM stated that he was very aware of the fact that he was in his fifties, and a small part of him was not looking forward to retirement.

Stage 2: 'Mini royal family'

SM began the interview by explaining that he was the eldest child of his parents and grew up in a white, British family with a unitarian minister as a father. SM felt as though he and his family were treated as a 'mini royal family' by those within the congregation and community. He observed that his father's career enabled him to be in a very social environment and had taught him about inevitable conflict in a safe and easy way. SM stated that he is not now particularly religious, but that his upbringing has had a lasting impact on how he views the world. He felt that his early life experiences have made him quite a sociable person and with a sense of being responsible for others. His father's role as a Unitarian minister, a denomination within which individuals are enabled to explore their own beliefs, had a significant influence on him growing up, especially regarding opportunities and understanding people around him. Additionally, SM commented on his level of tolerance, understanding and empathy for others and hinted that this empathetic nature was a prominent factor in his chosen career path. This 'mini royal family' status came with considerable expectations around his behaviour, participation in youth work and even volunteering. He remembered on different occasions being mindful of the responsibilities and leadership duties he was given as a child, for instance, opening and taking charge of a sweet shop:

> *'I was always mindful of the responsibilities I was given.'*

Although SM asserted that he is not seen as someone to 'rise to the occasion', he affirmed that he is in fact someone who will take the initiative and make hard decisions and is also prepared to approach or confront someone to say 'we need to do this or that'.

SM did not speak about his siblings other than to talk about the birth of his twin siblings, although he made an evaluative statement about them being a pair, which may well reflect his own sense of being on his own or different.

> *'I think, if I were to examine my life and look back to come forward to where I am, I think one of the most important aspects of that was my Father's career. My Father was a Unitarian Minister, so he was a Church Minister. I think that has two bearings on me growing up. I'm not particularly religious myself, but actually what it did was put me in a very social environment and as the Minister's eldest son, in many ways, a little bit like a mini royal family.'*

SM went on to give two specific examples of where he experienced difference, although he questioned whether his reflective comments related more to how he looks back on events than how he may have experienced them at the time. SM explained that he went to an all-boys school where he met a black boy who was frequently targeted because of his race and another boy with mental health problems. He believed these two boys gravitated towards him and they clearly had an impact on him, even though he had not consciously sought them out. SM conceded that he is not an outgoing person; however, within certain settings and situations, he can take a slight lead.

Stage 3: Low-paid work pre-social work qualification

SM was the first in his family to go to university, but he did not really know the career path he wanted to pursue. He had decided to study Social Studies, rather than Law, as that was of interest to him although, when he was offered the opportunity to train as a social worker in his final year, he did not take it up. By the time SM completed his first degree, he felt that he was exhausted by all the years of studying. SM repeatedly stated that he saw himself as an average student throughout his education, only obtaining average grades for his O levels, A levels and at university, and viewed himself more as having a creative mind. SM left formal education unclear of his career path. He eventually became a social worker 10 years later rather than taking the opportunity do an additional year after his first degree, a decision he did not regret.

SM's time and experience working in residential care developed his leadership skills and he believed it had given him a good grounding for his later career in social work. According to SM, working in residential care was the most rewarding job, in terms of 'what you put in and what you get out'. This sense of achievement contributed to his lengthy stay in that area of work, from when he was 22 to 33 years old.

Stage 4: 'The next stage in social work'

SM's journey to becoming a qualified social worker was slow but not uncommon for many social workers of his age: a period as an unqualified worker, then as a residential worker, before moving into field work. SM spoke proudly of his interactions with applicants, young people and his role in working with challenging cases. It is perhaps surprising that, as a white male, he had not been successful in becoming a manager:

'... I did apply for a management post, in leaving care but didn't get it. I did apply for another management post and I won't go into details but there was massive politics involved in it.'

Stage 5: Panel work - Advisor/Manager; 'I am going to stop there; I've probably taken you through to where I am'

Having been unsuccessful in his applications for two managerial posts, SM became an adoption worker. Eventually, the post of Panel Advisor/Manager became available, and SM applied. In sharing about his work life, there appeared to be a degree of contradiction when talking of his pursuit of a management position.

'I do think, this is a view of mine, I think there are people who apply for management posts, not because it's what they want to do, not because they are the right people but because they want recognition and I think you have to examine that in yourself sometimes. I think in Social Work, we are poor at saying, well done and praising each other and letting some good practice standout. So, I think people have to find their own way and I've, sadly, seen it done by people putting other people down by virtue, if you put someone down, you put yourself up. Also, I think people do sometimes, apply for jobs because that is the only way, if you get that job then actually you've been recognised.'

SM stated that his current role, as Panel Advisor, gave him the opportunity to work with senior managers as well as other adoptive families. In his role as Panel Advisor, SM has found that the most important element is to treat everyone he interacts with as people, first and foremost.

Having worked in the role for a few years, SM describes the role as 'very dry and I do feel that I have reached the stage where I am ready for a different challenge'. He also observed:

'I don't think I ever saw it as a long term… There is no urgency, if I am doing Panel stuff in a year's time that will be absolutely fine … throughout my career, I've never escaped, I've always chosen the next stage. I have never thought, I've got to get out of this… but I think every stage I've been able to plan and make it a positive move into something else. That would be where I feel I am now, you know, I have got absolutely no desire to escape.'

4.6.5 Interview reflections

Although the interview was very upbeat, and SM talked a good deal, he appeared to be guarded and the interview lacked real depth. SM is an engaging individual; however, the study highlights that he appeared to elevate himself and his experiences. This is particularly evident in his unsuccessful attempts to be a manager whilst at the same time stating that others felt he should be a manager:

> *'What I discovered was that you think you can do the job, then when you get the promotion, you find there is a lot more to it than you thought.'*

Overall, his interview lacked substance and the interview would suggest he remained unknown in as much as he only shared the aspects of himself that would portray him in a positive light. SM's narrative, whilst not overtly expressing self-love, contained clear aspects of his over evaluation of himself (Freud, 1915). The study would suggest that, as a child, SM was lost within his family and community due to his father's status and then lost with the birth of his twin siblings. He also never mentioned his mother, which may reflect an individual who was not held or contained by a mother figure.

> *'You know, my upbringing was very good, but I was motivated more by the experiences around me and I saw through that.'*

4.6.6 Summary of the case

SM is a 'preacher's kid', a white, middle-class male whose life appears not to have had any acknowledged trauma. He appears to have made a life on the back of the achievements of his father and his partner. In relation to his father, he has benefitted from being part of a church community which allowed him to achieve an elevated status and importance due to his father's reputation and status as a minister. In relation to his partner, they had no birth children together and he has stepchildren and a step granddaughter.

SM describes himself as average, which implies a middle-of-the-road existence, someone who will not really be remembered for anything. Belying this, SM's narrative seems to be that of an individual who does want to be recognised for his contribution to social work, as illustrated by his reflection on being remembered by clients in the street

and being someone whose colleagues already viewed him as a manager, even though he was never appointed as a manager directly responsible for others.

4.7 Misfit – 'don't feel safe/feel unsafe/wasn't safe/it's not safe'

4.7.1 Case overview

OO migrated to the United Kingdom from the Eastern Mediterranean at the start of his teenage years alongside his nuclear family. His teenage years were difficult, due to him being a foreigner and not having a good grasp of the English language, as well as to the fact that he was grappling with his sexuality.

OO, between the ages of 16 and18, was able to come into his own academically and sexually as he had his first same-sex relationship and headed off to university.

OO's adult life narrative centred around his profession as an unqualified and then qualified social worker: firstly, as an Educational Welfare Officer and then, working in all areas of social work before becoming an Independent Social Worker.

4.7.2 Aspects of the presented self

Phase A: Migration to the UK, becoming a 'minority ethnic'

OO was born in the Eastern Mediterranean in 1961 and came to the UK as a migrant in 1974 at 13 years old.

Aged 14, his sociology teacher, who was herself an immigrant, inspired him academically. Outside of the classroom, from 1974 to 1977, when compulsory school ended for him at the age of 16, OO was subjected to ongoing bullying in the form of being attacked and beaten by other schoolboys.

Phase B: Mapping out life: 'coming out', education and vocational training

In 1977, aged 16, OO came out as a gay man and had his first same-sex relationship. Two years later, in 1979, OO started university, studying sociology and psychology, before graduating in 1982. After graduating, OO worked for five years as an Educational Welfare Officer for the Inner London Education Authority, before returning to university in 1987 to study for a two-year MA in social work with the CQSW.

Phase C: A 33-year career as a social worker

Once qualified, OO worked for local government as a social worker for 10 years. He then left and, between 2003 and 2017, was employed as an adoption and fostering training consultant for a charity. During this time, OO became vice-chair of an adoption panel (2005), Chair of an adoption panel (2007), vice-chair of a fostering panel (2010) and, finally, Chair of a fostering panel (2014).

Phase D: Independent work

Due to national developments in the areas of adoption and fostering and subsequent organisational changes, OO made the decision in 2017 to become a freelance social worker, specialising in training and chairing in the fields of adoption and fostering.

4.7.3 BNIM interpretive panel structural hypotheses

OO has led a full life, centred around caring for and helping children. He has striven to succeed in this job; he is creative and uses his personal diversity experiences to help others.

Contradictory and conflicting elements in his narrative were identified, he faced adversity, he was resilient. Strong, confident, and resilient versus someone who is really scared; someone who is all over the place versus someone who is well-balanced. He is, perhaps, someone whose family does not agree with his choices.

4.7.4 The self brought to panel

Stage 1: Social worker in most areas of childcare field social work

OO expressed his pride and enjoyment in being a social worker, remembering the days when social workers were able to work directly with children and when more resources were available to undertake the work:

> *'I've … always been in the field of children and families. In family support, child protection and looked after children and then latterly adoption and fostering. That experience of doing all these different types of social work, then made me feel that I was ready to contribute my knowledge and skills on either adoption or fostering panels.'*

Stage 2: Involvement in panel work

OO became a member of an adoption and fostering panel in 1999, whilst working as a local authority social worker. He believes that, as a gay male who belongs to a minority ethnic group, he is a desirable candidate, as there has always been a shortage of male panel members, and he also brings insight from his other identities.

Over the years, OO has been a panel member, vice-chair, and Chair of adoption and fostering panels for both local authorities and IFAs. More recently, he has taken on the position of Panel Advisor for a local authority. OO communicated that he was always ready to contribute his knowledge and skills on either fostering or adoption panels.

OO expressed his sense of responsibility as Chair and clarified his tasks, which involves him reining in other panel members, ensuring that there is good and official conduct and that no side-comments are made that reveal personal values. OO stated that it is his job as Chair to ensure every member fulfils their professional roles and that everyone is thorough; he hopes his panel members come prepared because, on his panels, no one is exempt from participating or commenting. He was adamant that members cannot 'escape' being unprepared in meetings because he actively involves all panel members. He also states that, although panels can be time-consuming, he must ensure that members are focussed and clear and do not stray into debates and other philosophies since their discussions must not affect the delivery of the panel's business. Turning to discuss his recent appointment as the vice-chairman of a very small and independent fostering agency, OO admitted that he was finding the experience very 'different' and that it had presented some challenges for him, but he maintained that he was pleased that he was experiencing this process.

> *'I'm interested to learn little tips from other Chairs who very much are this sort of, you know, the leader, the judge. Little techniques of controlling or managing the process when it starts to be slightly elongated or not as orderly as I would like it to be. I am open to learning from others, but I do not think I will change my style. … in my mind I think that my style has a structure because I think quite clearly about the themes and what questions we are going to ask. I hope others do not think that it is unstructured. Maybe becomes unstructured when, at times, I have allowed it to go beyond the focus of the question to a debate about the rights and wrongs of something. I think that is when this is at risk of becoming*

unstructured and that's when I must claw it back. Hopefully, you have seen me trying to do this, to pull it back and, I mean, others would say maybe you are allowing them.'

Stage 3: Sense of privilege

OO emphasised that he loves his job because he loves helping children and believes that, after 33 years working in social work, helping children through the processes of fostering and adoption is something he feels he can do quite well. He believes he works hard to ensure that he can enable others and he takes responsibility for enabling others to help and support children in the way that he would have done if he were a practitioner.

'I mean, who knows whether, actually, a part of me, also, unconsciously feels that because I am a gay man, you know... um... I am lucky to be allowed to work with children and families …. I am sure there is an element of that where I still think that somehow, as a gay man, I should not be anywhere near children. I am sure that plays a part and which affects my self-confidence.'

OO expressed pride and contentment with his professional status as a qualified social worker although, beneath this pride, his statements relay a deeper lack of confidence in himself, highlighted by his references to his childhood experiences of not speaking English when he came to the UK and being bullied at school.

'You know, I have been given an opportunity, um, as a human being, as well as a professional person to make a contribution towards bringing about improvement and change in a child's life. … I see it as a privilege because I don't think that it is something that, um, I should take for granted or that should be given to me.'

For the last ten years of his professional career, OO has been a Chair of both fostering and adoption panel meetings and he shared the fact that he feels very privileged to be a member, vice-chair or even Chair of such panels because they play such an important role in children's lives. He also has 12 years' experience working for a charity which afforded him extensive knowledge of adoption and fostering law, regulations, statutory guidance, and good practice and, as well, has worked with many different authorities throughout England, occasionally delivering training courses in other countries, in

Europe and in Asia, which gave him the chance to work with social workers from other welfare systems.

Stage 4: Understanding diversity - insight and sensitivity

OO migrated to the UK in 1974 aged 13, with his family. He had vivid memories of struggling to communicate, as he did not speak English, and he remembers too that his darker complexion made him stand out visually as being different.

OO referenced ongoing issues at school because of his race and, perhaps, his sexual orientation and, from 1974 to 1977, he was attacked and beaten by other boys and classmates at school, even though he did not come out as gay until he was 16 years old. OO seemed to be acutely aware of the fact that he was different, as a non-English speaker and a gay man, and gave a lucid account of his experiences of being bullied as a result of these parts of his identity. However, he seemed to be able to identify that his experience of being of ethnic minority origin has contributed to his understanding of and sensitivity to the variety of families that he works with in England.

> *'I was really thrown into, for the first time in my life, in to what it was like to be bullied, tortured, hurt and attacked for being a foreigner. … I was, my skin was much darker, because I had, you know, I had the sun and I have very jet-black hair and very, very dark skin. I think they thought I was Pakistani; they didn't think I was Eastern Mediterranean. There were lots of Pakistani, Indian, and Bangladeshi children ... I was attacked, beaten, and punched many, many times. You know, I remember I would go to my language school in the morning and I would feel safe in going there, because there were other children who were, you know, black minority ethnic origin with me. Then on the bus, going back to our mainstream school was very fearful, not just from children, but also there would be adults that would shout abuse at us, you know, foreigners, Pakis. You know, I remember, you know, in school meals, you know, even the Dinner ladies … if you went back for a second, you know, they would say, you greedy person, you know. They were very harsh; aren't you being fed at home then, is that why you are here.'*

OO stated that he does not generally publicise the fact that he is a gay man. He does sometimes declare it when he believes that his sexual identity enables him to show

empathy, insight and sensitivity to foster carers, adopters or young people who may be gay or who may have issues about their sexuality or who have a different sexual identity to 'the majority'.

OO's experiences of continually attempting to fit in was expressed in the way that he spoke because, unless you asked him about his origin, an outsider would not have any sense that he was an immigrant, particularly as his command of English is faultless. When talking about his childhood from an ethnic background, he experienced growing up on an island that was a former British colony. He indicated that his understanding of the 'experience of colonisation', then partial liberation, independence and his own migration to the UK as a former Commonwealth citizen all add to his understanding of and sensitivity to the families with whom he works as a social worker.

Stage 5: 'That's my story and development'

OO's reference to the teacher who inspired him and the perceived similarities in their experiences seems to have been pivotal for him when looking at his own educational and professional development. From his outer appearance and his verbal skills, one would no longer know, other than from his surname, that OO himself was an immigrant.

> *'I think, um, my sociology teacher, when I was 14 and I had her for both 'O' level and 'A' level Sociology. She herself, was, um, from Austrian and Romanian heritage and she was born in Australia. She moved to England, when she was about 13 or 14, and once she learnt about my experience, I think she identified, … something in me. I think she began to show more, more pastoral care … she made sociology sound so exciting, … she became my role model and I thought, well if she can do this, then I can.'*

OO clearly uses references to his profession and his work experience to elevate himself inwardly and verbally from the above quotes; he struggles with confidence. He described how his experience as a trainer and chairperson illustrates his ability to communicate information to others and added that he is able to make sense of and analyse complex information quickly, interpret it, transmit it effectively to others, clarify and explain it. OO explained that his experience of training large groups equips him to manage panel members confidently.

OO added that, as a result of this experience, he feels that his style in chairing panels is very facilitative which, in his opinion, has certain advantages but also some limitations. He was very reflective about his limitations as a professional and as a Chair and was honest about how there are still areas for him to work on and improve in order to be a better Chair. Expounding on this, OO commented that learning the balance between being authoritative versus facilitative was a key issue for him and said he is aware of needing to improve his leadership skills because other Chairs lead panels to a much greater extent than he does. Whilst he acknowledges that he does lead at times, he stated that he was content with this. The Chairs that he has seen who are naturally more authoritative in their style of leadership have a greater influence on the panel, resulting in more reserved panel members. OO said that he was pleased that he has stepped back into practice in becoming a Panel Advisor, after being out of the field for 12 years when he was employed as a trainer.

4.7.5 Interview reflections

Whilst OO began his story with his professional status and his occupation as a social worker, he very quickly began to talk of his childhood and teenage experiences and the difficulties he experienced, not being English, striving to find a sense of belonging and struggling with his sexual identity as a teenager. OO also mentioned his experiences of growing up in a British colony.

OO's account of his encounters with bullies as a teenager due to his ethnicity and, as an adult, his awareness of others' views about sexuality seem to demonstrate a subconscious desire for approval. OO's interview revealed a yearning to fit in; in both the interview and the panel observation, OO appeared to be using his work to repair aspects of his broken self.

Klein's (1946) ideas on splitting, the struggle of infants and adults to come to terms with different or competing aspects of the self, come to mind. OO outwardly appears reflective and in touch with parts of himself. However, it did not appear that he was insightful in terms of the negative aspects of his self which may well have an adverse effect on his work. His personal insecurities seemed to make him believe that he only brings the positive aspects of his self to his work, namely, being an immigrant, being gay and having experienced bullying.

4.7.6 Summary of the case

OO gives a little insight into his early beginnings and family and the main issue for him in his family appears to be the lack of acceptance of his sexuality. As a result, he appears to have had to carve out a life away from his parents and find solace and reward in his professional life.

OO's narrative reveals a life of personal and professional ambivalence. Although he has been in a committed, long-term relationship for years, his Roman-Catholic family origins mean that he must live a double life around his wider family, especially when returning to his country of origin. Professionally, some colleagues and organisations for which he works are not aware of his sexuality, as he fears how they will see a gay, male, childcare social worker. There was a strong sense that OO leads a double life, as manifested in him not sharing very much during the interview, and seen in, for example, 'coming out' versus 'being in the closet'; confident professional versus being unsure about decisions; respect for parents versus challenging their views; social media presence versus none; gay male social worker versus paedophile.

> *'I stopped having a Facebook account because, … obviously you have friends, but sometimes the friends that you have get linked to you through friends that they have. … That made me feel, immediately, uneasy, that actually, if my account were viewed by service user or a young person, or someone in authority, what would they think of seeing all these different names, some of whom were gay men… I don't feel safe, in the job that I do. To have an account where there is such an openness into my life, you know, my personal life and family life.'*

4.8 Aloof – 'I am a workaholic'

4.8.1 Case overview

FF narrated the account of her life without referring to dates or her age at any point in the timeline; as such, her narrative was not punctuated in any way. The only time reference given is that FF worked in early years care for 33 years.

4.8.2 Aspects of the presented self

Phase A: Starting a family

FF has a son and daughter, who are young adults.

Phase B: Part of an extended family of foster carers and adopters

FF has two younger siblings and birth parents. Her brother and sister-in-law are inter-country adopters, and she has a sister-in-law who was a foster-carer.

Phase C: Joining the panel

In 2006, FF joined the Joint Adoption and Fostering panel.

Phase D: Working in a different role and environment

FF's entire career has been in early years. Having previously worked in several local authorities, she has worked in her current authority for 10 years, initially as a full-time worker, although she now works only in term time.

4.8.3 BNIM interpretive panel structural hypotheses

FF comes across as self-important, grandiose but discontent and has an exceptionally high work ethic. She places a high value on her work, and is a guarded person. She appears to be an emotionally discontent person who distances herself, someone who seeks safety through her peers, is professional and factual. She appears to have a low sense of self-worth. There is no sense of who FF is outside work, leading us to question how she is in her personal life: perhaps she comes from a difficult social background (hence had to start work at an early age) rather than a well-to-do family where she would have received family support and where there are high educational aspirations.

FF is an experienced and capable person who is resilient; she has faced challenges in life but stayed focussed on what she wanted. She loves the children in her family, but we have little sense of her extended family. The panel hypothesised that she may be an applicant to become an adopter.

4.8.4 The self brought to panel

Stage 1: A 33-year career in early years' support

FF's first job was in a primary school. She has worked for several inner London boroughs during her career, at children's centres and health centres and, over the years, moving into management positions. After a few years in her career she made the decision, due to the demands of her job, to step back. She joined her current local authority in 2006 on a two-year contract and has remained working for the same authority. Eight years ago, in 2014, she was employed directly by a school within the same local authority in the role of Childcare and Family Support Team Leader.

> *'Well if I start with myself as my background. I have over 30 years' experience in Early Years Family Support Services and Strategic Commissioning. In my work I have always been interested in, you know, social care development of my work, with the nature of all my past experiences.'*

Stage 2: Panel member - bringing personal and professional experience together

In most of FF's interview, she came across as defensive, adopting a professional rather than a personal stance in her narrative; however, as she spoke of experiences of racism, there was a glimmer of how she had grown as an individual due to early adverse experiences.

> *'I think in my life I have been through all sorts of, you know, growing up with racism and experiencing direct racism in my work environment and so on and having to tackle that, has made me ten times stronger… Oh gosh, yeah. … in fact, I was in my first job … a primary school, it was the Head, who was incredibly racist. In those days it was different …'*

Whilst working for a previous local authority, FF was invited to sit on a panel, but the demands of the post did not allow for this. After a few years of working for her current local authority, FF was again invited to sit on a panel; she took up the appointment and has been on the panel for several years. Originally, her interest was professional, as she wanted to diversify and expand her work experience. She has also been able to bring to the role the thoughts, views and experiences of foster carers and adopters, from her own adopted niece and nephew, as well as from her sister-in-law who fostered children.

> *'... I remember one particular young girl and her sister were placed with my sister-in-law and one of them was sexually abused by her parent and they all went on a tour to London and my daughter went with them. I am so proud of my daughter ... she would make a fine Social Worker, … my daughter didn't know about their life but she said, "Mum, I knew something was wrong because we were standing and there was a man standing close by, and you can tell that she looked so uncomfortable"… my daughter went and stood between the man and the girl. She sensed and I don't know whether it is because she had grown up with me … she has developed certain empathy and you know, sense of things.'*

FF came across as empathetic to the experience of foster carers and adopters; observing that certain panel members hold unrealistic expectations, particularly of first-time adopters and new foster carers. She was able to identify that her viewpoint came from the fact that her family had first-hand experience of adoption and fostering.

FF believes the team of panel members has developed as an effective team; some have more experience than others and they all come from different backgrounds and experiences. FF said that every panel member brings different areas of expertise from which she can learn. She reiterated more than once that this culture of learning from experience is crucial.

> *'I think also being on the Panel, being able to access training has been really useful and very good, I think, we have developed … we all come from different backgrounds, in terms of our professional career pathways. … The beauty of it for me, is that things that you may miss out on the paperwork, others are able to pick up, which is good. … I think the other thing is having that continuity, so the same Panel Members, I think, is important. I have heard, with the changes, you know, that some places have different members each month. I think just like any group you need to have continuity.'*

Stage 3: Accountability – home life, employer commitment and professional responsibility

Regarding her personal life, FF spoke very little of her family but, when she did, it was with affection and admiration, expressing the knowledge, qualities and possessions she had been given by them. When referring to her character, she shared that:

> *'My parents, are genuinely, very supportive to anybody I think, they are givers and I think they always see the better in people and um, you know. … if something presented in a harsh way, they would turn it around, re-evaluate it and see where that person is coming from and then review it in that way. That, I think, it helped me in my work, the kind of work I have been doing because you get all sorts of abuse thrown at you, from all angles and sometimes the pressure of work and sometimes you are sandwiched in … You have got to think like that sometimes, you know, where is this person coming from.'*

Recollecting the experience of being burgled and the possessions she lost, FF shared:

> *'… these were material things, but I mean, I had a lot of sentimental stuff go and that upset me quite a bit. These things were given to me by my grandparents, who are no longer alive, and it was quite awful the way it happened actually.'*

Her sense of pride in and responsibility to her own family is evidenced by the following quotes:

> *'I am able to also meet the needs, the demanding needs of my family. Despite what is going on at the moment with my Mum in hospital, managing two different homes and care, you know, … it just does not stop, does it. I am still working, ... I am still managing my work-life balance to a degree, but there are times ... I think, last week, I was shattered but, um, back on roll again, now I know what I am doing with the consultants and the care of my parents. My children are older now, so they are young adults now, so I have done everything back to front, in that I am now working term time.'*

Regarding her workload, particularly as it relates to panel duties and responsibilities, FF commented that there are times when she is overwhelmed with the amount of paperwork she must read in preparation for panels. FF has chosen to honour the commitment she has made by being on panel because the school in which she is based have committed to releasing her once a month to attend the panel. Although being a panel member is a lot of work [and not paid contractually], FF maintains that she really does enjoy her experience of panel work, contributing to decisions.

When speaking about her panel responsibilities, FF said that she has enjoyed her experience as a panel member because she has found it very rewarding and welcomes

the accountability and the ability to contribute to decision-making. She finds it fulfilling to have a huge impact on the future of an individual child or young person. FF expressed how vital it is to go into panels prepared and to ensure that she has read the documents so that she can make the enquiries that are needed, rather than making assumptions.

4.8.5 Interview reflections

FF presented as very professional in the interview, appearing guarded, which did not allow for any in-depth exploration of her personal life. This professional facade appeared to highlight that FF was seeking to find meaning and purpose in a life that is routine and uneventful. Work seemed to be the area where she finds importance, which provides a sense of purpose and value. FF said she had studied for an MA; however, she gave no detail about this. Additionally, although mentioning her career in early years' care, it was unclear if she had a professional qualification, in this area.

FF demonstrated her warmth and empathetic nature more when talking about the experiences of the applicants, carers and adopters who attended panel. She expressed concern about the number of questions they face, and whether the number of questions, or even some of the questions themselves, are always necessary.

There were many occasions during the interview and analysis when FF appeared to be striving for professional status and recognition but, in asserting her professional contributions, the study highlights a disconnect between the sense of true and false, as if FF were presenting a 'false self as an unconscious defence mechanism' (Winnicott, 1990). The 'false self' has the function of hiding the true self, showing the contradiction between how life is and how she wants or believes it to be.

4.8.6 Summary of the case

FF is highlighted as someone who has experienced racism and has had to overcome personal adversity:

> *'I have absolutely no resentment towards people that have caused me grief at times; in fact I am grateful for them doing that because I wouldn't be the person I am, with the strength I have … I don't feel deterred. I remember the first time it*

happened to me, I was crying all the time, I didn't know how to tackle it, I didn't know why it was happening, but I dealt with it.'

She comes across as having vulnerabilities; she narrated that she had experienced violations as a result of direct racism in her work environment but contended that these had made her who she was a person:

'I think it perhaps stems back from my early experiences with racism and that; people assume that you are a young Asian woman, … I have actually been told that I was quite aggressive; I said, "No, I am being assertive; you just don't like what I am saying.'

As well as both professional and personal contradictions, her pride in her work is evident, alongside frustrations with professionals when families are struggling and are misunderstood or openly judged by other professionals, especially when English presents a language barrier for them. She shows moments of feeling proud of her family members and the sacrifices she has made in terms of her career for her children and her parents, alongside a lack of clarity in relation to her qualifications, professional status and role.

4.9 Middle child – 'that next time never came to me; it never felt it was prioritised'

4.9.1 Case overview

YP narrated her life making very few chronological statements, except occasional references to the age she was when certain events took place.

YP's parents emigrated from Pakistan to the UK in the 1960s. She was born in Yorkshire, and raised in a large Asian, Muslim, working-class family.

Throughout her parents' lives and her own, the family have faced racial and religious discrimination. For YP, this began in her school years and lasted into her 50s; in the early years she was clearly a victim before becoming a local and national activist. She was bullied at school, taunted in the community and imprisoned as an adult, and then engaged in voluntary work to address the inequalities brought about by racial and religious discrimination.

4.9.2 Aspects of the presented self

Phase A: Uneven pairing

YP is the second youngest of seven children, with a seven-year age difference between her and her youngest sibling. From the age of seven she was paired with the sibling who immediately preceded her.

Phase B: Family responsibilities

Just before her eleventh birthday, her father started a family business; YP would fill shelves and complete other tasks in the shop after she finished school each day. As a young child, her extended family her father's nephew and his wife, lived in her family home.

When she was in her 40s, YP's family members adopted two children.

Phase C: Assumptions about professional skill base

Upon leaving school, between the ages of 19 and 21, YP worked in the library, informally advising and supporting members of her local community. In 1998, YP began working with refugee asylum seekers.

Phase D: Mature student

In 2000 YP decided to address the assumption that she was a social worker and began a social worker course. Seven years later, at age 27, in the academic year 2007/8, she returned to university, enrolling in an MA programme.

Phase E: Charity worker

YP first started supporting disadvantaged groups in 1998 when she worked with refugees and asylum seekers. In 2010, YP began working as a charity worker, taking part in international humanitarian commissions to deliver humanitarian aid to Western Asia, specifically Gaza.

4.9.3 BNIM interpretive panel structural hypotheses

Perhaps YP is a thoughtful, self-reflective person. She may be content versus avoidant and blank. It is possible that YP seeks solace in her own self, having no choice but to do so as she is single. Perhaps she is someone who likes to keep under the radar. Perhaps

YP has a sense of inadequacy and is filling her life with change. She may be lost and unfulfilled in seeking for something not out there. Perhaps YP likes to be the rescuer. She may be working her way up, insecure about the process and justifying her existence on panel. Her family or cultural background may only value things in so far as they have a status. Perhaps wasn't being truthful and she had a sense of grandeur. They or their parents have been 'dumbed down' so they exaggerate their achievements to gain recognition.

4.9.4 The self brought to panel

Stage 1: 'A large family that is part of our cultural values and although that has changed with generations, for me, it is something that I try to hold on to very dearly.'

YP described herself as first-generation British born into a large Muslim family. The household was always busy when she was younger, living with the extended family. She explained that she had an early sense of injustice from within her family: at the age of 9, she began to be frequently bullied by her sister. YP recalled memories from around the ages of 7 to 9 of how her mother dealt with her and her sister.

> *'Then there was a lilac pair of slippers that a pensioner would wear, but there weren't two pairs of the fluffy slippers, so my sister got those, and I got the ones I didn't want. My mum said to me the next time I'll get first dibs and I remember that next time never came to me; it never felt it was prioritised. I think it was easier to accommodate my sister and I maybe had this sense of injustice quite early on. Another incident that I recall, my sister … claims she can't remember this, was back then we had a cellar. There were stone steps leading to the cellar and my sister was very competitive and always said, "I'll race you" and she was trying to race down the step and I remember saying, "No, we'll fall" and of course she fell, banged her head and split her head open, bleeding and needing to be taken to the hospital and I was the one who was supposed to have pushed her, which I never did. Nobody believed me and I needed them to believe me and I felt awful, I felt mortified and they were looking at me as though I had done this with blood everywhere, I'd never seen anything like that before… maybe I have that feeling of injustice.'*

This, along with other childhood incidents, gave YP a sense of injustice growing up in her sister's shadow. YP describes her sister as very stubborn and explained with a smile and a smirk that her sister would not or does not remember being a bully.

Additionally, she recalled memories of ill-treatment at secondary school.

> *'I had a stark awakening when I went to my secondary school because my friends from my primary school went to another school … the other schools and started to express racist's views and they would create divisions. I found that really distressing, I found distressing and disappointing and I remember feeling quite vulnerable. I was bullied, not to an extreme but I was bullied at that school and it affected my education a lot at that time.'*

Culture plays a huge part in YP's personal and professional life, in recalling her early experiences of racism. Being an Asian woman has understandably moulded her outlook on life and society. YP explained that, growing up, she realised some lives 'were not as worthy as others'. This fact bothered her, and she recalled feeling a sense of affinity with Irish people when she learnt more Irish history and had Irish colleagues in her professional life: Irish people, although not ethnically black, can understand racism from English people more easily because of their own history and relationship with England.

YP experienced times where her exposure to racism made her feel frightened as a young child and adult. She refers to an occasion where a situation escalated so badly that she and her family were escorted home by the police. YP recalled other incidents, such as her father being pushed and kicked around by skinheads and another time when her mother was sexually harassed in town by a man wearing a British Union Jack. These instances made YP determined not only to protect her parents but to try to make things better, professionally striving for greater cultural and racial understanding, equality and diversity. YP stated that she has always been involved in ensuring equality for workers and expertise in communities and has served on various boards and groups which have a focus on racial equality. She was Chair of a black workers' forum and the Vice-Chair of an Equality Partnership for a county council.

Stage 2: Caring for others: a value learnt from parents, especially mother.

YP explained that her father was instrumental in supporting other family members who came to the UK, mostly because of his own experience of migrating to England in the 1960s. When she was a teenager, her mother worked as a respite carer for children and young people with severe disabilities, who would stay for the weekend.

> *'so that has been reinforcement really of my empathy to children in care.'*

YP's parents informed her social conscience; perhaps unsurprisingly, this has had a lasting impact on YP and influenced her career choices.

> *'I don't remember when exactly but I remember it was a regular thing and I didn't like it necessarily, it sounds horrible, but at the time it was adult children, these weren't young people with, you know, my mum was toileting them as they were soiling themselves… I couldn't believe the kind of skills and the non-judgemental approach my mum had, just amazing, just absolutely phenomenal really. I admire her so much for that and the young people that she had always wanted to come back, their parents would want my mum and they had a lot of respect and a lot of trust and a lot of integrity, you know.'*

It does not appear that YP did well academically in school which may reflect attitudes to Asian women at the time when she was growing up. She left school and went to work in a library and did not go to university until her late twenties, having worked in community settings prior to this. The changing expectations of society, and her family, towards young Asian woman are evidenced by the fact that her younger sister went to university at what would be considered a 'normal' age.

YP went to university aged 27 as a mature student to become a social worker and later enrolled in the university as a graduate student in 2007/8 to obtain a MA. At university, YP was actively involved with equality workers and black student organisations. After obtaining her degree and social work qualification, YP started working as a Programme Manager for Sure Start, working predominantly with the most disadvantaged communities in the UK.

YP stated that, before she went to university, people in the community often assumed she was a qualified social worker, which would make her feel embarrassed when she

had to clarify that she did not have those qualifications. She asserted that she never wished to become a social worker but wanted to work in community development. YP stated that her social-work training was a more strategic route into working with disadvantaged communities in the UK and improving society first-hand. YP acknowledged that she perhaps lacked self-confidence at that time, due in part to her sense of failure as she had very few qualifications. Once qualified, others encouraged her to pursue managerial roles despite her lack of confidence.

In addition to the values she gained from her parents, YP recounted experiences within her family which have assisted her in her work. She spoke highly of her brother in law, recalling how, as a teenager, she supported her brother-in-law and one of her older sister's children, as her sister had mental health problems. In the last 10 years, family members have adopted two children.

> *'So that has been reinforcement really of my empathy to children in care, recognising that these children were lucky enough to have a good experience of foster care.'*

> *"Even adoption was something I considered when I was a teenager, to adopt children. I have no idea where that came from; it could have been from Little House on the Prairie, which was a lot of my influence in those days.."*

YP brings all these experiences, alongside her theoretical and practical knowledge of working with multi-disciplinary teams in health, education and social care, to her work as a social worker and panel member. YP appears to have wanted to eliminate generational inequalities and disadvantages as early as her teenage years.

Stage 3: 'Managed to escape although others were injured and killed.'

YP's focus in life has been on aiding and supporting others, as she is passionate about equality and community work. She began training as a social worker and a charity worker. YP describes herself as a self-professed humanitarian:

> *'I became more aware of conflict and conflict around the world and, in 2008 … for 21 days people of Gaza were bombed by Israel and that is something that has been going on for more than 60 years. ... my father, my uncle would talk about these things, Yasser Arafat, didn't know much more than that. I was very much*

> *focused on my immediate environment. … I remember that the BBC refused to broadcast a humanitarian appeal for the people of Gaza, and I was outraged … I suddenly realised that some lives were not as worthy as others and that bothered me.'*

YP became heavily involved in international humanitarian aid. She recalls one experience in which hundreds of people from around the world came together to provide and deliver humanitarian aid. Sadly, the convoy was attacked by the Israeli Defence Forces in international waters, resulting in numerous fatalities and injuries. Although she was rescued, YP stated that she barely escaped; the experience resulted in her suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and she had to give up work for a period of time which led to financial hardship. When she returned to the UK, YP resolved to channel the ordeals she had experienced into becoming a full-time peace campaigner and increasing her humanitarian experience, trying to dedicate her self-sacrificial efforts elsewhere. It took her several years to overcome the PTSD and to find her way back into work. YP worked as a full-time peace campaigner for five years but ceased as it 'does not pay the bills'. Before becoming a panel member, YP considered becoming a foster carer. However, her lifestyle and unpredictable overseas trips did not lend themselves to that responsibility and, therefore, she decided that the next best thing was to support panel work and fostering panels. Once she returned to work, she began working as an independent social work consultant, which eventually led her to join adoption panels in addition to her work. She has now had experience of four disparate types of panels, in various locations.

Stage 4: 'Bringing something of meaning to the panel.'

Although she is single and has no children, YP brings to the task her personal and professional experience of caring for children, as an aunt and as a residential and field social worker. Additionally, she has supported individuals in the community and other professionals in relation to cultural competency as an Equalities and Diversity trainer. In addition to being an assessor of foster carers and adopters, YP was commissioned as an independent social worker to undertake work with a South Asian family who had adopted a sibling group. The staff had struggled to understand this family and wanted to fully understand the cultural differences and approaches to caring for the children. After this work, YP was asked to be a member of a panel and has since become a member of other panels.

YP's pragmatic approach derives from the skills and strategies she learnt as an assessing social worker earlier in her professional career. YP endeavours not to let her own personal experiences hinder her ability and productivity in undertaking the work presented on panels, hence her efficacy and efficiency with her tasks.

> *'I have on occasions seen quite judgmental views I have to say. … I am quite assertive and confident enough … There was one where the applicants, a couple, heterosexual couple, the male was a transsexual/cross dresser and really open about all this, we wouldn't have known if he didn't tell us. There was a conversation … the Panel Members felt that he had kept this very private and secret from his children because he didn't want them being bullied, and you know, he had done a very good job at it and that was his decision …, I felt, it wasn't what she said, I think it was the way it was said quite insensitive that basically he should be open and honest ... I said regardless of what you feel, society isn't as accepting and embracing of difference … these incidents, I kind of log them and if get the opportunity I want to explore them and hopefully educate myself and others.'*

YP's professional experience gives her an understanding of working directly with educational psychologists, nursery nurses, crèche workers, nutritionists, health visitors, social workers, guardians and many others involved in the care of vulnerable, looked after children. Additionally, her assessment skills, alongside her lived experiences and theoretical knowledge of diversity and equality, appear to be at the forefront of her own considerations and deliberations when she is on panels.

4.9.5 Interview reflections

YP expressed a willingness to be part of the research project and, on reflection, the interview highlights her character of wanting to help and be part of different things. Unusually, YP arranged to meet in a coffee shop midway between her home and a train station that would facilitate my commute to and from the interview. The interviewee chose the location, but a coffee shop did not feel a safe or secure environment in which to share a personal narrative. It was made still worse by the noise outside the coffee shop, where workmen were using a pneumatic drill which made it difficult to hear her at times. Trying to be respectful of her privacy and using a recorder made it difficult to be present in the interview. However, YP seemed oblivious to it all, which to some extent

was comforting; she gave a good account of her life despite the physical location. Additionally, as someone who had to adapt to racism within her school environment, as well as experiencing trauma through being captured when trying to deliver humanitarian aid, the environment was clearly not an issue for her.

YP came across as a reflective person who was able to relate her life experiences to her work. Although life had clearly thrown up many challenges, and YP to some extent presented as someone attempting to repair herself, there was a sense that at least on a surface level she was aware of this. Klein (1946), in describing projective identification, highlights that individuals can spend their life oscillating between the two positions. There were times when YP seemed to be in the 'paranoid' state, not content with her life, perhaps best seen in her comments about being single and childless and the expectations of the community. However, at other times, she was in the 'depressive' state, as seen in her example of how her single status enabled her to be supportive of her sister, nieces and nephews, also supporting and contributing to the lives of local and international people. As much as can be expected of an individual, she appears for the most part to have reached a place where she has 'a strong capacity for love and a great longing for a good and complete object … a desire to love people' (Klein, 1975, p. 16).

The study interview represents YP as a panel member who is able to come to the task with a knowledge of her past and use it effectively.

4.9.6 Summary of the case

YP's case is that of a single, Asian woman in her late forties, who has a distinct community presence. There seemed to be an underlying sense of loss when she spoke about her life, which could be related to her own expectations and hopes in terms of marriage and having children of her own, yet her immersion in social work and her family appeared to be her way of meeting these needs.

YP is culturally and socially aware and aims to incorporate her personal and professional knowledge into her work. Her personal experiences of caring for others derive from values that YP learnt from her parents. The ignorant actions of others towards herself and people of difference has meant that she is empathetic of others. This stems from her own parents' experiences of racism coming to the UK, her experience of being a child of immigrants, childhood difficulties within her family,

observations of disabled children through her mother's work as well as children in general through her own work and, latterly, the different world media view of Palestinians and Israelis/Jews.

4.10 Abandoned/Alone – 'let me down, yet again'

4.10.1 Case overview

BJ is the only child of her mother and father's marriage and the first child of her mother. Her father was in the army and she lived in a coastal area. Hers was a close-knit family, and she had contact with both sets of grandparents and at least one aunt.

This picture of early life changed dramatically with a lasting impact, due to her mother's extra-marital affair with her father's best friend, which resulted in her father leaving the family home, her parents divorcing, her mother remarrying and BJ suffering abuse and neglectful parenting, and trauma as an adult.

4.10.2 Aspects of the presented self

Phase A: Trauma and aloneness

When she was 5, BJ's parents' marriage ended, as a result of which she saw few of her extended family thereafter.

Phase B: Dealing with trauma (6–16 years old)

BJ disclosed she was sexually abused by her stepfather from the age of 6 years old, and experienced emotional and physical abuse as well.

Between the ages of 11 and 15, BJ had behavioural issues at school, assaulting another pupil, showing a lack of respect to teachers and truanting.

BJ also self-harmed, including taking an overdose of tablets, which resulted in her nearly dying. During her adolescence, BJ started taking drugs and was also placed in foster care. When she was aged 15, the abuse BJ experienced became known, resulting in a court case and her fellow pupils knowing of her experiences.

Phase C: Life in care (12–16 years old)

In BJ's early adolescence, she had her first contact with a social worker. BJ was placed in foster care by the local authority, having been removed from her mother's care. She had at least three foster carers before she left local authority care the week before her 16th birthday, when she was given a flat. BJ continued to take drugs.

Phase D: Life as an adult

From the age of 16, BJ had several relationships which were emotionally, physically and financially abusive, including one partner 'feeding' her drugs. BJ also engaged in the selling of drugs. BJ's experiences of domestic violence resulted in her breaking her back and having mental health difficulties.

BJ trained to become a hairdresser. She was also evicted from her accommodation and experienced financial debt.

In her late 20s, BJ gave birth to two daughters whom she raised for the first few years of their life. By the age of 34, BJ was unemployed and lived on her own, having no contact with her two daughters, who were taken into care.

4.10.3BNIM interpretive panel structural hypotheses

BJ's family perhaps can be described as having dysfunctional dynamics, to the point where her life has been marked by childhood trauma which may well continue throughout her life. She is perhaps emotionally stuck in the past, resulting in ongoing relationship problems and being a single parent. BJ's experience in the care system has been both positive and negative. Perhaps having survived significant trauma from the age of five has made her a survivor, to the point that those life experiences have made her resilient, empathetic and insightful. She uses these qualities to enable her to feel she has achieved something, namely sitting on a panel.

4.10.4The self brought to panel

Stage 1: Journey to being on panels

BJ mentioned that she was a qualified hairdresser, and it was through this that she was introduced to panel work. BJ had been doing a social worker's hair and had engaged in debate about foster care. Based on her time in care, she was putting forward negative

views; the social worker felt that she had a valuable contribution to be made and invited her to become a panel member. Initially, BJ was apprehensive about the role and did not want to be involved with panels. Since taking up the position, BJ has had feedback in her reviews that she makes a valuable contribution to panel given her unique experience as a service user. She describes herself as being passionate about issues, which can lead to her being vocal.

> *'So, I can come across as very abrupt or very vocal about things, I am very passionate.'*

BJ expressed mostly negative views of social workers and foster carers, although she has memories of at least one good foster placement. Her negative memories include being locked in her room at night to protect her because her foster sisters were stealing knives from the kitchen. In relation to social workers, she recalls Social Services threatening that if she did not stop misbehaving, she would be put into a children's home. In her opinion, it is very hard to be in the 'system' as a young person, dealing with all the emotions and your surroundings. Although, BJ commented that she experienced foster carers who were motivated by the wrong reasons, she did recall a childless couple whom she described as:

> *'yeah they were lovely, they were just brilliant people, brilliant people'.*

These carers allowed her to have friends around, have her own room and to swim in their pool. However, she describes the difficulty of knowing that children services were not going to allow her to stay in the placement,

> *'because I felt like I was being pushed out, I was a little shit, I was terrible… that was because I felt they were pushing me out, but it wasn't them, it was the system'.*

BJ feels failed by the system, as reflected in her generally negative comments about social workers:

> *'textbook learners [who] have not had any life experience'.*

She comments on their ineptness in saying the wrong thing:

> *'I know exactly how you feel, and I'd be like, "What? How do you know what I feel?" I could never, even though my own experiences could sit and say to a young person, "I know exactly how you feel", because every person is different, everybody has had different life experiences, different upbringings and different personalities. People think differently so you can never say that and just because a textbook says, you know, not every young person is the same. That really gripes me because I say argh!'*

When talking of her time in foster care, BJ speaks of a series of different foster carers, some of whom she describes as good carers while others were, in her opinion, bad foster carers. Generally, she observed that nobody had actually parented her and there was a sense that she felt abandoned, let down by numerous adults and particularly her parents. BJ said she became very distrustful, feeling a lot of pent-up anger and putting up walls as a defence mechanism because she thought that nobody cared about her, an instinct to which she believes many young children and young people relate. BJ remembers having social workers who would attempt to form a rapport, saying, 'I know exactly how you feel.' She found such statements ludicrous: they could not understand her, as they had not been sexually abused themselves.

Stage 2: Social Services - 'Life after Local Authority involvement'

The negative aspects of her family life were compounded when her private difficulties became public, following the court case in which her stepfather was prosecuted, as the case was documented in the newspapers, which was terribly stressful for her as a young teenager. BJ stated that she came from a small community, where everyone knew each other. She withdrew her emotional self by turning to heavier drug use. She never explained when the abuse stopped or anything about the disclosures made. She recalled the lack of support physically and emotionally during this time, especially as her mother moved away; she felt that her parents 'just generally did not care' about her.

BJ described her experience of leaving LA care aged 15 as being 'shoved out of care', given a flat although she was unprepared and ill-equipped for adult life. She had never been taught independent life skills, such as cooking, cleaning or paying bills. She remembered being frightened, to the point that she could not sleep on her first night.

> *'I learnt how to cook a chicken from the woman that lived above me. I wanted a roast dinner and I didn't know how to cook, so I knocked on her door, I was so embarrassed. I went, "How do you cook a roast chicken" because I was scared of poisoning myself and she taught me, and I still cook my chicken that way to this day.'*

BJ narrated that she mismanaged her money, not paying her bills and owing money to drug dealers, so had to vacate the property. Over this period, she became a drug seller as well as being addicted to drugs herself. She says that no one would have known how much she was abusing drugs as she always took care of herself, implying that she was well-presented and retained her hairdressing job.

Reflecting on her time in care, BJ believes that her drug misuse was an escape from having to be a 'mini-adult' and not being permitted to simply be a child. She stated that, as a young person, the impact of being let down by adults so many times and being moved around endlessly was detrimental. Equally, she felt that her experience in care changed her: she just 'gave up' and this led to further substance misuse on her part. She believed the system 'took you in and spat you out … they didn't want to help you in later life.'

Stage 3: Coming to terms with life: implications of domestic abuse

BJ explained that she had been subjected to three types of abuse from her stepfather, that continued for several years, 'it was physically, sexually and mentally'.

BJ said the abuse led her to be 'really bad' at school and at home. She felt there was no escape from her stepfather or the situation and recalls fearing him and always being frightened at home. BJ's experiences at the hands of her early caregivers resulted in her turning to substance misuse and eventually experiencing what could be described as a toxic trio of substance misuse, domestic abuse and mental ill-health throughout her life. BJ defined her conditions as bipolar disorder and a personality disorder.

Due to her negative experiences, BJ has resolved aged 34 that she will remain single. This would appear unrealistic given her young age but also illustrates that, although on the surface she appears reflective, she has not explored the reasons why she continually finds herself in abusive relationships. The abuse has been particularly horrific, including being locked in a bedroom and being physically abused while she was

undressed, being thrown against a mirror and the bedroom wall. On another occasion, BJ broke her back when, fearing for her life, she jumped naked out of a window to flee the domestic violence that her then partner was inflicting on her. She appeared to be aware of the impact of domestic violence on the children, stating that she had not wanted her daughters to feel they had done something wrong when hearing BJ and their father screaming and shouting at each other, just as she had to hear when she was 5 and dealt with her parents' fighting in the home. Interestingly, she was able to make the connection between her own first memory of her parents arguing and her daughters being the same age, 5 and 6, at the time she lost contact. Again, she narrated that other people seemed to be aware of her situation and there were rumours and gossiping.

> *'I didn't want to give up as such but I've been condemned by people, by other mothers as well for not fighting hard enough. I've been an adult and thinking about my children now if I'd gone up the school kicking off, fighting or turning up at their house, what would that have done to my girls.'*

At the time of the interview, BJ was unemployed. She mentioned that she makes jewellery and seems to support people in the local community informally. Although she did not mention any current involvement with mental-health services, she said how difficult it was to access mental health services because these services do not undertake preventative work, only supporting people who are in acute crisis.

Her traumatic childhood, marred by abuse, failure to protect and neglectful parenting, has led to BJ being distrustful, with a sense that no one was available to help. She experienced the same abuse in her adult relations and described not being parented and having no respect or trust for elders and authority figures, being violent and angry, leading to a life searching for love and closeness in others.

> *'It was every kind of abuse possible, financial abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse even to the point of sexual abuse and the drugs.'*

Stage 4: Family dynamics

BJ recalls having an early secure existence but, due to lies and dishonesty, the course of her life changed. She remembers the day that she stood screaming for her father not to go as he left her and her mother. As he walked out of the family home, her mother was crying and BJ was left alone, as she had no siblings at the time. Her mother later went

on to have a son with BJ's stepfather. BJ made clear that her relationship with her younger sibling is not good.

> *'My brother reminds me of my stepdad, so I've completely cut them out because of my girls.'*

BJ makes several references to dealing with trauma on her own, throughout her life, from this first experience onwards. Adults continue to let her down: her parents, social workers, her aunt, her partners and the system.

Although she appears self-sufficient, there was an underlying sense that BJ, at least up until a year or two before the interview, had continued to hope that her parents would be proud of her and would ultimately meet her needs.

> *'Whereas before I always wanted to make them proud and I've always tried to be in their lives.'*

BJ concluded by saying that she had again been let down by them and reflected that, not only had they disappointed her, they had failed as grandparents to her children.

> *'Cut my parents out of my life completely because with the situation with my own children they let me down, yet again, as an adult with supporting and helping me.'*

This was in some way a contradiction, as she had spoken about the fact that her mother seems to have contact with her children via their father, at the expense of her not having contact with her daughters.

> *'Yeah, she went behind my back. I was trying to say to her, listen, my children, if you are going to see them, then just tell me …I am their Mum, you are not their mum, you can't make up for your mistakes with my kids. As it was, I was due to see them, but I couldn't get hold of them, nobody was answering their phone, so I was going crazy. They had only gone up to her, which I don't trust her to have my kids on their own anyway and they have gone behind my back and the reason why I didn't get to see them was because they were with my Mum.'*

She has since decided that she is better off on her own, without contact with her family. Whilst she tries to remain jovial and optimistic for the most part, BJ has had a lonely life that lacks any real direction and purpose. BJ's historical debt from past

relationships and the additional legal fees incurred from taking her children's father to court has, in her words, meant that she is without the money to restart a legal battle for custody or at least contact with her two children. Her ex-partner left her for the children's babysitter.

4.10.5 Interview reflections

BJ came across as insecure and immature and, although the interview reflected a degree of self-awareness, there was childlike aspect to her interview. Stopping and starting, she continually sought to establish whether she had answered the question; seeking the approval she had desperately wanted from her parents. Despite these limitations, BJ is reflective enough to learn from this and has since commented:

> *'When I am in the panel, I am very expressive. I know I am very vocal and sometimes I can interrupt, but with me, if I don't say it, I forget it ... I am learning. I put my hand up and they laugh at me, but I need to speak, or I am going to forget what I am going to say.'*

BJ's sense of loneliness is clear; she blames herself at times for the experiences she has had in life, is resigned to being unable to trust people, whilst at the same time feeling that she is on her own.

> *'I think I am going to be single for the rest of my life because I can't trust anybody, which is a very sad thing, but I really can't trust anybody, because of everything that has happened to me. Maybe the right person will come along one day but it is very scary, I am always too suspicious.'*

On eight occasions in her narrative, she spoke about being alone:

> *'[on] my own … Like I was just alone, I didn't have any brothers or sisters and I just had to deal with it on my own because my mum was so upset and she didn't know what to do, you know what I mean. My Dad left and I just remember being on my own, lonely.'*

4.10.6 Summary of the case

BJ's case reveals a life of abuse by the inability and failure of others to protect her. This is illustrated by her father walking away despite her 5-year old cries; an absent

mother who was embroiled in meeting her own needs; her mother's response to BJ's suicide attempts (on at least three occasions BJ attempted to take her own life); and her aunt's mismanagement of telephone contact with her step-father. She describes the same abuse in her adult relations:

> *'It was every kind of abuse possible, financial abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse even to the point of sexual abuse and the drugs.'*

These repercussions are evident in the fact that BJ still suffers from nightmares. Her lack of trust in adults is evident in her view of foster carers and her disagreement with the legislation.

> *'I don't agree with the law about the way they deal with certain things with young people these days.'*

The trauma and abuse have impacted on BJ's mental health. This was evident in her adolescent years in how she rebelled at and absconded from school; her eventual placement in foster care; a disruptive upbringing; poor education; drug misuse; mental health difficulties and separation from her children. She has experienced two generations of family dysfunction. Given that some of these issues remain in her personal life, it is concerning that BJ now contributes to recommendations on whether people should become foster carers.

BJ's case illustrates the problems of poor childhood attachment and the life-long impact this has. Bowlby, in 1958 writing on attachment, stresses the importance of a baby forming affectual bonds with its many caregivers: a child's ability to securely attach in the future is dependent on early relationships. The child's need for protection, safety and security is based on the bond between them and their caregiver. Bowlby (1977) describes attachment theory as how the relationship between a child and parent or caregiver develops and impacts on the child's emotional development either positively or adversely.

4.11 Chapter summary

The chapter explores the capacity of the interviewees to think, as highlighted by the work of Bion, through the lens of reflecting on their own biographies. Within this context:

> *Panel should be fair and be seen to be fair; greater independence can reinforce this.*
>
> *It is recommended that people with experience from a variety a personal perspective should be included on panels. This can bring a wealth of additional understanding and knowledge to the task required ... so that all groups are well represented. (Borthwick and Lord, 2019, p. 7)*

The chapter has presented the nine interviewees' interpretive case accounts using the BNIM model. Each interviewee offered a unique personal experience in the interview and a perspective on their panel role. The BNIM processes illustrate both the uniqueness and similarities of panel members' narratives and, based on their individual life histories, what they contribute to the panel task either positively or adversely. The themes that emerge are the family (i.e. position in the family, significance of a parent or other family member); professional (i.e. striving for status and academic qualifications); and the external world (i.e. harm caused by race or class). Some common themes include being the first to attend university in the family, being of working-class origins, experiences of being bullied or discriminated against, career progression into a management position. The major difference was the experience of being poorly parented.

Many of interviewees came across as defensive in their interviews; there was a calculating air as they openly evaluated what they felt was wanted by the research question. This will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6. Even when discussing their experience on panel, there were almost no adverse comments; despite this, the observations highlight that, in the majority of cases, there were areas for development in each panel, in some more than others. Looking back to the literature review, this reflected Janis's views about the cohesiveness of the group and not being open to challenge from the outside.

The chapter that follows summarises the themes from the panel observations, highlighting contributions in the panels of eight of the nine interviewees observed, and illustrating how they bring their personal biographies into their professional role.

5 Panel Observations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the data obtained from the observations of 12 (6 agencies) of the 15 panels (8 agencies) presented in the case studies. All but one of the panels were observed on two occasions. The case study analysis reviews the effectiveness of panels by giving an overview of each agency's panel, describing its membership (including ethnicity, social class and profession) and the frequency and timing of the panel meetings. It also addresses questions about whether issues of quoracy cause delay and impact on how the panels function.

5.2 OBS_001

5.2.1 Background

This independent fostering agency is based in the south-west, covering England and Wales, and has two office locations. At the time of the observation, it had 35 foster carers in the south-west and over 40 children placed.

The Central list is made up of 10 core members who are all independent from the agency, the Chair (a Special Educational Needs headteacher) and a vice chair, who is a social work educator. The other members include a solicitor, an ex-foster carer, a care-leaver, a children's nurse and a social worker. Gender and age representation are proportionate; disability and sexual orientation were not evident, and all members were white.

The agency employs external assessors to undertake assessments of prospective foster carers.

5.2.2 Observations

The first panel was chaired by the Chair and the second by the vice chair who had a social work background. The panel sat in the evening, 6.30–8.30pm and 6.30–10.30pm, respectively. Each panel had 6 items: Annual Foster Care Reviews, a review and an

allegation report, a resignation and a Prospective Foster Carer report. No time slots were allotted to any cases on either agenda.

At the first panel, a new member was observing as part of her induction; by the second panel, she was a panel member. The membership was 6 and 8 respectively.

Due to the age and layout of the building, full accessibility was compromised. The only access to the meeting room is by stairs, and the meetings take place in the basement, which is also used for storage; therefore, there is minimal natural light. In addition, there was no table other than one small table used by the Chair for panel papers (**Error! eference source not found.**). Panel members were seated on chairs with their backs against the wall (Appendix 7.2.). Of the six items presented to the first panel, foster carers were present for the first and last cases, which were mainstream assessments.

The first case was a single applicant, and this was presented via video link; for three of the four annual foster carer reviews, neither the carers nor their respective supervising social workers were in attendance and these cases were presented by the Panel Advisor. The Panel Advisor asked if he should leave the room so that the panel members were free to raise any issues or formulate any questions. He was not given a response and, therefore, did not leave the room.

The panel discussion of all these cases was minimal and very informal, with the Chair summarising and panel members making statements such as:

> *'All I would say is that we ought to pass on our thanks really and to continue on with the good job really.'*
>
> *'I put well done.'*
>
> *'Yeah, me too.'*

The case discussions were observed to take the form of a general conversation, as reflected in the panel minutes which do not record any questions being asked or answers given.

All three items included merely the panel Chair's opening summary and the panel's recommendation. For the final case, only the supervising social worker was in attendance, and the panel stated on their arrival:

'We have not got many questions really… I know you are just rushing through.'

The questions that that panel did have related to sibling contact, which had no bearing on the panel's ability to make a recommendation.

The PFCR was presented via video link, which proved to be difficult to get started as the signal was lost several times during the presentation. Once the presentation began, the Panel Chair asked questions of the social worker who was invited to join the meeting first. Then the prospective foster carer was invited to be part of the discussions and questioning. Much of the discussion in this case centred around the carer's age (over 60), the ex-partner's criminal conviction and their pet parrot. All the questions were presented in a manner that highlighted individuals' own value bases and personal biases.

Panel Chair: So, she is 65, isn't she? 64. So, we don't want to be considered ageist. There comes a time when age may …

BJ : She is quite a young 64-year-old.

Panel Chair There is no upper age limit and it'll be on a case-by-case basis. I was thinking to myself at what age you might think a foster carer was too old. It would be 70? Maybe 75.

Panel advisor I'm not going to answer that question.

BJ : I mean, I read the notes … the foster couple that I lived with and I think they have done their time when I got there, and it was awful experience. But you would probably know because they become really complacent and you can tell in their attitude I suppose.

Panel Chair Can I ask about this parrot?

Applicant Oh, bless him

Panel Chair Is he safe?

Applicant He is very smiley if you don't touch him. I can't even touch him; he doesn't like me anymore. I have a stick with a shield…

Panel Chair *Can I say that's not the right answer.*

Panel members' laughter

Panel Chair *Can I tell you what the right answer is, the serious side to it is you need to, with L, do a proper risk assessment because what we were talking about earlier was that, if it was a dog and there was a dog in the house and you couldn't touch the dog without being bitten, we would have real concerns. Parrots can also give you a nasty nip, so I think what you need to do, before we would approve it, is to actually do a proper health and safety assessment to make sure that, if you had a youngster in your house, he was very safe. Actually, we can all sit here and laugh about being bitten by a parrot, but you could lose your sight or lose an eye whatever so there needs to be a proper assessment. The stick might be fine for you.*

Despite the above discussion, the panel did approve the carer and vulnerabilities were noted in the minutes.

The second observation did not run according to the agenda even though two of the six items were deferred by the panel.

Of the four cases heard, one was via video link with the assessor and applicant present; again, the signal was lost and had to be reconnected several times. However, for the three other cases, only the social workers were in attendance. For all cases, a number of questions were identified by the Panel. Panel business was poorly managed by the vice chair, with panel members seemingly managing themselves. Panel members were interrupting each other in trying to convey their points. As mentioned, for this panel, there is no table and, on one occasion, BJ, wanting to get her point across, stood and jumped up and down.

At both panels, the panel Chair or the panel advisor brought attendees into the panel room. When the case was being heard via video link, it was the responsibility of the panel administrator to coordinate electronically the attendance of those presenting the case. On most occasions this was very disjointed; on one occasion, the panel Chair brought attendees into the room without being clear with the panel what questions were to be asked.

The unfamiliarity of video links and some attendees not being physically present led to very informal and sometimes chaotic presentations which clearly were difficult to minute, hence the brevity of the written record in the form of minutes

5.2.3 Panel membership

Each panel observed was constituted in line with the regulations: it was diverse in terms of gender, age and role representation, but the population of the area is predominantly white and middle-class, and it was not a diverse panel in terms of ethnicity or class. The same members generally are called upon to attend each panel, which has the potential to lead to consensus rather than challenge in recommendation-making.

5.2.4 Panel effectiveness

The panel administrator appeared very efficient and was relied upon heavily by the panel.

> *Vice Chair:* *I am confused. Why have I got the Bs in my hand, what are we doing with them.*
>
> *Vice Chair* *Have you got all that Charlie?*

The quality of the minutes is generally good, considering the free flow of conversation and the identification of issues to be addressed by presenters.

The recommendations are very general and are picked up from the discussions rather than being specific to a panel member; no reasons are given for any recommendation.

> *Panel Advisor:* *I will cover that one, do you want me to leave the room?*
>
> *I am just looking for the approval.*
>
> *I am more than welcome to answers from these carers as I assessed them back in 2005/6 I think.*
>
> *Panel Chair:* *I think they have done really well actually.*
>
> *Have we got any questions or quite happy to continue.*

All I would say is that we ought to pass on our thanks really and well and to continue on with the good job really.

Panel Advisor: Definitely.

The panel process appeared more like a conveyor belt than a means for asking questions in a manner that would adequately safeguard the children. This was particularly reflected in comments made by panel members:

BJ: I think it is our fault as much as, you know, something is not, and it's gone amiss there, hasn't it?

Panel member: Ideally it should have come back.

BJ: We could have just said yes to them and them come back and say to them well actually, even though you are approved for that, you can't have that. So, we need to make it clear to them, don't we?

BJ: No, I didn't. No, this is what I am saying, it should have come back to Panel, shouldn't it?

Evening panels that have full and long agendas also risk being inefficient, since most panel members have already worked a full day, may not be working to their full capacity and can become easily distracted. This was evidenced by poor eye contact and fidgeting by several panel members.

5.2.5 Panel delay

The panel meets monthly and there is provision for extra panels to be held. As illustrated in the exchange below, an additional panel was going to be held the week after the second panel. Each of the panels has a full agenda, despite being held in the evening, although two items at the second panel were deferred with no reason given.

Panel advisor: We are deferring them to next panel.

Panel Chair: Okay.

Panel advisor: Bs and Cs can wait until next week.

5.3 OBS_003

5.3.1 Background

In the financial year in which the observation took place, 2015/16, the London Local Authority had more than 280 looked after children, over 80% of whom were in in-house foster placements with the remainder placed with Independent Foster Agency carers. Of the in-house carers, approximately 85% were mainstream carers.

The fostering panel met monthly and held occasional additional panels. The Central list consisted of 10 members, comprising the Chair (qualified in social work), two elected members, a foster carer, an LAC nurse, a group manager, a team manager (vice chair), an IRO, a CAMHS psychotherapist, an independent social worker plus the Panel Administrator and Professional Panel Advisor. Of the two panels observed, both reached the quorum of 5 members on the day.

The agenda for each panel was varied and the time allotted for each case was case-dependent. For example, first annual reviews and change of approvals are allocated 40 minutes, resignations 5 minutes, connected and mainstream approvals 60 minutes.

5.3.2 Observations

The observations took place during the summer months. The first panel observation took place from 9.30am to 2pm and was chaired by the independent Chair. The panel started promptly with the Chair going through the minutes; although initially the panel was not quorate, the fifth panel member arrived 15 minutes later.

The Chair gave a summary overview of each case being presented, with the strengths they had identified, before asking members' views on the case. There was a tendency for the panel to make statements about practice issues rather than asking questions that would assist in making a recommendation. The Chair then raised their own questions; notably, there was no collective agreement about what questions would be asked.

The Panel Administrator has a very active role and is tasked with bringing social workers into the room for the panel to ask questions. Once the initial clarifying questions had been asked of the social worker, the social workers would leave the room to get the applicants or foster carers. It was not clear why the social workers were

routinely asked to come in first as in no case was a question asked that could not have been asked of the applicant or foster carer, or at least for which they could have been present, for example a question relating to health and safety.

After the introductions, the Chair shared the strengths identified from the report(s), and then proceeded to ask all the questions; other members were less involved once the presenters arrived.

One of the members was an IRO and had knowledge of a case; the Chair made it clear that they would stop the member if it were felt they were going beyond their role as a panel member. This appeared an appropriate approach for the Chair to follow; nonetheless, it was observed that the Chair made a number of value-based comments in relation to the applicants' finances e.g. savings. Additionally, on two occasions, rather than asking the social worker a question, the Chair appeared to be 'lecturing' the social worker about how to manage the case. There were no questions, just statements, as illustrated below:

Chair: So, it's about gaps between placements?

Presenter: No, I think that she maybe, she is meaning a general comment, it's an area that she needs to, maybe, improve on.

Chair: Why I am going to pursue this is the, obviously, for children, especially little people, in placement, respite during a placement wouldn't be in their best interest, so in terms of taking time, she is talking about between placements, not within a placement, do you see what I mean?

Presenter: I think, I think that she might mean generally, she is reflecting on her character that it is something that she needs to put in. I am not saying that we would get respite because she's got enough people, there is her Mum and there is C, but it is just sometimes recognising....

Chair: So, you don't think that she is saying, "I want more respite"?

Presenter: No, she is not saying that.

Chair: Lovely, okay. Thank you very much.

Chair: Okay. We noted that there was, you were really, really pleased to read about the attachment with M and they say we think it will be difficult process when M leaves us, as she is the longest placement so far and we have very strong bonds being developed. Which we know, is fundamentally important for children that foster carers form strong attachments. One of the complexities being a foster carer, and being a very able foster carer, is having the capacity to form those attachments and deal with the related loss, in the interest of children, do you know what I mean? But we noted that they'd been on the moving-on course.

Presenter: No, we are wanting them to go on it.

Chair: Absolutely. Why I say that is, sometimes, foster carer's attachments to children are, there is a sort of discourse around slightly problematising that, where actually we know it's quite the reverse. It is absolutely essential because otherwise children don't develop psychologically well. But it is also very complicated because they have to have the emotional capacity to deal with a loss and enable children to make positive bonds, to happily and hopefully hand children on, basically, do you know what I mean, in a careful way.

The Chair reflected that, having seen the foster carer, they had become distracted by the medical advisor's comments about the foster carer's BMI, again illustrating the Chair's biases.

The second observation took place between 9.30am and 1.30pm and was chaired by the vice chair. The tone of this panel was more informal, and there was an overall sense that the vice chair had not frequently chaired a meeting, forgetting, for example, to make the introductions. The vice chair tended to ask leading and closed questions; as such, the meeting appeared to be more a friendly chat than a process to gather information that would lead to a clear and concise recommendation. Additionally, it was not always clear whether a question was being asked, whether it was a statement, or who was asking the question.

Vice Chair: OK, before we move on – on page 21 – it was confusing about the plan – that this is a short-term plan because we don't know what is happening and it was a bit confusing on page 21, um, because it was saying, do you want to say how you felt about that, elected member?

Elected member: Yeah, it was just under the contact, it said that should he be approved as a long-term carer. I would recommend that contact be reduced for M – I assume that is with mum – it doesn't say that and that she would be living with her uncle and I wondered why that was there, because it sorts of blurs the recommendation?

The vice-chair had an over-familiar manner with attendees; the more relaxed approach appeared to lead panel members to drift into care-planning, overstepping the mark in relation to quality assurance and recommending and, ultimately, becoming case-managing. At times, the Chair interjected with their own views or knowledge of the case, failing to ask panel members for their individual recommendations and instead saying, 'Are we in agreement?' or 'happy to approve?' The panel ran early for every item, so the attendees were frequently not in the waiting area when the administrator went to fetch them. Both the panel administrator and the professional/panel advisor, who do not have a vote and whose comments on the merits of each case are not required, had a great deal to say in this panel:

RM: I should not make any comments as I am an advisor here. But what I do know this had to be written in a short timeframe because of deadlines. We could not actually request school references because this is one of the things, I told the social worker to follow up, and she did try and failed because, literally, they broke up the day before. It was a quick job … which is problematic for getting background references sometime.

RM: Can I add to that a little bit? I read this referral yesterday, so I am working from recall, I have not got it with me today. I understood that her attendance at school was very, very good actually, so I don't think ... I am not concerned. I think that if she was attending that school, that is another continuous in her life at the age of 16, which will be what the social worker will weigh up very carefully. She has clearly had fantastic experience with you, but if you think about it, the school holidays are the honeymoon period, there is no pressure to perform and family are far away, and she is safe as well. The reality is that she would have to then find a different school in a new area … joining a whole different peer group as well, so there are other changes. I think that will be the thing to weigh and I suspect, I don't want ... I am very keen on transparency and I

don't, from my perspective, I cannot consciously say I would support a move to school before the end of the holidays, given the relatively short period of time that she has been in your care. I think 16 years of schooling is a bigger weighing factor, I know that is the plan...

5.3.3 Panel membership

The central list is important in ensuring that the panel is always able to take place. On both occasions, the minimum number of panel members were present. This may well have been due to the panels taking place in July and August; however, the total central list only consisted of 10 members, and on each of the panels there were five members sitting, excluding the advisors and administrator. Therefore, there was the potential, on any given panel, that if a panel member did not arrive, the panel would not have been able to proceed.

In terms of role representation, there were no issues; however, diversity in relation to gender and ethnicity were poorly addressed by this central list, with only one male and one non-white member included. The panel acknowledged in the business section the need to have representation from an ex-service-user and was making attempts to address this. It was not evident whether the panel was representative in terms of sexual orientation or disability.

5.3.4 Panel effectiveness

Both panels observed ran to time and addressed all the matters put before them. Panel members had clearly read the paperwork and during the pre-discussion it was clear that they felt able to express their thoughts about each case. Given the skill-based diversity of the membership, various views were expressed. However, at times, the panel overstepped its authority in relation to care-planning. Subjective comments were also made: members did not always make comments or express views based on the reports in front of them, but on personal values or prior knowledge of the carers or children.

Earlier studies on panels have documented that attendees have expressed how daunting they find the whole process; this panel appears to make matters worse as there is no waiting area. Prior to the panel, attendees spend time with their social worker, either in the canteen or in an office found by the social worker. Attendees and their social

workers are asked to leave the panel room whilst recommendations were deliberated, which meant being asked to wait in the hallway outside before returning to the panel room, as illustrated below for two of the cases presented:

> *Chair: Okay, so S has probably explained this to you, that we now ask you both to leave and, if you can hover around and then we ask you to come back, is that okay, while we have further discussion. Thank you very much.*

5.3.5 Panel delay

At the first panel, the Chair started the meeting when it was not quorate; the panel member arrived after 15 minutes, as noted above. No recommendations were made during this time. The outcomes for applicants, foster carers and, in turn, children were not delayed by panel processes.

5.4 OBS_004

5.4.1 Background

As at the end of March 2016, the East Midland authority had over 800 looked after children and young people. Half that number have been placed with in-house approved foster carers, and a further quarter placed with independent fostering providers. Exact figures were not available from the service; it is estimated that 80 children were placed for adoption, and a little more than this number had been adopted in the previous financial year. In 2015/6, approving 30 mainstream foster carers.

The adoption panels meet three times a month; thus, there was no delay in the approval of prospective adopters and matches.

The panels were chaired by independent chairs and vice chairs who had extensive, relevant experience. Although employed by the service, the panel advisors (managers), were independent of the adoption service.

5.4.2 Observations

The panels ran from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm and 9:15am to 12:00 pm, on different days of the week, and chaired by the two different independent panel chairs. Both panels started on time with a panel business slot. The agendas clearly laid out the time allotted for the

panel's pre-discussion (preparation) followed by the set time when the panel would hear the case and concluded with a debriefing slot at the end of the panel day. The Chair provided a summary of each case to be presented which was followed by the panel advisor setting out the legal parameters of the item.

> *SM Yeah, I'll do my spiel…*

The Chair would then proceed to field questions from each panel member, and then distribute the questions among the panel membership.

The Chair in the first observation was calm and considered and numbered each question, informing the panel members of the order in which they would ask their questions. The Chair then left the room to greet the attendees and to inform them of the questions that would be asked of them.

After questions came panel discussions. The Chair asked panel members if they felt able to make a recommendation, which was done in front of all attendees with each panel member giving their recommendation as well as their individual reason for it. The first of the two cases ran over by over 30 minutes and the Chair apologised to the next case that they had been kept waiting. It was evident that the panel advisor felt the need to take a more active role, helping to reframe a panel member's question and summarising the task of panel at the end of the pre-discussion.

> *SM: I think one of your problems is, it's not just the asking of the questions. You may not get the detail in the answer because that's a question that, if you're the worker at home, you can talk to her about and deal with it. It's a difficult question. That's the answer in this setting. So, I think you have to accept that you can ask the question around that. You may get part of your answer …*
>
> *It's a reminder that we expect the worker to answer questions. The occasion is harder for the adopter, isn't it? So, she is entitled to struggle a bit if that is the case, but I would expect L to help her out. And so, I think some of these questions will be…*

With the second case, panel members clearly struggled with their thoughts about the suitability of the match presented to them although they were able to give a positive

recommendation. This unease showed itself by the very poor eye contact between panel members and adopters.

The second observation was a full day's panel and included two internal matches, two adoption applications and an interagency match. Each was allotted 60 minutes for discussion and presentation.

The Chair shared the strengths that the panel members had identified from the paperwork, before questions were asked. There were five cases on the agenda and the panel advisor was of the view that two of the cases were difficult and should not, therefore, be observed. In one case, the prospective adopters (applicants) did not want to be observed and, in the second case, the assessing social worker thought that it was possible that the couple would not be approved, so felt it was not appropriate to have an observer.

This panel generally ran to time, with presenters entering the room 5 to 10 minutes later than the allotted time. At times, the panel Chair appeared flustered, dealing with matters in front of presenters which would probably have been best managed by taking advice from the panel advisor. There were also occasions when the body language of the panel members was not particularly engaging or friendly. Additionally, panel members' questions and recommendations were very long-winded; they appeared to be trying to demonstrate that they had read the paperwork and seemed more focussed on their knowledge of the case than the task of making a recommendation.

> *Panel Member: I'm also very happy to recommend the match. I just feel that the time is right for you, you know, that you two, you know, you've done lots of things in your lives, you're financially stable, you've got a very positive relationship, you've got a nice house, and now the time is right to have some children come and join you and it seems that your lifestyle is right for that. You seem to have really realistic understanding of the needs of the boys as well, so it's not all rose tinted, although you know, your responses are really happy about it, you do seem to really understand what the needs of the boys are, and that you know, you'll be good advocates for them, you're going to look after them and make sure that they, you know, have the best and reach their full potential and the best that they can as individuals. Good luck.*

5.4.3 Panel membership

The agency has a large and suitably skilled and experienced central list, which includes two independent chairs and a vice chair. As well as three adopted adults, one adopter, a birth mother and an education representative (ex-headteacher), three medical advisors, two independent social workers, five agency social workers and two other independent members (professional background unknown). In addition, the panel had access to legal advice. Due to changes in legislation, there was no longer an expectation that the legal representative attends, although on this panel they provide written legal advice for the panel advisor to share with the panel.

The population within the local authority area is less than 4% non-white and this is reflected in the panel. However, three of the panel members were non-white, one panel member had a visually noticeable physical disability and there was at least one male member on each panel. The observer was not aware of any representation in terms of sexual orientation. On the second panel that was observed, no vice chair was present, as there was only one on the central list.

5.4.4 Panel effectiveness

The service makes good provision for attendees in terms of refreshments and a suitable waiting-room, although there is quite a walk from the waiting area to the panel room.

This panel process appeared to be open and transparent both in terms of informing presenters of the questions and giving recommendations in a transparent manner. That is the case whilst everyone remains in the room, but it should be noted that, if the panel is not minded to give a positive recommendation, attendees are asked to leave the room. Panel members then give their recommendations, after which the Chair and the panel advisor go into the waiting area and inform attendees of the recommendation. As previously mentioned, both panels ran over time; however, the panel advisor left the room to inform attendees of any delay over 15 minutes. As the panel advisor gave the legal parameters of each case, the panel remained on task.

> *SM: What… but what you're measuring up, you've got to… partly, to get somewhere, is can… are they… can they meet most of the needs of this child? That is what you're actually looking at. You know, at the end of the day, you are aware of age and all those factors, but actually, that's… that comes before.*

You're now presented with this match of this couple with M, can they meet most of his needs that are significant?

From the observations, it would appear that where panel members had real difficulties with the information presented or were dubious about matches or recommendations, there was considerable pre-panel discussion. It was for this reason that the panel ran over its allotted time rather than panel members getting caught up in care planning.

The following discussion shows the usefulness of panel being able to explore issues through probing questions. The answer that this particular question elicited from the attendees enabled the panel to make an unanimously positive recommendation.

Panel member 1: My main question is why R with these people? I didn't, at face value, feel that comfortable. I just think I saw them with an older child, one with speech. I don't know.

Panel member 2: So, I was a bit puzzled as to why this child for this couple? … that sort of came right from the very beginning, and I tried to work my way through it. I'm still left at the end, thinking, yes, okay, but this sounds a bit… yes, okay, this couple, this child. But actually, as a resource, this was a couple who could have taken a more challenging child. I know I'm probably not allowed to think that, but I'm saying it here today, because that's how I felt.

SM: You can think it, but you can't form a question.

Panel member: I can't form a question. But I needed to say it because I felt this was a resource that has not been used to its best ability?

Panel Chair: On the other hand, yes, there is an element, I suppose of [unclear], is that very often, when couples approach an agency, they feel that they've got to have quite a wide age … to be sort of accepted. Because of their ages, they get sort of hooked into that…

SM: But you're going right back to your first question, aren't you? Why this child?

Panel member 3: My recommendation is yes; I too would recommend R to be placed with yourselves for adoption. I think you... I didn't know you before you

came to panel, but you've come over as a very open, thoughtful couple who I think, you know, have embraced this little boy with ... The baby you didn't think you would be offered has come to you now, and that you've actually embraced that and taken that on board. And I think that really you have adjusted your thinking to the fact that this is a baby you're taking on, not a three to four-year-old, and how you will actually work with him both in the early days.

Other examples of panel members expressing their biases and preconceived thoughts include:

Panel member: You know, the question is, do we ask them why they wouldn't change the dog's name, and changed the child's name instead?

Panel member: Yeah, I've not really very many questions. D's got a very difficult story involving incest on the part of his birth father … how they approach telling this story… it is just a bit disappointing that they were changing D's name, although I could understand that.

The efficiency of the panel process is aided by good quality paperwork as a result of a robust quality assurance processes, due to having dedicated panel advisors (managers).

5.4.5 Panel delay

Due to the size of the central list and the fact that panel met almost every week, on different days, there is no evidence that the administrative workings of the panel caused any delay. The panel minutes are clear and concise. It is also evident that the administration of the panel is very efficient in setting deadlines for when minutes will be circulated to the Chair and panel members, when the Chair should return the minutes and when applicants and social workers will be informed of the agency decision-maker's decision both verbally and in writing.

5.5 OBS_005

5.5.1 Background

In March 2016, the looked after population stood at just over 500 children, with more than 80% living in foster placements. Of this 80%, 75% lived outside the London authority.

The panel meets fortnightly and has a busy agenda with a variety of cases: AFCR (50 minutes), AFCR and de-registration of previous partner (25 minutes), Friends and Family assessments (50 minutes), long-term match (35 minutes) and PFCR (50 minutes).

A copy of the central list was not made available to the study but, from the apologies given in the minutes, the membership appeared to be comprised of nine members: with seven and six members sitting, respectively, at the observed panels. The second panel observed was an extra panel. Members were from a range of backgrounds and included two vice-chairs, one sitting on each of the two panels observed. One was an experienced foster carer (who sat on both panels) and the other an agency social worker.

5.5.2 Observations

The Independent Chair who had been in post for 5 months, chaired both panels. At the first panel, a social worker was observing as part of her induction to the local authority. The meetings were scheduled to run from 9.30am to 2.45pm and 9.30am – 12.55pm, but both ran over, one to 3.30pm and the other to 2.30pm. This is noteworthy as the Chair had informed the panel earlier that complaints had been received in relation to the meetings going on longer than scheduled, and that there was concern that the timings of the agenda were not being adhered to.

The Chair acknowledged that their style of chairing encouraged participation and debate but added that there was a need for more conciseness in the panel's deliberation. The study supports the panel Chair's reflections on their style of facilitation, which was inclusive and encouraged discussion and the free exchange of ideas. This was also illustrated by the Chair attempting to draw the researcher into the pre-discussions about the case to be presented, which may well be related to the fact that they were new to their role in the local authority.

OO: It must be hard as a panel Chair not to want to intervene. I would find it hard if I was the Chair observing. You're being objective for the research?

The panel came across as a warm and friendly group who, whilst having very strong individual views, were able to listen to other members. There was a clear rapport between members which facilitated their ability to add and clarify points with one another. Panel members were also very attentive to the presenters, making good eye contact with supportive body language. However, at times there were tensions over who would be asking the question or what the question was to be.

This panel became very involved in care-planning for the child, as opposed to focussing on the suitability of the foster carers. The questions were more of a dialogue than an attempt to establish whether carers should be approved or continue to be suitable.

OO: I mean, with respect to … I don't want to pass comment or judgement now, but I need to say I find it unusual that actually that L appears not to have had any contact with B and the family. Because if they have financial investments, for example like this, in terms of the renting, what is happening to that income, and given that he was not working before, how is he surviving now financially?

Is B receiving any income from the rented house...? You see what I mean; I just find it unusual that, you know, that she's saying she doesn't really know much about his whereabouts. Without wanting to, you know, say that she's not being truthful.

Value judgements were being made by several panel members, including the Chair, which bordered on undertaking assessment.

Panel member: I don't think. I don't … From my knowledge of relationships, people don't … Well, they probably do, but they don't just wake up one day and walk out. But they probably do, but I don't know. But there's more to it than that. But all we need to focus on the children. And the other is, I think, how is she coping with the whole thing? Because there's children's needs and there's her needs for her to do her job well. And, if those things are not dealt with….

The panel Chair and panel advisor appeared to work well together with the Chair asking the panel advisor to give an update on each case being presented. Following this, the Chair would give a summary of the case and then ask panel members for their input. Whilst issues and questions were raised among members, there was not always clarity about how the questions would be phrased. The Chair and the panel advisor went out to meet each presenter. Once they returned to the room, there was no clear order to the questions. It appeared that questions were fielded simply by going around the room which meant that there was a degree of disorder. After the discussion, the presenters were asked to leave the room and then the Chair would bring them back into the panel room to tell them the panel's recommendation.

5.5.3 Panel membership

Fostering Panel members are drawn from the Central List. Members had the relevant experience and qualifications and panel consisted of a care leaver (employed as a Children's Rights Advocate), a foster carer, an elected member, an independent Social Worker and two agency social workers, one from CAMHS and another from a residential setting.

The Central list was balanced in terms of age, gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity, reflecting the adopters, foster carers and looked after children of the borough. Some of the independent members also sit on other local authority or Independent Fostering Agency panels.

5.5.4 Panel effectiveness

There was drift in timekeeping. with the panels running over their allotted time by 45 and 90 minutes respectively, as a result of discussions about care planning and panel members expressing their own personal views, which the Chair acknowledged.

> *OO: Let's stay focussed, please, as time is now passing, please, this is very serious, and time is passing.*

> *OO: Okay. So, let's settle down… Let's prepare for the second case, which is another review.*

Despite the above statements, the Chair also got involved in care-planning rather than modelling the need to keep on task:

> *OO: … I don't want to lecture you now about this issue, you know, there are lots of other professionals who will do this kind of work with you, I am sure of that. It is just something that children also may not want to hear that. I think it is up to us to ensure that their life reflects an openness for them to learn about their culture and heritage of someone. It doesn't mean that because they are saying that they don't want to know, that actually…*
>
> *OO: That's why it's important that L should, you know, show some responsibility for them, at least even, as suggested in terms of the letter, he owes that to the children and also to his Local Authority, because he was approved as a carer. So it's not a big ask, I think, for him to provide some closure to the children in terms of an explanation, so that they can also, you know, be less worried and understand and continue their lives with you, because clearly they're worried about you, and they shouldn't be, but they are.*
>
> *I think those letters must continue and I think that he must have a discussion with a social worker, preferably you, he needs to provide something, a letter or something, really, some kind of explanation to each child. Because he's doing that with M, he's talking with him, but he's not talking with the other three children.*

There were numerous occasions during the two observations when there were no clear questions being asked of presenters, merely statements being made.

5.5.5 Panel delay

There was no evidence that panel processes were causing wider delay for the agency in terms of items not being heard by panel. The scheduling of a second panel demonstrated the panel's ability to deal with extra matters.

It could be argued that continually running over time does in fact cause delay and inefficiencies for the agency. It could limit the panel's ability to timetable other matters, and the process would be financially more efficient if the panel was not continually

running over time, as some panels pay an additional hourly payment to panel members for each hour the panel goes over the set time.

> *OO: … whilst we are on that, it brings us nicely to another issue we can reflect on, … ADM has had put to him by social workers presenting, … our timekeeping. I'll be honest, I have said to you before, I do hold responsibility for that, and I may not always ensure that we stick to the agreed times. We really have to because of the long agendas that we have now, and we are starting to get complaints about some of the waits. I think whilst, you know, we are a very lively, dynamic strong intelligent panel, and my style is, you know, to be very facilitative and to encourage discussion and to aim to arrive at, you know, a consensual view. I think we need to also be very focussed on when we are looking at people, just really focussing on what further information do I need for me to say yes or no, the same for reviews and matches. Any other general comments we have, we must keep them as brief as possible.*

5.6 OBS_006

5.6.1 Background

As of 31 December 2016, this greater London local authority had 200 looked after children. Approximately 68% live with foster families, 36% of whom lived outside the authority. Ten children were placed for adoption in the year 2015–16. As of April 2016, the panel had approved just over 10 new foster carers.

The central list of 10 comprises two agency social workers (one of whom had a disability), an independent social worker (independent vice-chair), a birth mother (recently appointed independent vice-chair), a foster carer (recently appointed independent vice-chair), an elected member, a medical advisor, an independent member representing education and an independent care-leaver, and the panel administrator and professional advisor.

The panel meets monthly as a joint panel and the agenda included both fostering and adoption items.

Foster-care approvals were allocated 30–40 minutes, a first annual carer review 30 minutes, special guardian suitability 60 minutes, resignations 5 minutes, terminations

(connected persons) had no time slot allotted and a review of inter-country adopters was allocated 30 minutes.

5.6.2 Panel membership

Both meetings were well attended with 7 and 9 members respectively and both were, therefore, quorate. The central list has a core membership of independent and agency members who appear to attend each panel. The diversity of the panel was evident in terms of age, role, disability, ethnicity and race representation. There is only one male on the central list, although at the first observation the professional advisor was also male. Nothing is known about the sexual orientation of panel members.

5.6.3 Observations

Although the agency had an independent Chair, this person was not in attendance at either observation. The first panel was chaired by the established vice-chair and the second by one of the newly appointed vice-chairs. For the latter, this was their first experience of chairing, although they were an experienced panel member who sat on other local authority panels.

The panels ran from 9.30am to 3.50pm and 9.30am to 1.40pm.

Both had observers from the NHS and there were, therefore, 12 and 13 people respectively around the table with two observers and a signer for the disabled panel member.

The first panel initially started ahead of time, due to there being few business matters; however, it eventually overran by 25 minutes. The vice-chair did not appear confident and was happy to ask another panel member to assist in undertaking the role. The Chair did not assist the panel members with the phrasing or structure of questions if indeed there were questions. Questions were either vague or just statements, with long preambles and there was much care-planning, rather than asking questions that would help the panel in their recommendation making.

> *Panel Chair: Okay, thanks for that. So, just to start, C, do you want to just clarify the issue on page two?*

Elected Member: Yes, on page two, where it says key information about carer two, that's you, and there's nothing there.

Panel Chair: And S, do you want to ask a question about accommodation?

Panel Member 2: And do you have a backup carer in place?

HY: Yes, I think I was a little bit concerned to hear that T about his approach … The approach of old-fashioned fostering time asking about care, and A to man up, I did not expect that. I think, with all due respect, they have done…. You know, they have a lot of experience, over 30 years, with due respect, but there are some issues that need to be addressed, maybe through their supervising social worker

FF: I mean, I am concerned for A, hearing what you just shared as well; I think A needs to have a voice, and again, the therapeutic support for her needs to go recognised as well, as well as for O, who is in your face and you know demonstrating his feelings; where as it sounds like A is internalising a lot of it, and she needs to have the ability to voice and then understand the advice that is being given to her, because she's not going to man up, despite what you say…

The saying 'too many cooks' is applicable to the second panel in that three vice-chairs were in attendance and, as mentioned, the person who was given the responsibility for facilitating the panel had not chaired the panel before. The panel advisor was directing the vice-chair, (sitting as Chair) as to how to chair, as the other, long-standing vice-chair seemed to want to take over the chairing role and was interjecting and giving suggestions rather than allowing the new vice-chair to grow into the role. During the break, the panel advisor and panel Chair were overheard discussing the inappropriate behaviour and actions of the long-standing vice-chair. On returning to the room, this was raised as a general comment, to the effect that questions should all go through the Chair. The longstanding vice-chair accepted their actions and apologised.

Panel Advisor: It's important that you go through the Chair.

Panel Member (vice-chair): Oh, sorry Chair. Is it okay to…?

Panel Chair: Well I think [unclear].

Panel Member (vice-chair): I think I want to… sorry Chair. Is it okay for me to…?

Panel Chair: Ask C a question?

Panel Member (vice-chair): C, yes. I just wanted, because obviously one session did seem quite limited, and I just wanted to have some understanding as to why they were able to make the decision that the one session was enough. What was it about the session that made them feel that they didn't need any further sessions?

Panel Advisor: Can I just stress when, you know, when you want to ask them further questions it's really important that you go through the Chair.

Panel Member (vice-chair): Can I apologise?

Panel Advisor: That's okay, but it's… I'm saying it generally.

Panel Chair: And, you know, we go through kind of a round of questions, unless there is something that comes up that we haven't expected to come up and, you know…

Panel Member (vice-chair): I appreciate that, and I do apologise for it. I thought it was something that X, was going to, you know, follow up on, but it's okay.

The Chair had good body language and was very engrossed in the answers given by attendees but, at times, became distracted from the role of Chair when managing the flow of questions. For example, on one occasion, the catering team entered the room to set up the refreshments while comments and questions were still being gathered, raising questions of confidentiality; the panel advisor quickly left the panel room to address this.

5.6.4 Panel effectiveness

Both panels were well represented in terms of role and appeared professional but the number of panel members, (including the panel advisor, minute taker and observers) would be daunting for attendees.

It was evident that all panel members had read their paperwork, but the questions they asked were not always clear. The panels observed seemed, overall, to be chaotic and unstructured. There was a sense that the panel was meeting for its own ends rather than to fulfil the task of approving and addressing continued suitability

There was also a tendency for panel to plan care and, at times, members were prone to making statements or lecturing attendees rather than asking questions that would assist in making recommendations.

> *HY: Yes. It's just an observation. I'm not intending to ask that question, but usually it is good to have a balance reference in relation to both the man and the woman …*
>
> *FF: I just wanted to know, in terms of your experience as a foster carer, how does the community feel about that, you are aware that, you know, I think it was last year or the year before, that we had a big event, focus around adoption and fostering, within the Somalia community, and I just wanted to have some feedback in terms of what sort of reaction you're getting as a foster carer, from the community.*

5.6.5 Panel delay

There is no clear evidence that the panels caused any delay in terms of the timeliness of making recommendations. However, it is noted that both panels overran, by 25 minutes and 70 minutes respectively, which could raise a question about time management, since one item was withdrawn from the second panel. This was also highlighted by the feedback received from attendees of previous panels.

> *Panel Chair: Okay. The next one was 20 minutes late. … They said the venue was accessible and easy to find, but there was a poor waiting area. It wasn't comfortable.*
>
> *Oh dear. The next one was 45 minutes late. Okay, the comments on this one … the general comments were, the panel was running late. I was not informed nor greeted by my social worker until when I was called in. I think if all these things were done it would have calmed my nerves before facing the panel.*

So, the September panel, all those comments actually relate to the September panel.

Okay. Now this is the October panel. So again … Oh, the first one I look at, 15 minutes late. There seems to be a pattern, doesn't it?

The other one was 20 minutes late.

Panel member: It's the time keeping.

Panel Member: I'm just thinking in terms of the space between some … like, when it's a really complex case, how important that there is space, you know.

Panel Chair The panel was late, 40 minutes late running. There was one hour of questions to the social workers; however, this is a complex match, therefore I feel it was justified ... So, it was obviously the case that came after this was the one that was 45 minutes delayed. … Okay. The next one was October. Preparation was all very clear. This was the case … this case was 50 minutes late apparently ... The questions … oh, it was 25 minutes late,

5.7 OBS_007

5.7.1 Background

This Yorkshire Council is geographically large but has a small population. Over 80% of the population is white British, with a looked after population of just over 300 in March 2016.

Thirty-three children had been placed for adoption and 16 family units had been approved as adopters. There is no annual independent chair report on the work of the panel; therefore, it is not possible to provide a more detailed breakdown.

At both panels observed, the adoption panel was properly constituted, with eight members. The panel atmosphere was very formal, with a membership comprising an independent vice-chair (social worker), a male adoptive parent, an independent social worker, a medical advisor and an agency social worker. The non-voting members included a panel advisor, a panel administrator

The membership was consistent across the panels observed. On one panel there was also another male adoptive parent and an agency social worker. On the other, there was additional agency social worker.

The adoption panel considers the suitability of prospective adopters and potential 'matches' between prospective adopters and children with an adoption plan. Each business item was allotted 45 minutes; this was an effective means of ensuring that each item started on time. The panel meets monthly and there were no recorded cancellations of panel due to not being quorate during the year in question.

5.7.2 Observations

The independent Chair facilitated both panels. The panels ran from 9.30am to 1.30pm and 9.30 to 12pm. An hour was set aside for each agenda item. The first panel had one adoption approval and two matches and the second had two adoption approvals, one for a same-sex couple, and another for a single, female, second-time adopter. There were no overtly prejudicial views observed.

In the second observation, along with myself, there was another observer, who was introduced as a prospective panel member. After introducing the item, the Chair first went to the medical advisor for their input on the case. The rest of panel were then asked for their thoughts. There was no order to this process, with panel members 'chipping in' as they felt the need. The Chair then divided questions between panel members, with some questions being allocated by the Chair and members volunteering to ask others. The Chair would then leave the room to greet the participants. This process was not observed, but it was explained that the Chair informs the participants of what questions would be asked. Upon their return to the panel room, the Chair read from a script explaining the panel process. It was often difficult to hear the Chair, possibly due to them reading from the script.

> *Chair: So, again …… do you want to think about picking one of those issues out as a question?*

> *Chair: Have you got a question? Can you make that into a question?*

Two panel members were adopters, one of whom at times expressed personal experiences. Specific questions were not formulated; instead, advice and statements were given.

> *EP: The advice I would give is, start the ball when she comes. Tell her that she's adopted. She's not going to understand it, but you are saying it. … It's as much for you as for her, saying the words. And then it's not, oh God, she's seven and we've got to cross that bridge now … It just becomes normal.*
>
> *YP: I would think that it's remotely possible that his bipolar may have been, if there's any sort of hereditary … you know, from his dad.*
>
> *Medical Advisor: Oh, yeah, definitely. … his dad's probably not got the diagnosis, but he's got those traits.*

Many of the questions asked were long and unclear, and there was a general sense that the panel did not always get the answer it was looking for, possibly as a result of the questions being poorly phrased.

The Chair leaves the room to inform every one of the panel's recommendation.

5.7.3 Panel membership

Access was not given to the full central list; however, from the minutes, apologies were given on both occasions, which accounted for 10 on the central list. The same members regularly attend panel, so the central list is not a large or varied pool of individual panel members but enough to ensure that the panel was always quorate.

The panel was well represented in terms of gender composition and had one Asian member; all the other panel members were white British. Representation in terms of disability and sexual orientation were not evident.

5.7.4 Panel effectiveness

When discussing each case, the panel was very formal and kept to task; only when the Chair left the room to bring in social workers did the panel possibly lose sight of its function. Panel members would cluster in pairs or threesomes to discuss various issues, personal and professional.

The first observation illustrated the panel's understanding of its role; explicitly, panel members were able to disagree with one another. The first item on the agenda had been deferred from an earlier panel, as panel members had wanted more information to enable them to make a recommendation.

> *YP: Yes. I feel somewhat reassured, I didn't expect I would be if I'm being honest. I think the fact that she's lost a stone is quite significant from where they were at last time we met with them. I think in terms of her being at work, she's going to be reducing her hours. So, she will be with a child more, maybe that will help to incentivise her further… I'm not expecting miracles. I feel more positive.*

Panel members agreed that the report submitted on this occasion was of a higher quality and the gaps identified previously had been addressed on the second presentation. Despite this, there was a split recommendation, with two members not supporting approval, due to concerns about the applicant's health, and five supporting the applicant's suitability to adopt.

5.7.5 Panel delay

There was no evidence of delay on the part of panel in addressing issues presented; the size of the central list would enable extra panels if needed. There was no evidence of the agenda being too full to address matters fully, as both panels were half-day sessions.

5.8 Relating theory to practice

OBS_004 and OBS_007 are examples of groups working sufficiently well to be able to achieve the tasks and manage the dynamics and relationships, internal and external, Bion's (1961) workgroups. In contrast, the other panels illustrated the avoidance of true feeling and real thought, highlighted in the ways the group members engaged and related to one another and with the task of the panel. In OBS_006, the way in which the vice-chair (in the role of Chair) and the panel advisor met together outside to strategise how they were going to tackle the behaviour of the other vice-chair was an example of Bion's basic assumption of pairing (BaP). The two mobilised in order to ensure that the panel ran smoothly after the break. A statement was made to help group members, in particular the other vice-chair, to face the truth of her disruptive behaviour; as a result of

this frankness, a different way of thinking and relating to others emerged from the vice-chair.

OBS-005 could, on the surface, be assumed to be constructive, with a Chair who sought to keep panel members on task by directing the liveliness generated by the multitude of questions and issues; however, the observed intervention only reinforces Bion's basic assumption of fight-flight (BaF): as soon as he left the room, members slipped back into the default position of fight-flight. In the panel, there was a considerable degree of projection into the attendees and reports rather than thought and examination.

OBS_003 illustrated Bion's notion of dependency (BaD) towards the Chair: panel members were observed to be in awe of the 'leader' as if she were a deity. Unlike in all the other panels, the Chair did not go out and greet attendees; the administrator did this. All the questions were asked by the Chair, and members offered no challenge to anything she said; she appeared to be idolised. In the second panel observation, it was evident that the panel struggled without her, as if they did not know how to function without her; her general leadership was authorised by the group to lead.

Additionally, Janis's concerns about groupthink, namely the over-estimation of the group's morality, illusion of invulnerability, and stereotypical views of non-group members – as demonstrated by panel members' apparent inability to reflect critically on how their panel functioned – were particularly evident in the observation of OBS_005, as illustrated below:

> *OO That actually we have a duty to act on this specific occasion, to act as a further safety net … We can only make our recommendation on what we see and what we read and that is our recommendation. If the ADM decides to disagree, well at least, you know, we would have performed our duty. Whilst we are, actually, pragmatic and realistic, at the same time, if we have a unanimous view that there are standard of care concerns and therefore, we cannot make a recommendation … we will do that and it is our right to do so. The decision making is entirely up to the agency, isn't it? I don't think we should feel coerced*
>
> *Panel Member: We will not remain independent if we are going to be taking pressure to make recommendations that we don't agree with.*

The study has found that there is a sense that panels believe that they are functioning more effectively than, in reality, they are.

5.9 Chapter summary

The days of childcare officers knocking on local doors to recruit foster carers and adopters for children needing placements have long since passed. Therefore, a return to social workers and their managers making decisions about placements would not be advisable. Additionally, there is no evidence that panels cause delay for children. Nonetheless, this chapter has highlighted that some panels could operate more efficiently in terms of focus, size of panel and the length of time given to deliberate each case presented. All but OBS_001 adopted a conventional layout for the room, irrespective of the size of the room, as illustrated in Appendix 7.1.8.3. Too informal a room layout leads to the panel being less focussed and contained, as was seen (see 5.1.2 above) in the actions of BJ.

The observations, for the most part, concluded that the panels were representative in the constitution of their central lists. Further research is needed to explore the impact of the ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, class and gender of panel members in their recommendation-making.

There are some variations in the amount of time allotted to hearing each case, with evidence that the competence and skill of the Chair are crucial in determining whether the panel remains on task and is able to undertake its function in a concise and relevant manner. OBS_004, as a model, demonstrates an effective structure for conducting panels, similar to that of the court system, whereby a court clerk or legal advisor advises magistrates and, in some cases, juries, on the parameters of their role. The model adopted by this authority involves the (professional) independent panel advisor directing the panel to what they are tasked to do. Their partnership with the Chair, together with the latter's skill set, ensures that the panel formulates clear concise questions and is transparent in its recommendation-making.

While it is noted that some local authority fostering panels no longer have a panel advisor, this study would argue that this absence frequently leads to time-inefficient panels. Additionally, a panel that has seven or eight members in total is more efficient in terms of cost and assists in ensuring that attendees are not overwhelmed. Panels need

to be formal but not officious, friendly but not overfamiliar, respectful but not self-righteous and provide scrutiny but not interrogation.

6 Discussion & Findings

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 expounded the individual case summaries of LS, HY, RM, EP, FM, OO, FF, YP and BJ. This chapter introduces the tenth stage of the BNIM analytic process, the process of cross-case theorisation, identifying the similarities and differences between those interviewed. Figure 6.1 gives a pictorial illustration of this process. Additionally, the chapter will summarise the main reflections that emerged from the panel observations.

The study aimed to investigate the extent to which personal biographies impact on individuals' recommendation-making in the panel setting. Effective recommendation-making requires that individuals accept the influence of the unconscious, as well as understanding and managing conscious attitudes.

> *[237]. Indeed it is sufficiently obvious, and has been confirmed over and over again by experience, that what the doctor fails to see in himself he either will not see at all, or will see grossly exaggerated, in his patient; further, he encourages those things to which he himself unconsciously inclines, and condemns everything that he abhors in himself. (Jung, 1993, p. 120)*

How the findings came about will be discussed below, using information derived from the literature review to critically reflect upon the impact of individuals in their roles as panel members, making reference also to the information gathered from the observations presented in Chapter 5.

The existing literature on panels has not focussed on the role of panel members in performing the task of recommendation-making; this chapter critically considers the research findings in the context of previous research on panels. It echoes the findings of Pennie (1993), which highlighted the need for panel members to explore their own attitudes and O'Sullivan (2004) in relation to more effective panel functioning. The central finding is that, if panel members are able to be more conscious of what they bring to the panel role, they will be able to be more constructive in performing the task

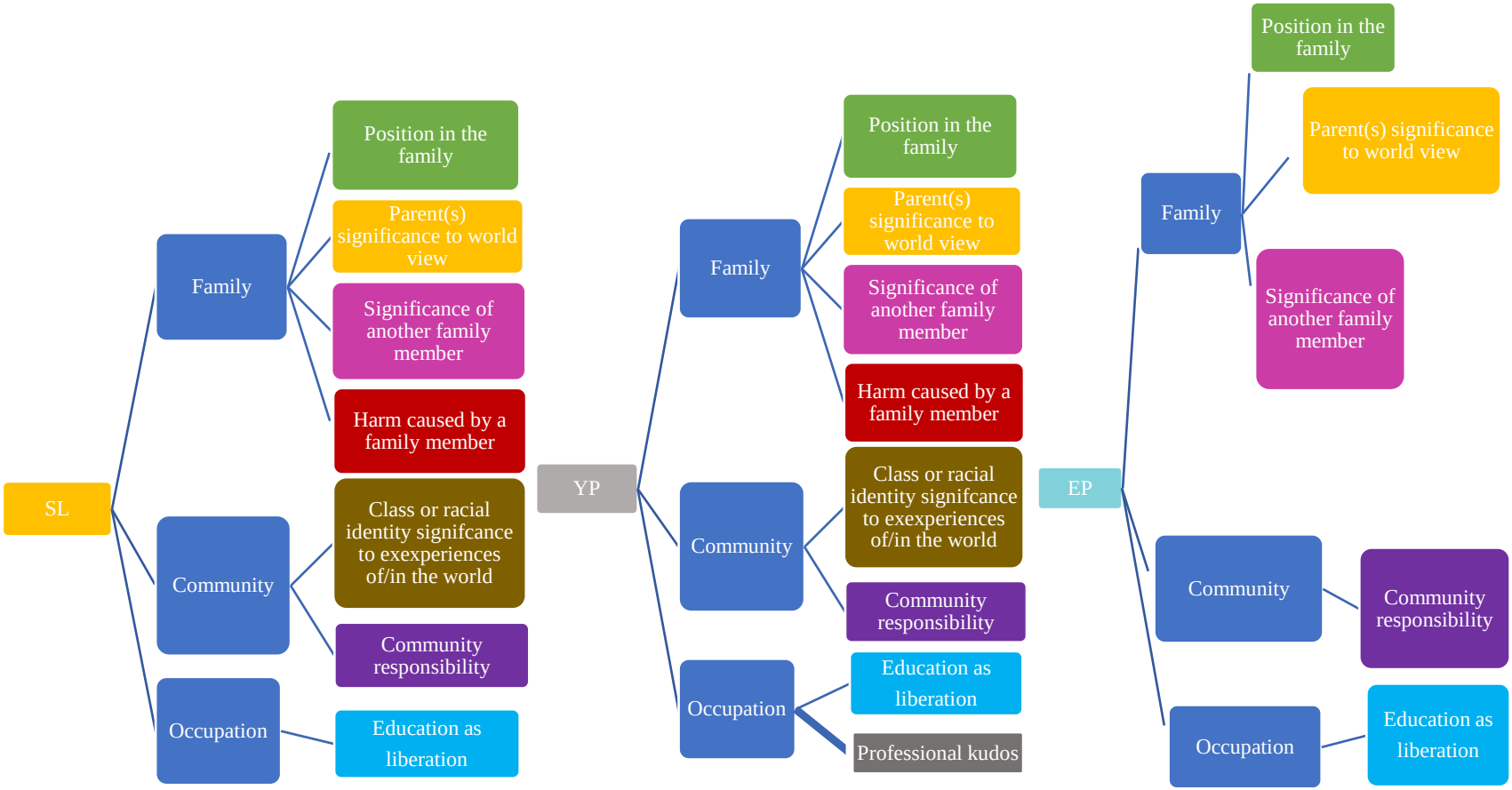
of recommendation-making. Correspondingly, personal values, beliefs and thinking pervade panel recommendation-making to a significant degree and it is naive to presume that this can be self-controlled without agencies attempting to lessen its impact by introducing more robust recruitment, training and support measures. Alongside these measures, agencies should aim to improve the quality of work and reports presented to panels, which would go some way towards reducing the tendency of panels and panel members to step outside their remit in an attempt to compensate for inadequacies in paperwork and care-planning. This research points to the need for a re-evaluation of some of the thinking in relation to the value of panels. Whilst it is noted that various governments have sought to eliminate panels, arguing that they cause delay to decisions on children's futures due to issues of being quorate, there is no evidence to support this assertion. Instead, consideration needs to be given to the emotional burden and immeasurable responsibility that one person (namely the ADM) would bear, should panels not exist. This study argues that panels are both necessary in terms of collective responsibility by way of corporate parenting and valuable in terms of bringing together differing views to explore options. Instead, the focus should turn to how they can be used more efficiently and effectively.

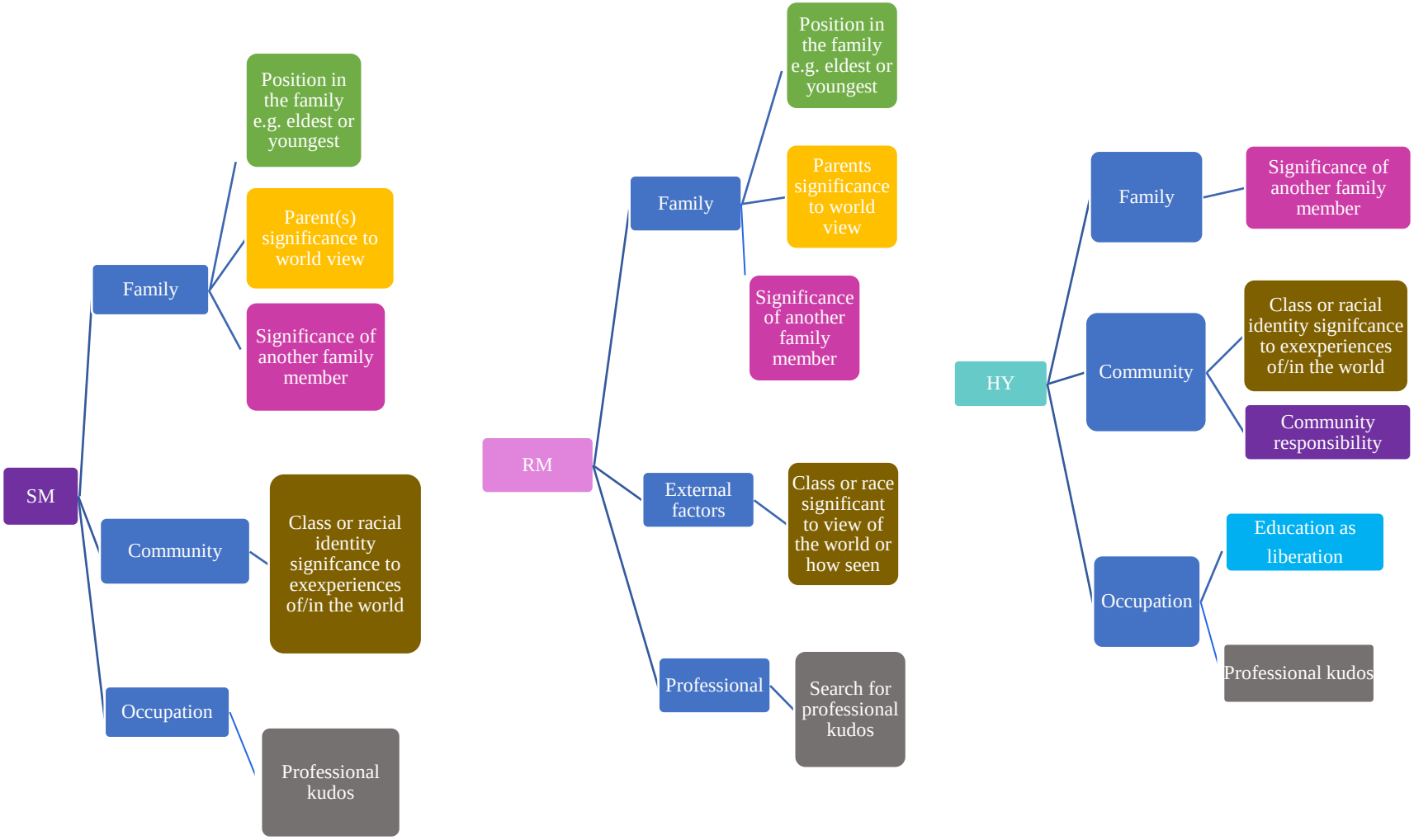
6.2 Cross-case theorisation

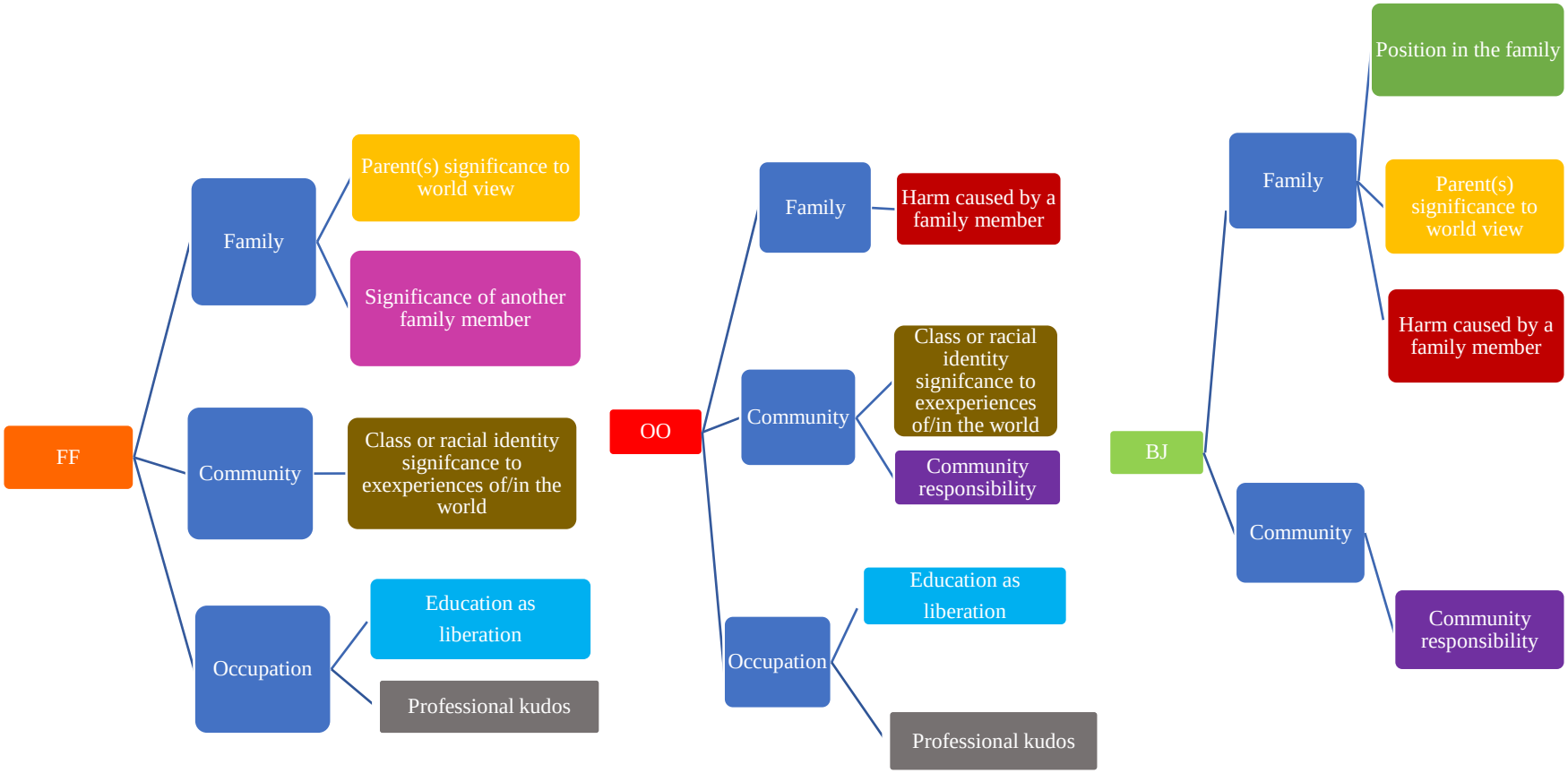
Cross-case theorisation via thematic field analysis provides an understanding of the interviewee's life through their biographical narrative, highlighting the fact that people's social construction of their world is individual (Piaget, 1965; Bachelard and McAllister Jones, 2002).

Each of the interviewees' narratives demonstrated three broad themes, although not all the narratives shared all components of the sub themes. Figure 6.1 below illustrates the differences and similarities between the interviewees, enabling some research generalisations to be made.

Figure 6-1 Cross-case comparisons based on narrated themes




SM
Family
Position in the family e.g. eldest or youngest
Parent(s) significance to world view
Significance of another family member
Community
Class or racial identity signifcance to exexperiences of/in the world
Occupation
Professional kudos
RM
Family
Position in the family e.g. eldest or youngest
Parents significance to world view
Significance of another family member
External factors
Class or race significant to view of the world or how seen
Professional
Search for professional kudos
HY
Family
Significance of another family member
Community
Class or racial identity signifcance to exexperiences of/in the world
Community responsibility
Occupation
Education as liberation
Professional kudos


FF
Family
Parent(s) significance to world view
Significance of another family member
Community
Class or racial identity signifcance to exexperiences of/in the world
Occupation
Education as liberation
Professional kudos
OO
Family
Harm caused by a family member
Community
Class or racial identity signifcance to exexperiences of/in the world
Community responsibility
Occupation
Education as liberation
Professional kudos
BJ
Family
Position in the family
Parent(s) significance to world view
Harm caused by a family member
Community
Community responsibility

Whilst the three broad headings may not be surprising, the detail of the sub-themes may be more so. The themes include family (significance of parent(s) in worldview; significance of another family member; harm caused by a family member and position in the family); occupation (education as a form of liberation and professional kudos) and community (significance of class or racial identity to experiences of and in the world, and community responsibility).

6.2.1 Family

Alongside the right to family life, as defined by the Human Rights Act 1998 and referred to in 1.4.1 above, the work of Boivin and Pennings (2005) goes some way to explain the significance of family in the narratives of all but one of the interviewees.

Also relevant to this study are issues of how and why individuals develop their ways of thinking. Bion (1961) places considerable emphasis on the role played by emotional experiences in providing individuals, either positively or adversely, with the capacity to think. Building on the work of Klein, that of Bion is particularly relevant, given that seven of the nine interviewees spoke of the significance of parent(s) for their worldview.

Parent(s) significance for worldview

All the interviewees spoke of their parents, except HY who made no mention of his parents in his narrative, although he talked about 'back home'. FF and SM spoke of their parents in a distant way, referring more to the attributes and qualities that their parents had imparted on them as they looked back on their childhoods. OO did not talk about their influence on his early life but about how they did not speak to him for three years when he 'came out' as an adult. For SL and BJ, their overall feelings in relation to their parents were of loss and abandonment, beginning when they were children and continuing throughout their adult lives, as illustrated by this statement by BJ:

> *'Now I have actually cut my parents out of my life completely because, with the situation with my own children, they let me down, yet again, as an adult with supporting and helping me, and so I've just completely cut them out of my life now and I feel a lot stronger for doing so, because I don't feel that I am constantly trying to get their approval which has always got me down.'*

YP, EP and RM spoke about their parents more reflectively, unconsciously recognising in their narratives the indirect harm caused to them by their parents, either through their parents' inability to see them as individuals in their own right, being absent due work patterns or death, or through giving them a false perception of themselves as a parent. EP and RM reflected on their changing view of their parents: both had had a negative view of one parent, which had changed as they themselves became adults. As RM observed:

> *'At the time I didn't ... I just thought Mum, um, judging him very harshly, because to me he was my hero too, you know. He was also the man who had time to sit and talk to me about values and ethnics and all that, while she was out earning the bread and butter, you know. My perceptions changed as I became a woman and a parent myself and such like. I was thinking, as a father he was perfect, as a husband I would have probably divorced him, you know, sort of on reflection.'*

In contrast, YP had a realistic view of her parents: while she noted that, at times, they had made mistakes in relation to her, she shared her awe of what they had experienced as immigrants to the UK, their community, work and family ethic, which she appears to strive to emulate.

Significance of another family member

FF and RM reflected on the influence of a sibling on their career path or their role as foster carer or panel member. SM mentioned his siblings, without going into detail, but expressed a thought about his position as the eldest child with younger siblings who happen to be twins. OO mentioned a brother, but gave no details other than his contribution to being part of his nephews' lives. HY made no mention of siblings; however, his narrative was heavily influenced by his role as carer for his disabled son and, in later life, his wife.

SL, YP and EP relayed both positive and negative accounts of their sibling relationships; whilst all three were able to be philosophical about the past, it was evident that their experiences within their families had had a lasting impact on them.

> *EP: 'I was only ever in favour when there wasn't a boyfriend and she would then take me out or do something with me when there wasn't anything else to do.'*

Harm caused by a family member

In addition to their parent(s), six of the interviewees spoke of the significance of another family member. In the majority of cases, this was a sibling, most of whom were mentioned in relation to the harm caused by that sibling during their formative years, through bullying or being ignored, as was the case for SL, YP and EP.

The narratives of SL and BJ highlight direct harm caused by their parents or caregivers, including emotional, physical and sexual abuse. These experiences of neglect and harm manifest themselves differently in each woman's life: whilst both experienced mental health difficulties throughout their lives, how this featured in their adult lives differed greatly and, in particular, their ability to use these experiences in panel was significantly different, as can be seen in the wounded healer axle in Chapter 7. SL's narrative relates:

> *'… so, I went for counselling and had 10 years of counselling. In those 10 years from 1994 to 2004 I explored the whole of my life with a really sympathetic and professional private counsellor. That helped me to come to terms with a host of things. This was difficult for me'.*

OO spoke about the struggle to be himself within his family:

> *'There was, yeah, that there was a huge amount of distress shown by my mother, you know, very, very emotionally … distressed, saddened, angry, and um, you know. She said things like, you know, um, I cannot understand … My Dad said, um, you have got to make a choice, really, you have either, you either marry, have children, and settle down or you cannot be a member of this family. … So, for 3 years, you know, I had no contact with my Dad and my Mum would ring … and just cry and say why. The question of why went on for years, years and years, and years and years."*

Position in the family

Whilst there was no consistency in the position held by the interviewees, whether the first, middle or last child, position in the family is significant, as six of the nine interviewees mentioned it. SM and LS recalled the sense of responsibility given to them and the expectations of them as the oldest sibling, and the former continued to have responsibility for her adult siblings. SM's mannerisms, as observed in the panel, indicate that he feels responsibility for others and for the coordination of events. YP was the second youngest of a

large sibling group; her narrative included being bullied by the sister who immediately preceded her; as well as having responsibility for her nieces and nephews when another older sister had mental health difficulties and required the support of the extended family. YP's experiences of mental health were illustrated by her empathetic approach to mental health issues in panel, her explanations of such issues and desire to understand their impact on would-be adopters.

BJ, also the eldest child, had a different experience as she was the only child of her parents. Her mother went on to have a son with her abusive stepfather. Due to her experience of sexual abuse, BJ reported having no relationship with her brother, as he looked like her stepfather [his father]. Her behaviour in the panel, demanding to be heard, might indicate that being side-lined by a younger sibling meant she continues to struggle to be recognised.

EP and RM were the youngest siblings in their families and shared the difficulties of a substantial age gap between them and other siblings, which meant that they did not have a close relationship with their siblings as young children. Both of the interviewees lacked confidence in themselves and had a negative view of the other parent in childhood. For RM, this displayed itself in her reverence for the first Chair with whom she worked and to the Chair in the first panel, alongside whom she was observed. With both, she felt unable to say much although her position requires her to challenge more.

6.2.2 Occupation

A recurring theme was the importance of the redemptive nature of education for the interviewee, alongside the importance of a career, in terms of status.

Education as liberation

All but one of the interviewees had attended university; one of the eight was of middle-class origin and the others born into working-class families. Six of the interviewees highlighted that they were the first members of their families to have gone to university; all but two entered higher education as a mature student. Of the eight who attended university, six were from ethnic minorities.

> *YP: 'Along with my younger sister who went through the orthodox route of going to college and university, whereas I didn't go to college; I went as a mature student. Coincidentally ended up at the same uni at the same time, so I went to uni when I was*

27 and she was 19. We were the first two in our family to go to university and get a degree.'

All the observations illustrated a sense of the importance of being well-educated, even at an unconscious level. This ranged from comments about grammar, to explanations about professional status, as mentioned below:

EP: 'I was quite impressed by the detail that was in it and I was disgusted by some of the spelling and grammar. Unfortunately, I come from an age when GCEs, you were marked on your spelling. The factual inconsistencies that are in there as well, it drives me mad, getting the names wrong, cut and paste.'

Professional kudos

There was a real sense of the importance to the interviewees of being recognised as professional, and this was the case for all but one of those who had attended university. It was evident from many of the narratives that the interviewees saw their professional status as a form of kudos. Whilst many indirectly articulated their struggles with work while claiming they were not seeking recognition or promotion; the reality came across differently in that they mentioned their position and status or lack of it in a manner that would suggest that they were not content with their professional achievements. For many of those observed, it would appear that their panel status was as a way of further enhancing their professional identity both for themselves and for others.

SM: '... I did apply for a management post … But didn't get it. I did apply for another management post and I won't go into details but there was massive politics involved in it. ... In all honesty, whilst part of me was probably disappointed I didn't get the management posts, I'm glad I got the post I did. I look at that and think, you know that was right.'

The concern is not whether panel members were being professional but, rather, their conceptualisation of professionalism – their internalised view of themselves. A number of panel members were wedded to the idea of being professional in terms of their kudos.

6.2.3 Community

External factors came to be viewed as playing a significant role, to varying degrees, for interviewees in their narratives, for some for altruistic reasons and, for others, as another avenue to heal personal wounds.

Significance of class or racial identity for experiences of or in the world

YP, FF, OO, HY and SL had all experienced racism and associated discrimination from a relatively young age. All but two were migrants to the UK, and the other three were first-generation British. All narrated that racism had been instrumental in making them the people that they had become. YP and HY consciously made the decision to ensure that, through their careers, they were helping their communities, recognising the significance of race on the experiences of others. It was also evident from the narratives of FF, OO and SL that their experience of racial discrimination informed how they performed their professional roles and helped others.

> *OO: 'I was really thrown into, for the first time in my life, in to what it was like to be bullied, tortured, hurt and attacked for being a foreigner.'*

> *RM: 'I do think it is probably about a working-class upbringing with a level of deprivation and sometimes being the underdog and knowing what that feels like.'*

SL, YP and BJ highlighted the harm caused to them by others, including abusive men and political regimes. Understandably, this harm has had long-lasting effects on their emotional well-being, finances and contact with certain family members. BJ recalls:

> *BJ: 'It was every kind of abuse possible, financial abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse even to the point of sexual abuse and the drugs'.*

Community responsibility

The motivation for serving others was not made explicit in the narratives, but it could be hypothesised that panel members chose, either consciously or unconsciously, to fulfil something in themselves or to achieve a degree of professional or community kudos, perhaps suggesting that it acted as a means of assisting people to feel better about themselves. The narratives of LS, HY, SM, YP and BJ demonstrate their contribution to both their local and wider communities. HY and YP have contributed to their local communities in terms of their

race and culture. BJ supported people who lived locally who had similar experiences to herself in relation to drugs. LS and YP have been involved in international work, supporting people outside their communities.

> *YP: 'I have always been involved in charity work and I decided to take part in an international humanitarian commission, which was to try and deliver humanitarian aid to the people living in the Gaza Strip.'*

SM recalled that, as a young person, he had been brought up to be inclusive and accepting of all people and had been an ally to two pupils who were not deemed by others to be part of the 'in crowd'.

> *SM: 'I can look back and see, it was an all-boys school, and I remember, and this is something that I remember, there was one black boy in my class and I remember, not appreciating it at the time, how much he was picked on for his colour, he was the only black boy. There was also another boy who had mental health problems, even though this was a very high rated school, and it was interesting, … I was only there for the first three years until I was 14, both those boys would levitate to me. So, although I was no one significant, you know ... it was interesting that they clearly saw in me someone who was far less judgmental, that's not to say that I am not judgmental.'*

6.3 Process of developing individual thinking

Bion's (1962) concept of capacity to think, although unusual at the time, has proved to be relevant and consistent with modern decision-making ideas, highlighting the emotional and cognitive aspects of thinking. Munro (2008, 2011) provides a means to explore the thinking of panel members, referring to neuroscience studies which reveal the unconscious intuitive processes which influence conscious thinking. As intuitive (emotional) thinking is unavoidable, attention needs to be placed on developing analytic (cognitive) skills as a means of ensuring the recognised biases of intuition are used appropriately:

> … The downside of this is that the practitioner who has a 'gut feeling' about a case has a sense of confidence in that judgment that can make the person resistant to change or challenge. (Munro, 2011, p. 91)

Analytical thinking can also lead to restrictions in time available, processing capacity and inclination.

> Forgetting irrelevant information is essential to keep thinking clear; the problem is in deciding what is, or is not, relevant.(Munro, 2008, p. 139)

Munro makes clear that, regardless of the approach to thinking, poor thinking can be the result of a blinkered approach, as the result of not paying attention to information for whatever reason. In contrast, if effort and time is afforded to judgements, good thinking with clear reasoning occurs. The study's findings support earlier theories, identified in Chapter 2, that individuals who are aware of their own biographies through reflection are better able to make more dispassionate professional recommendations and decisions.

6.3.1 To explore the underlying thinking of panel members when arriving at their recommendations on the suitability/approval of foster carers/adopters and matches.

LS and SM were the only interviewees who consciously conveyed an awareness of where their perspective derived from. For LS, this was illustrated by her initial reluctance to become a panel member, as she had a negative view of adoption based on her own upbringing. Later in the interview, she also shared that she had made a conscious decision not to have children as a single person or to adopt also due to her experiences in her own adoptive placement. Equally, SM started his narrative by positioning himself as the child of a Unitarian Minister which, he believes, has informed his life although he does not currently follow a faith. YP and EP, in turn, indirectly attributed their thinking to experiences at home, with YP sharing her admiration for her parents and a desire to help others, and EP reflecting that his parenting style is similar to his father's, adding that he is similar to his father.

The other interviewees displayed a level of personal blindness in relation to their biographies and the effect that these may have on their panel work, although their narratives, as demonstrated above, give a clear indication of their thinking which informs their recommendation making. The quote below in which one of the interviewees demonstrates a tendency to move into care-planning, which can be arguably based on his narrative, seemed to say more about his personal experiences of discrimination and perhaps his underlying expectations that adults will address such issues. Whilst this can be seen as admirable, it is not the task of the panel to assess attendees' emotional capabilities:

> *'That's fine. I think that's an ongoing piece of work really that the department will be expecting from you and it is expected of all foster carers who look after children of a different heritage and culture. I think that is what we wanted to impress upon you, obviously, to see how you feel deeply and personally about it.' (OO in OBS_005)*

Four of the nine interviewees (HY, RM, SM and FF) are described as being guarded. The research highlights that these interviewees were unable to access certain experiences, feelings and meanings of memories.

The work of Klein (1940) and Holloway and Jefferson (2000) can assist in understanding the issues involved. Klein's notion of the manic defensive describes individuals' avoidance of feelings of dependency and vulnerability; decades later, Holloway and Jefferson developed the concept of the 'defended subject', where interviewees relay their narratives in such a way as to protect their vulnerabilities and anxieties. Although both concepts operate at an unconscious level, they always affect how the narratives are conveyed to the listener and the meanings available.

Both RM and SM illustrate manic defensive characteristics in their interviews in their tendency to distract from uncomfortable thoughts and feelings, describing overly busy lifestyles and behaviours or expressing counter feelings and thoughts. Moreover, SM was observed to have made a decision – without consulting the applicants for whom he thought it would be too upsetting to have an observer, that I could not observe two cases in my role as researcher, as though he did not want me to observe how the panel might cope with a 'messy' case. This blocking prevented me from observing how his self-played out in the panel decision-making process but, nonetheless, allowed a hypothesis to be made based on his defensiveness. In Phase E and 4.6.5, I highlight his unsuccessful attempts to become a manager, where he seemed unable to express his disappointment, 'I won't go into details but there was massive politics involved in it.' Similarly, RM would quickly move to discussing solutions and achievements rather than staying with the pain of any disappointments in life. As a social worker, albeit in a researcher role, I found these defences easier to manage, as the interviewees gave me enough of themselves in the interview to make me curious and enable me at least to hypothesise how this played itself out in a panel situation. As Panel Advisors, neither had a decision-making role or Chairs that allowed them to overstep their roles.

In terms of manic defences, HY and FF exemplified characteristics of defended subjects: both interviewees narrated their stories in a manner designed to protect against anxiety. They remained on safe ground, relying on comfortable, well-rehearsed generalities, to protect themselves from perhaps painful experiences and memories, as seen in HY's interview when discussing his vulnerabilities as a foreigner in two countries. In the observations, this was illustrated both in the manner in which HY introduced himself, preferring the title of 'independent member/vice chair' over the less professional title of foster carer. In 4.3.5, I describe the difficulty of engaging with him: the description of him as a chameleon best sums up my feeling of not knowing the true person. Equally, in 4.8.5, I describe FF's façade and my inability to verify her statements in relation to her qualifications and professional status.

The study sought to explore the complexities of recommendation-making. The use of a narrative approach was aimed to enable me to analyse the underlying thinking of the panel members; however, for these more defensive interviewees, it was more difficult to deduce their 'actual sense' in the decision-making process, as they appeared unaware of the abilities and qualities they brought to the panel. I struggled to warm to the interviewees and was left with little sense of 'knowing' the individuals. As such, given the small sample, it is hard to make generalisations from these examples.

6.4 Awareness of values and beliefs

6.4.1 In what ways do adoption and fostering panel members' biographies, attitudes and values influence their role occupancy and recommendation-making?

Whilst no direct question was put to interviewees regarding their motivation to sit on a panel, the research study highlights that most panel members have not joined for purely altruistic reasons. As mentioned above, the desire for professional status was evident in the narratives of all but two of the interviewees. Additionally, many of the interviewees shared a narrative highlighting personal trauma which, in some way, plays itself out in the panel setting. Experiences of trauma do not in themselves have a negative impact on the ability to perform as a panel member; however, it is concerning that the overall pattern of reluctance to speak openly about their lives perpetuates a view that people sitting on panels are above and, in some ways, free from any issues that might impair their judgments or recommendations. A presumption of impartiality was evident both in their narratives and the panel observations.

The statements below are examples of what panel members bring into panel from their own history. Although the panel's role is to provide scrutiny of the assessments, none of the comments below provide scrutiny in the form of questions but are merely statements coming from the individuals' biases.

> *I think this issue with his sexuality is tied up with his race and culture. He doesn't feel comfortable with raising culture and heritage then. I'm sure also he's is gay.* (OO: OBS_005)

> *But I think, it's, at the same time, I mean, from own experiences, you need to be thinking about there could be some things you haven't even thought of that you're going to come across.* (FF: OBS_006)

> *Yes, it's fantastic to hear the work you're doing for the community as well.* (FF: OBS_006)

6.4.2 To what extent does a panel member's conceptualisation of their professionalism impact on their role in panel?

There was no direct question on professionalism, but two-thirds expressed in their narratives how important their professional status was to them. The narratives of HY, RM, SM, OO, FF and YP conveyed an individual search for professional recognition, whether by way of career development, acquisition of qualifications or management positions:

> OO: *I have been given an opportunity, um, as a human being, as well as a professional person to make a contribution towards bringing about improvement and change in a child's life … I don't have any personal experience of adoption or fostering, it is purely professional through my work as a social worker, then a manager, then latterly as a trainer.*

> FF: *The school that I am based in have … committed to releasing me … They recognise the fact that I need to, want to and is part of my professional development… I see it as clinical supervision as well because I am not getting that level that I would need from an educational setting. Then, you are surrounded by like-minded professionals.*

YP: *I do not have children of my own … but in my professional work I have lots of experience of understanding, through the expertise of colleagues more than anything.*

HY, SM, FF and YP were all observed to conduct themselves in a professional manner throughout the observations. In contrast, OO and RM were not consistently able to maintain the professional position they appeared desperate to demonstrate. LS, EP and BJ placed greater importance on bringing their personal experience to the role, although the former two were able to bring professional attributes to the undertaking of the panel task.

The study has highlighted that the panel members interviewed, in the main, were either unaware or not in control of their unconscious personality characteristics. The observations evidenced unconscious components which were projected onto workers or applicants. When panel members express an excessively emotional response to paperwork or the applicants or presenter, these powerful emotional responses indicate unconscious content which has burst through into consciousness, projected in words by way of questions, statements or recommendations. Only three of the panel members, SL, YP and EP, were consistently able to demonstrate an awareness and management of their conscious and unconscious self:

> *[239] … demonstrates the need for self-criticism ... No analysis is capable of banishing all unconsciousness for ever. The analyst must go on learning endlessly, and never forget that each new case brings new problems to light and thus gives rise to unconscious assumptions that have never before been constellated. We could say, without too much exaggeration, that a good half of every treatment that probes at all deeply consists in the doctor's examining himself, for only what he can put right in himself can he hope to put right in the patient…. This, and nothing else, is the meaning of the Greek myth of the wounded physician. (Jung, 1993, p. 121)*

Figure 6.2 below describes the complexity involved in the panel role. The study emphasises, for the majority of the interviewees, a discord between biography –(un)consciousness – and its use – (un)constructiveness, in role, whilst on panel.

High consciousness and high constructiveness: This indicates an awareness of self and external factors to the point of being able to access and pay sufficient attention through effort

and careful processing in decision-making. Such individuals are more able to overcome their prejudices and biases.

Low consciousness and high constructiveness: This characterises individuals who are less aware of themselves and so can appear distant in roles where they work directly with people. However, they understand their role function, and perform tasks effectively.

Low consciousness and low constructiveness: Individuals who are not fully aware of their internal influences and processes are more influenced by subtle stimuli, both internally and externally. These individuals are not aware of how their internal self-impacts on their role function.

High consciousness and low constructiveness: This characterises a self-aware individual who chooses not to use their awareness in undertaking their role.

Figure 6-2 Consciousness and constructiveness axle

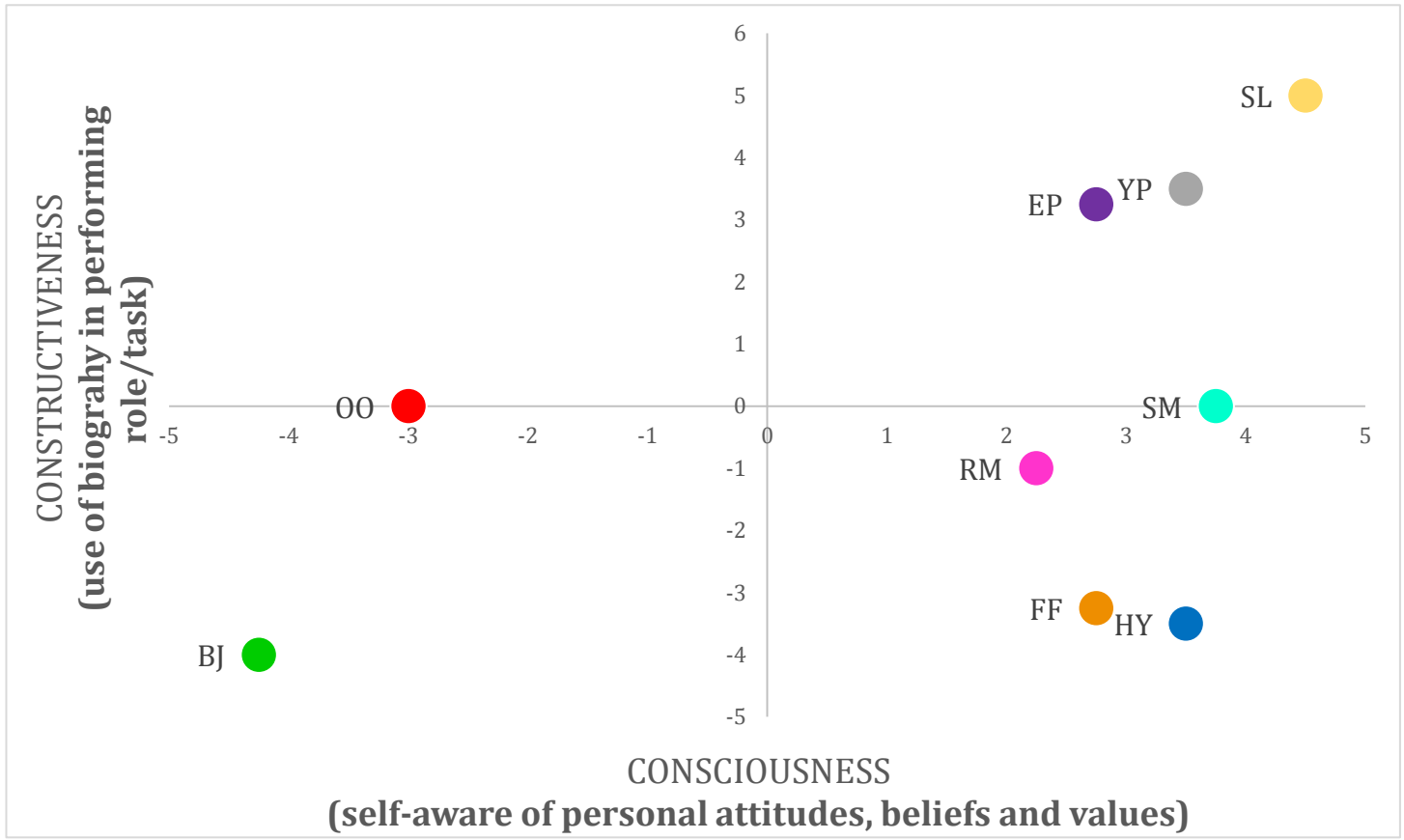
	HIGH CONSCIOUSNESS **(aware of personal attitudes, beliefs, and values)**	
LOW CONSTRUCTIVENESS **(poor use of biography in performing role/task)**	Panel members who are self-aware but do not put that knowledge into practice. These panel members could be trained to use their experiences more effectively	Panel members are sufficiently aware of themselves to make an effective contribution to the panel. These panel members know what they are doing and tend to do it.
	Panel members have pockets of self-knowledge but do not use the knowledge effectively. These panel members have unregulated emotions and thought patterns that can impair their effectiveness.	Panel members do not demonstrate high self-awareness but have the professional competence to be effective in role. These panel members can be supported and trained to bring their self to the task

6.5 'Wounded healer' concept

The notion of the 'wounded healer' can be regarded as an oxymoron – for most it conjures up a negative view that an individual who has experienced trauma or suffering in their own childhood seeks employment in the caring profession, motivated by a desire to relieve the suffering of others. Jung (1961), adding to Freud's theory of countertransference, was of the view that those entering the helping professions unsurprisingly brought their biographic experiences to their professional performance. He asserted that adverse experiences provided unique insights for the wounded healer which could be used empathically in the performance of their role; however, this required the wounded healer to be aware of and manage the conscious and unconscious personality characteristics. Such ideas on the emotional self-awareness of panel members can be aligned to the function of the panel, answering the question of whether personal biographies can be used constructively and effectively in panel recommendation-making? The study shows that three panel members (SL, YP and EP) were sufficiently aware of themselves to make an effective contribution to the panel and a further four (SM, RM, FF and HY), whilst demonstrating lower levels of self-awareness, were sufficiently aware of themselves to make an effective contribution to the panel, and could be supported and trained to make a more effective use of self in performing the panel task.

The concept is used to describe how panel members are both aware and use their awareness of their wounds in their panel roles. A visual representation of the impact of biography, as described during the narrative interviews and observed in panel, is mathematically plotted on the linear scatter diagram, Figure 6.3, illustrating whether the self brought to panel was effective. The explanation of the diagram below follows the panel members in a clockwise direction.

Figure 6-3 'Wounded healer' axle



The three interviewees in the top-right box articulate how they have processed their conscious, personal material in their thinking and recommendation-making. Their narrative gave a clear sense of who they were as individuals and, whilst on panel, they were observed to be able to bring this awareness to their role. SL gave the best example of being self-aware of how she used her own experiences, stressing the importance of the accuracy of a child's personal details on file, in case they wish to trace birth parents or family as adults. YP was able to use her experience of having a sibling with mental health issues to ask questions of the medical advisor in relation to a prospective adopter. EP, whilst bringing useful experience as an adopter, at times stepped outside his remit in giving advice as an individual rather than on behalf of panel.

The four interviewees in the bottom right box would commonly be described as professionals and, as such, good practitioners who are able to get the job done. They would appear not to be easily riled and do not bring personal issues to work. In their narratives, three shared little about themselves, appearing at times distant and detached. Whilst this may appear to be an admirable quality in practice, such individuals may not come across as personable and understanding of the plight of others. SM, whilst empathetic in the observation, had a tendency to be inflexible and officious. RM had a good sense of self in terms of life experience, but her desire to come across as professional meant that she sometimes lost her ability to use this experience in a helpful way. HY was also officious and, although representing the foster-carer's perspective, did not exude the warmth that would allow him to connect with other foster carers or adopters. FF's narrative indicates her awareness of the difficulties others experience but, both in her narrative and in panel, she conveyed a sense of superiority.

Two interviewees sit in the bottom left box, both able to talk about the sum of their life experiences in their narratives. BJ's narrative was full of the trauma and distress which continued to be features of her life up until the point of interview. Her internal distress was observed in panel in a way that demonstrated her subjectivity and inability to be constructive in panel. As well as jumping up and down to be heard, most of her statements and questions referred to her personal experience, which calls into question her ability to be objective. In contrast, OO sits on the central line in terms of his consciousness, which was evident in his narrative by his recollection of a number of specific life events; however, he was observed in panel to be very uncontained. There

was a noticeable conflict between his desire to perform well and a continual over-spilling of his biography. His questions, statements and, at times, 'lecturing' came across as 'repairing' his inner self through the experiences of the young people presented to panel.

The final quadrant is, perhaps unsurprisingly, empty. The study shows that a panel member is unlikely to be highly conscious and, at the same time, ineffective. Although it is acknowledged that it is possible that an individual maybe having a bad day or is being particularly triggered by certain material, aware individuals will not usually be located here.

6.6 To identify systems, methods and techniques to improve recommendation-making.

During the interviews, all interviewees were able to articulate clearly their understanding of their role and the expectations of them in relation to the panel task. However, understanding did not always lead to compliance, when observed in panel. Many of the interviewees spoke highly of their Chair and, in most cases, of their panel. The observations called into question their objectivity as it related to the functioning of the panel. In Chapter 5, OBS_004 provides an illustration of a generally efficient and effective panel. One of the significant lessons from this panel is the quality of the Panel Advisor/Manager who can keep the panel on task, as illustrated by the quotations below:

> *It's a reminder that we expect the worker to answer questions. The occasion is harder for the adopter, isn't it? So, she is entitled to struggle a bit if that is the case, but I would expect L to help her out. And so, I think some of these questions will be…* (SM in OBS_004)

> *Difficult to do, but what we do with many matches, isn't it, in this sort of situation. But I think you've got to be careful. We can explore, you know, when we were thinking it was more likely to be a three or four or five-year-old, we can explore that, but actually, at the end of the day, you're using that to tease out the reasoning of this match. But at the end of the day, it still comes back down to the basics of, can they meet most of his needs? That's what you're looking at.* (SM in OBS_004)

6.7 Experiences of and in the group

6.7.1 To understand the group process that is at play when panels make their recommendations.

As mentioned above, the study has highlighted that panel members tend to have an idealistic view of themselves and the functioning of their panel; very few reflected on areas where their panel could improve. Panel are generally quite a restrictive closed system, with a small central list, and infrequent turnover of membership.

The study highlighted a conflict in the relationship between the agency, its presenting social workers and the panel, as demonstrated in comments from the panel about poor quality reports.

> *I think one of your problems is, it's not just the asking of the questions. You may not get the detail in the answer because that's a question that, if you're the worker at home, you can talk to her about and deal with it. It's a difficult question. That's the answer in this setting. So, I think you have to accept that you can ask the question around that. You may get part of your answer, and that's probably …* (SM in OBS_004)

On some occasions, the boundaries of the roles of agency staff who serve this panel were blurred. For example, on several occasions, panel administrators commented on the cases outside their non-voting role; there were struggles for power between the panel chair, panel advisor and panel members, particularly evident in OBS_006.

6.7.2 To understand whether panels are the 'best' social structure to determine who is suitable to foster or adopt and to be placed with which child(ren).

The jury system operating in many countries highlights the benefits of being judged by one's peers and the system, in this way, assisting judges. The work of panel should be given the same credence as the court jury system.

Over the years, central government has challenged the need for adoption and fostering panels. The reason for this is not clear; however, those working in the sector have repeatedly argued that panels continue to provide scrutiny to the work of agencies and have responded to consultative documents by providing evidence as to why they should

continue. During the latter stages of writing up this study, and within a month of the COVID-19 lockdown, the government swiftly introduced legislation to be effective from 24 April 2020 through to 25 September 2020 (subject to review), attempting once again to jettison panels. It is not known whether any agencies and in what ways The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 have used the regulations.

Regulation 4 amends the requirements of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 which state that an agency must constitute an adoption panel to allow additional flexibility in that it 'may' constitute an adoption panel. To be quorate, only the Chair/Vice-Chair, a social worker with three years' qualified experience and one other independent person need be present. Moreover, the agency can decide whether it wants a matching panel to consider a match prior to the ADM's decision.

Regulation 9 amends the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, a fostering agency need no longer constitute a fostering panel and the quorum comprises only Chair or Vice-Chair, a social worker with three years' relevant post qualifying experience and one other independent person. The agency does not need to refer cases to panel before the ADM can decide. Regulation 25(4) states that the quality assurance functions relating to assessments are no longer obligatory. If a foster carer is deemed unsuitable and makes written representations to the fostering agency, the latter does not have to refer the case back to a panel.

The literature review has looked at the studies on juries, which are the best benchmark for the work of adoption and fostering panels. The study has also taken a historical overview of what was in place previously and asserts that there is no merit in returning to a pre-1984 system of one or two individuals deciding on the fate of others; the subjectivity of individuals highlighted by the interviewees would be magnified if the panel process were not in place to provide a balance and check to individuals' thinking.

Figure 6.4 provides evidence that good, and even average; panels provide the best structure to determine who is suitable to foster or adopt and to be placed with which child(ren).

6.8 Knowledge of responsibilities to safeguard children

Neither the content of the observations nor the interviews highlighted any direct concerns about the ability of panels to safeguard children. However, a number of the observations highlighted that panels were frequently distracted and lost sight of their primary function. Some panel members seemed unable to ask direct questions that would assist them in making recommendations and instead asked questions which appeared to relate rather to personal curiosity. Panels should provide an appropriate level of challenge and the work of Janis (1982) and Bion (1961) is again useful in demonstrating the difficulties if groups do not remain on task:

> *Such vigorous scrutiny is required for the sake of children whose major life choices are determined by the decisions of professionals. (Leslie, 2001, p. 29)*

6.9 Panel comparisons

This study illustrates that adoption and fostering panels perform a valuable function for their major stakeholders – children, adults wanting to adopt or foster, and agencies and contributes an enhanced insight of how panels operate. The illuminating conscientiousness of panel members – their commitment to their roles in terms of length of service and volume of paperwork read in return for relatively low or no monetary reward – demonstrated by this study is heartening. There was no observed evidence to suggest that panel members had not come to meetings prepared, and all were passionate about improving outcomes for children, whilst, at the same time being considerate towards adults. As such, the findings, if appropriately directed, ought to assist the improved functioning and survival of panels.

6.9.1 Panel membership

The study identified a high level of consistency in membership. In line with the legislation and guidance, it was evident that agencies had sought to ensure that their panels were broadly representative, in terms of personal experience and professional roles. The study did, however, highlight that recruitment is likely to be flawed, as many panel members were recruited by word of mouth, rather than casting a wider net through advertising positions and, therefore, diversity in age, ethnicity and gender

difference was not always evidenced. Additionally, many panels had small central list, which could lead to symptoms of groupthink, identified by Janis (1982) as over-estimation of the group's power and morality – an illusion of invulnerability, closed-mindedness, and stereotypical views of non-group members creating a pressure for homogeneity, expressed in self-censorship and direct pressure on member(s) who express dissenting views. Individuals within the group guard against any conflicting information coming into the group and foster a shared illusion of unanimity. This was evidenced by the relative or complete absence of dissenting viewpoints on recommendations.

6.9.2 Panel effectiveness

Many of the panels observed did not keep to the allotted time, in most cases, this was due to the panel deviating from its remit, engaging in subjective statements or unclear questions and involving themselves in care-planning, as illustrated by the case studies OBS_001, OBS_003, OBS_005 and OBS_006, detailed in Chapter 5. The study clearly demonstrates that panel members have read their paperwork; however, the questions asked and the tendency to be easily distracted resulted in some panels appearing chaotic and unstructured. At times, they appeared to meet to justify their own existence rather than with a purpose. It can be argued that having a disproportionate number of retired members suggests that many saw their panel role as employment. While it could be argued that the limited time allotted to discuss cases did not always enable longer discussions, the study showed that the limitations were largely due to poor facilitation or management by the chairs. This study echoes the research of Hender (1994) and Pepys and Dix (2000), who note the crucial role of the chairperson, particularly when applicants are in attendance. Their role in welcoming and introducing helps to alleviate anxiety and distress in applicants. Hender (1994) and Pepys and Dix (2000), studies found that, where the panels were not well-facilitated by the chairperson, they did not remain on task and questions were not focussed and, thus, did not help panel members to make a recommendation as to suitability. The study of Pepys and Dix (2000) also stressed the importance of good timekeeping to avoid long waiting times for those presenting.

Panels OBS_004 and OBS_007 were examples of well-managed panels. These were the most transparent and open panels in terms of informing presenters of questions, and the former also gave its recommendations in front of attendees, with an openness that

worked well. It can be assumed that the need to be transparent excludes subjective thoughts and statements. These panels support the ideas of Janis (1988) in avoiding groupthink: namely, everyone in the group evaluates ideas critically and thoroughly examines all alternatives, allowing a second-chance process or extra time to be devoted, before finalising their decisions.

Another issue illustrated in the study is that of the setting. All the panels except OBS_001 and OBS_003 adequately address issues of time of meetings, room layout, waiting room and refreshments for attendees (see Appendices 8.2 and 8.4). This study asserts that appropriate waiting rooms and refreshments are basic requirements for alleviating any nervousness associated with attending panel and ensuring that all attendees are in the best possible emotional state prior to entering the panel, and able to present themselves.

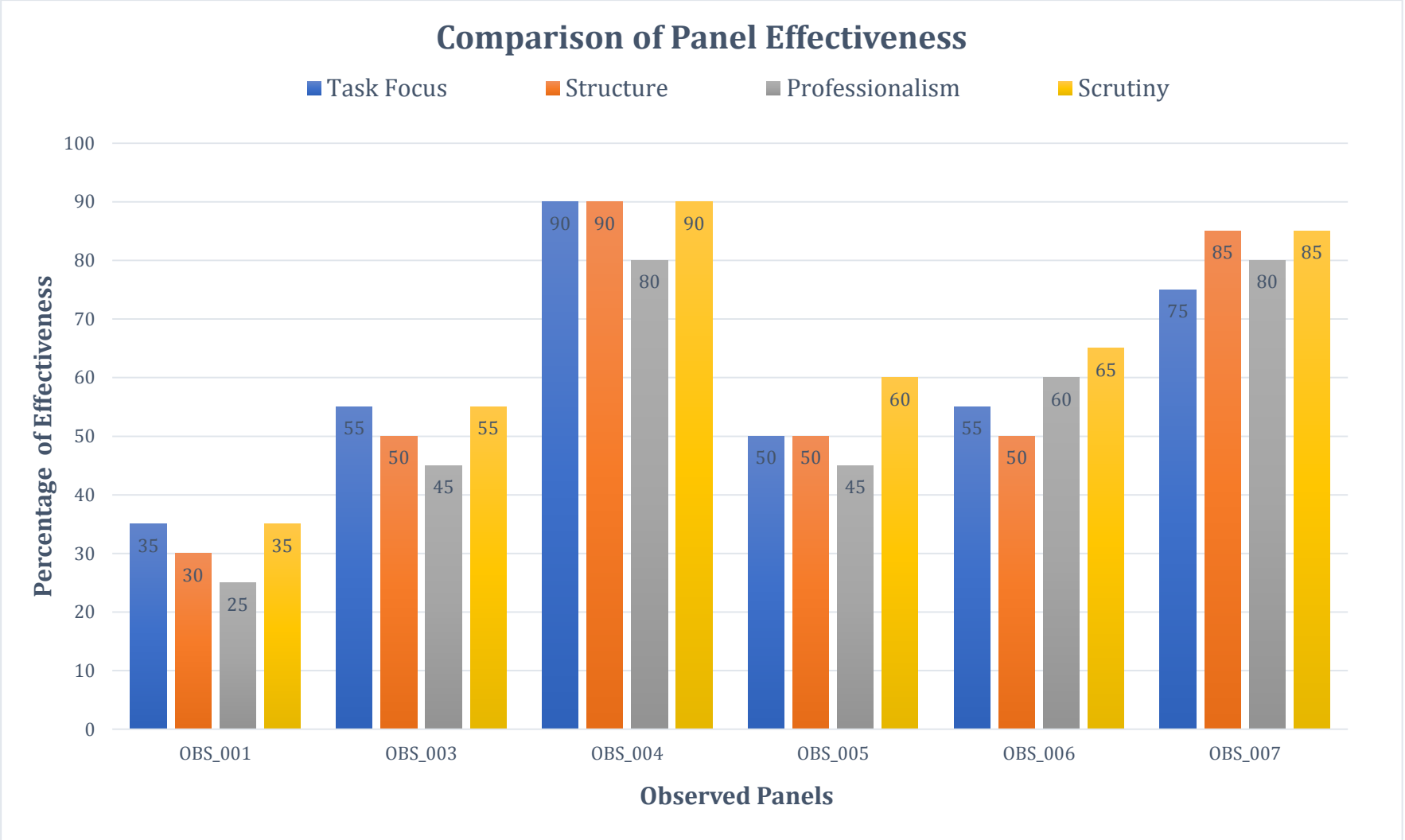
6.9.3 Panel delay

The study's findings do not support the view that panel processes lead to delays for any of the stakeholders. Panel member and panel recommendation-making is not always as logical and rational as it should be, but nothing in this study casts doubts on the overall accuracy and reliability of the systems in place to support the decision-making of the Agency Decision Maker. There was no evidence of delay on the part of panels in hearing the cases on the agenda; all panels have a sufficient number of available panel members to facilitate extra panels if needed.

6.10 Panel functioning

In relation to panel functioning, the study identified four principal themes by which panels could be compared, as illustrated in Figure 6.4.

Figure 6-4 Comparison of panel effectiveness



Task focus (ability to remain on task versus going beyond the panel remit): OBS_004 and OBS_007 both had a good understanding of their role. Panel members were given the opportunity to ask probing questions before the presentation and presenters were given the questions in advance.

The other panels scored lower as they became over-involved in care-planning and had a tendency to make value judgments and statements rather than asking questions to help them make recommendations about suitability.

Structure (organisation pre-, during and post-panel): All the panels had clear agendas and timings for cases, allowing time for pre-panel discussions. The panel advisor for OBS_004 was actively involved in guiding panel members to stay on task; the panel advisor for OBS-003 was engaged in their role although slipped into the role of a pseudo panel member.

Panel members on the OBS_004 panel were asked to give individual reasons for supporting the recommendation. Many panels used long and unclear questions, which failed to elicit clear answers, generally due to being poorly phrasing.

Whilst there was a structure for all panels, many of the panels became unstructured in undertaking the task. Examples of this include OBS_007, where was no order to processing the pre-presentation discussions, demonstrated by panel members interjecting as they felt necessary. Panel members in OBS_001 also interrupted one another in a bid to convey their point. OBS_005 was poorly managed in terms of timekeeping, leading to drift.

Professionalism (professional versus unprofessional): Overall all panels were understandably a formal group process, operating with degrees of professionalism, OBS_001 was the most unprofessional due to the casual nature of the panel layout and processes, clearly demonstrated by one panel member jumping up and down to be heard. Another example was the vice chair in OBS_003 being over-familiar with presenters.

Scrutiny (good quality assurance/scrutiny versus a conveyor belt/rubber stamping of recommendations): It was clear from the observations that all panel members had read the paperwork and had identified issues and concerns which they brought to the

panel discussion. Panel members had a good sense of their quality assurance role. OBS_001 was the only panel that appeared to be rubber-stamping processing rather than questioning carers, with almost all the cases decided in the absence of the relevant social workers and foster carers, and the panel depending on the panel advisor to answer questions.

The study found that panel members' and panels' recommendation-making is subject to variations dependent upon who comprises the panel, the chairing style, the time of the meeting, the timeframes allotted per case, the relationship between the independent Chair and the panel or agency advisor and administrator, and the quality of the paperwork presented.

6.11 Effective Personal and Professional Judgement

> *The 'non-judgmental attitude' is one of those troublesome terms. Social workers are probably unanimous in considering it a basic concept, but whenever its meaning is discussed in any sizeable group, there are many protestations to the effect that 'that isn't what I mean by the non-judgmental attitude.' (Biestek, 1953, p. 235)*

The argument of this thesis is that the notion of being non-judgmental is a fallacy. The aim then becomes to support, empower and educate people to be consciously aware of their inherent personal and professional judgements so that they can be significantly more effective in undertaking their role and function. One of the central aims of this study was to understand what it means to be 'conscious' and it has been demonstrated that two types of awareness create this consciousness: firstly, self-awareness of one's internal processes and bias and, secondly, the external processes of the professional world and systems. Sections 6.5 and 6.10, illustrated by figures 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4, evidence that people's personal history and their relationships, and their awareness and capacity to reflect on this, affect the functioning of panels. The thesis thus develops a theory of Effective Personal and Professional Judgement (EPPJ), that the functioning and recommendations of a panel rely on the efficient use of personal beliefs and values.

To be effective, individuals need to own their internal and external prejudices, noting that, if an individual claims to be non-judgmental, they are denying both internal prejudices and external systematic inequalities, thus denying aspects of themselves and

missing an opportunity for real reflection. The responsibility for the management of this lies with both the individual and the professional system in which they operate. It is noted that, in panels which were securely managed and chaired, individuals' own personal material was better contained and the overall functioning of the panel enhanced. The difficulty lies not with the biographical material but with its individual and organisational containment. Thus, historical material can be experienced in a continuum, from undermining and chaotic to informative, enhancing and a tool for challenging what may otherwise be unconscious bias, depending on the individual and the organisational understanding and management of this material.

The study's narratives demonstrated that people are complex, with complex histories and complex views, which they cannot deny, although some seemed to attempt to leave them behind when they came to work. In trying to set them aside at work, a sometimes arid professional stance was observed, negating the richness of the experience they could bring to their relational and emotive role. People need to own their individual complexities, because these complexities, consciously or unconsciously, impact on their role and function, for good or ill. In the category of high consciousness and high constructiveness, individuals have a continuous dialogue with themselves about their views and about which experiences are helpful or unhelpful to call upon at which point, so that their experiences impact positively when undertaking tasks. In a state of low consciousness and high constructiveness, individuals leave their complex histories behind in order to remain 'professional' in role, as noted above. Those individuals with low consciousness and low constructiveness carry the burden of their complex lives around with them and it appears to drive much of what they do. This can be useful in challenging 'tired narratives' and professional distancing, but is often experienced negatively, as they rarely demonstrate a reflective dialogue with themselves, raising the question of how a person can be a useful panel member if they are dislocated from or ruled by their personal biography.

Thus decisions, or choosing between options about 'best' outcomes, should be based on Effective Personal and Professional Judgement (EPPJ). By recognising, analysing and adapting personal values and preferences, decision-makers will become professionally proficient, particularly in relation to decisions about others. This concept could have a wide impact. It could, for example, be used when considering team membership, ensuring that teams have no more than one or two individuals in the low

consciousness/low constructiveness quadrant, whilst recognising that teams and groups may benefit from these individuals to produce a challenge to those in the reflective and professional quadrants, in order that the latter can develop some personal and professional distance from their internal drivers. Such people need to cultivate the capacity to self-manage and be assisted by the Panel Chair to self-regulate. In 'good' panels and teams, if they are 'held' by the Panel Chair or manager, they can be supported to use their personal biography, so they function effectively. In contrast, a team or panel may benefit from having some members from the low consciousness and high constructiveness quadrant; the cross-case analysis found that some panel members who, whilst in the main were guarded about what they shared, demonstrated an ability to remain on task. Such people need to be encouraged to be more empathetic, by the appropriate sharing of their experiences and selves, and to develop a less officious manner.

6.12 Chapter summary

This chapter found that many panel members had constructed a collective narrative of being impartial, balanced and united however, this was not in reality the case. In talking about the correlation between biography and professional identity, the narratives of the interviewees highlight themes of family, occupation and community. The family narrative is the most substantial thread in the data, suggesting that an individual's early experiences within the family unit had a lasting effect in terms of the individual and role occupancy they adopt as adults.

It was observed that, without personal reflection and external containment, dyadic conflicting positions could often be observed, such as emotional versus unemotional. EP was able to share in his interview and demonstrate in the panel in OBS_007 that he is not afraid of showing emotions at times, sharing this with attendees, in comparison with FF, who tended to appear officious and emotionally distant, as demonstrated in her narrative and in panel OBS_006. The conflict between being contained versus uncontained was illustrated by the outburst of BJ in OBS_001, as she jumped up and down, unable to control her emotions. In OBS_004, SM was able throughout the observation to demonstrate the importance of being on-task versus off-task. Finally, the conflict between processed biography versus unprocessed biography is illustrated by OO, when sharing his thoughts about a child's sexuality in OBS_006, in contrast with

SL who was clear in her narrative as to why she was enquiring about the accuracy of a child's name in reports. This also highlights the possible conflict between unconstructive use of biography and constructive use of biography. The concept of EPPJ is used to argue that individuals and teams can be supported to construct internal and external facilities to guard against such unconscious acting-out.

The study chiefly highlights that the panel system achieves what it was intended to achieve, in terms of having a representative constitution and providing well-considered recommendations in a timely manner to the ADM. The most unexpected finding is the extent to which biography, illustrated by personal beliefs, assumed knowledge and expertise, plays out in the conduct or misconduct of panel members in performing their role, as illustrated by Figure 6.3. In introducing the findings of this study, it is noteworthy that the values and beliefs of panel members and their impact on recommendation-making has been under-researched and, accordingly, is inadequately understood. The observation of panel members regularly becoming involved in care-planning is a cause for concern and renders it vital that agencies improve the quality of their reports and social worker presentations, supporting the findings of O'Sullivan (2004, 2005) that clarity on the part of agencies about their expectations of panel would improve the effectiveness of panels.

7 Conclusions & Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

The collation and analysis of the data has led to oscillating hypotheses throughout the study as to the benefits of the panel structure. The differences in the conduct of panels noted in the observations, the sense of meeting for meeting's sake, the 'niceness' of some of the panel discussions and the lack of challenge lead to questions about their legitimacy. However, reflection on the narratives of the panel members and their professional and personal knowledge brings an appreciation of the importance of different people making recommendations on stakeholders' lives. The study refutes any suggestion that panel members are passive participants in the process. It concludes, however, that existing panel members need to be more aware of the unconscious stimuli that inform their recommendations, and agencies recruiting new panel members need to develop systems to enable the recruitment of individuals who are able to do this from the outset.

This study asserts that any system that leads to decision-making by many must be better than any in which decisions are made by a single individual. Why do so many people charged with an offence opt for a trial at a Crown Court as opposed to going to the magistrates' court? The study contends that it is likely that someone will have empathy for them, that has experienced a similar plight or knows someone who has. This, then, is the benefit of a panel, a group of people ideally from a variety of personal and professional backgrounds, over a social worker and their manager (prior to the 1980s) or an ADM. Individuals operating alone or in pairs are far less likely to question their own values and beliefs and how these impact on their decision-making. Power dynamics may also lead to workers feeling unable to challenge their managers' thinking, whereas a collective is likely to be empowered to challenge and question those within the group. Despite the overwhelming view that panels should continue, some areas do require improvement, as identified below from the study. Many of these areas highlight the work that needs to be undertaken by or with individuals to address individual thinking:

> *And man can find every truth connected with his being … if he will watch, control, and alter his thoughts, tracing nearest fits upon himself, upon others, and upon his life and circumstances, linking cause and effect by patient practice and investigation, and utilising his every experience, even to the most trivial, every day occurrences, as a means of obtaining that knowledge of himself which is Understanding, Wisdom, Power. (Allen, 2017, p. 11)*

7.2 Conclusions

The narratives shared demonstrated that the interviewees struggled to share their stories in a manner that demonstrated their ability to own the adverse aspects of their lives. The majority of the interviewees were guarded in the interviews and appeared to select the parts of their narrative that they wanted to talk about, often in an evaluative manner. Many presented themselves and their career paths in a positive and progressive way, while their personal lives were, for the most part, presented as matter of fact and uneventful. The lofty narratives of the majority of the interviewees call into question whether panel members called upon for their expertise are sufficiently empathetic and able not to discriminate against those attending panel. During the panel observations, panel members were often condescending to social workers in terms of their work, aloof in terms of the realities of practice issues and discriminatory in terms of their views about the lives of prospective or actual adopters or foster carers.

7.3 Recommendations: areas for panel improvements

Chapter 3, acknowledge the researcher as an ‘insider’, due to 15 years’ experience as a Panel Chair, 5 years as a Panel Advisor and many years of immersive research, namely the observations and the narratives interviews.

The recommendations and the resultant conclusions are organised using the areas of panel effectiveness identified in Section 6.4. Some of the recommendations can be placed under more than one heading but, for ease of reading, they have been located according to best fit. It is noted that the largest number of recommendations falls under task focus, suggesting that work needs to be undertaken specifically in relation to processes of recruitment, supervision, training, and appraisal, in order to create panels and panel members who can keep to task. For panels to function effectively, the

management and support of panel members and panels needs careful attention beyond the actual panel meetings.

7.3.1 Task focus (ability to remain on task versus going outside the panel remit):

1. Agencies should develop more robust recruitment and selection processes for both internal and external potential panel members (Appendix 8)

In line with the quotation below, six of the nine interviewees were recruited by some form of head-hunting or word-of-mouth encouragement to apply; two were on panels as a part of their substantive role, and one was an external appointment.

> *Recruitment of adoption panel members has traditionally been largely through approaches to individuals based on personal recommendations. While this can work well, it can also lead to panel membership being drawn from a rather narrow group of people already known to the agency. (Lord and Cullen, 2016, p. 9)*

Whilst each panel had a central list, it was difficult to evidence the transparency in the recruitment process; greater effort should be made to ensure that panels operate effectively with a diverse membership in terms of personal identities, experience and professional expertise.

Significant factors influencing recommendation:

Very few of the interviewees reported that they were formally recruited; the vast majority were either headhunted or sat on panel as a representative of an agency or partner agency. Some reported being appointed through a conversation rather than an interview, as demonstrated by the quote below. My own experience as a Chair mirrors this, as I was unaware on occasions that a position was being filled, or that new members were interviewed.

> *'I saw this advert, I applied, I got on well with the Manager, it was almost like it didn't feel like an interview or didn't feel like I was being tested, it just felt as if it was a nice conversation with somebody.' BNIM_020*

2. Interview questions recommended for use by the Warner Report (Appendix 9)

Agencies should implement rigorous recruitment processes to assess the characters and mind-sets of potential members. Although panel members do not work directly with children and young people, their motivation for wanting to sit on panels that affect the lives of children and young people should be thoroughly explored, alongside their ability to form and maintain appropriate relationships and personal boundaries with others, their emotional resilience in working with challenging behaviours and their use of authority and power.

> *Self-awareness is frequently understood only in a very limited sense: an awareness of undesirable things in oneself, or things to be eliminated or modified in oneself. However, it can also be the source of positive learning about human nature and behaviour. (Biestek, 1979, p. 96)*

Significant factors influencing recommendation:

> ***BJ:*** *'I actually got into the panel because I was a hairdresser. I am a qualified hairdresser, and I was doing one of the social workers that works here. I used to do her hair. I didn't know she was a social worker and we got into this debate about foster carers. I had such strong opinions and she was like, you would be amazing at this, would you like to do this job? I was like, wow, yeah ...'*

As seen from the above quotation, some of the interviewees' accounts demonstrate poor recruitment practices. In *Choosing with Care*, the Warner Report (1990) makes clear the associated problems when the selection of staff is not undertaken with adequate rigour, making suggestions as to how to improve recruitment.

3. Panel membership should not be viewed as a type of paid volunteering role (The Cambridge Dictionary defines volunteering as 'to offer to do something that you do not have to do, often without having been asked to do it and/or without payment').

Being a panel member should not be viewed as a job or role that is for the benefit of the role holder; those holding the role are kin to jury members. They undertake a key safeguarding function for the placement of vulnerable children. The pseudo-volunteering role can make it difficult for agencies to challenge practice, as they are

concerned about appearing unsupportive of members who are deemed to be helping the agency out.

> *Staff need leadership and support in establishing and maintaining civilised attitudes and values ...'. (Utting, 1997, p. 105)*

Significant factors influencing recommendation:

As an 'insider' (Panel Chair), I have first-hand experience of discussions with panel members calculating their hourly rate, commenting that it is less than the minimum wage. I have also attended business meetings arguing for panels to hear a greater number of cases for the same rate of pay, without acknowledging the amount of time needed to read the paperwork.

4. Exploration of the development of supervision and support structures for panel members.

Currently there is no process in place to offer support and guidance to panel members on a regular and structured basis, other than informal discussions and yearly reviews. Panel members need to be supported to recognise the power they have and be guided not to abuse this power by disempowering service users and presenting workers. Panel members need to develop an awareness of how their individual judgments and collective recommendation-making can adversely affect the lives of others.

> *Compared with intuitive reasoning, analytic thought is slow, demanding and effortful. Practitioners need a work environment that recognises the demands it makes and provides a context in which thinking is encouraged and facilitated. … The more supervision is used to monitor managerial concerns, the less practitioners will be helped to reflect on their thinking and to be critical. (Munro, 2008, p. 25)*

Significant factors influencing recommendation:

The abstracts from FF's narrative below give an indication of some of the struggles panel members face. As an insider (Panel Chair), I have observed the difficulties members have experienced when working on complex or challenging cases, having to

take part in group debriefings as there is insufficient space or time to conduct individual sessions.

> *FF: 'You don't always know whether you are allowed to ask something or not. Particularly with the applicants being present as well, because it is, you know, you are so aware of their own anxiety levels and everything, so, but, um...'*

> *FF: 'There are times, I think, you're overwhelmed with the number of documents you have got to read and that is being honest.'*

5. **Panel Chairs and Panel Advisor to monitor panel members' projections via their questions and responses in panel and to panel reports, where they may be exemplifying, for example, a 'rescue' mentality, and address these in an appropriate and timely manner.**

To ensure that 'wounded healers' remain safe to work with service users, an understanding is needed by employers of the potential risks and benefits of early childhood adversity and adult life experiences, these are still felt consciously or unconsciously. All 'wounded healer' panel members need support with conscious and unconscious self-disclosure, ensuring that experiences are shared and used infrequently, and only where relevant and for the benefit of the service user.

> *To eliminate the judgmental attitude the worker must be able to have self-knowledge to the degree of knowing and controlling factors in his own personality and motivation that are likely to cause him to judge the client. (Sherlock, 1953, p. 61)*

Significant factors influencing recommendation:

In Chapter 1 (1.3 Why the interest in this study?), I highlight the case of an older male panel member who projected his experiences in asking a question. This was evidenced in the interviewees with RM, BJ and OO, who experienced difficulties in processing their own subjectivity, as demonstrated when formulating issues and questions at panel. These observations mirror the findings of Pennie (1993) and O'Sullivan (2004, 2005).

6. **Panel member reviews should be known as appraisals, in order to constructively explore the extent to which panel members remain effective and**

still have 'current currency'. If they are no longer suitable to remain in role, agencies should have transparent processes to terminate employment.

The interviewees had all been panel members for several years, yet many made inappropriate comments and drifted off task, which would suggest that they either went unchallenged or they had not taken heed of earlier challenges.

> *Working with children in whatever capacity – salary staff, foster carer, volunteer, charity trustee – must become a privileged occupation: one which justifiably requires, in the interest of children, careful scrutiny of the applicant and continual supervision of people in whatever position they fill. (Utting, 1997, p. 99)*

Significant factors influencing recommendation:

The work of Bion (1961) and Janis (1982) on the different ways in which individuals function in groups was influential in this recommendation; some members were observed to be not as effective as they had been, or perhaps they never been very effective. This was particularly evident in BJ's interview and panel observations.

> *BJ: 'I have sat and argued, and they had to point out it's the actual law that this has to be done ... When I am in the panel, I am very expressive, I am very ... When I had my appraisal, I said, I know I am very vocal and sometimes I can interrupt, but with me, in my head, if I don't say it, I forget it. So, I come across as very, you know, interrupting all the time.'*

7. **Return to a fixed-term length of panel membership, as opposed to the current indefinite term.**

Unlike other groups, for example juries, which are a task-specific group, panels generally have a static membership. The panel system creates an in-group (panel members) and an out-group (presenting social workers, as panel membership is not time-limited, and central lists are usually relatively small, potentially leading to panels being closed systems.

Significant factors influencing recommendation:

Janis (1982) highlights the dysfunctionality of some groups and suggested that membership and leadership of groups should be changed to address this. As mentioned above, as a Panel Chair, I have had first-hand experience of having to encourage panel members to resign, as there is no system in place to remove people from the central list and have experienced angry responses when people are told they are no longer needed on panel.

8. **Panel-member training to increase to twice a year, one session of which should be an annual update on the role and function of panel, e.g. conformational bias, groupwork and anti-discriminatory practice.**

9. **All new panel members should have a robust induction to include shadowing of or mentoring by an experienced panel member, who can assist the new member with the reading of paperwork and the formulation and asking of questions at panel.**

10. **All individuals involved in presenting, social workers, team managers, panel members and ADM, need to be trained to make effective use of personal and professional judgement (EPPJ).**

Agencies are only required to provide panel members with the opportunity to observe one panel before becoming panel members, with few also providing a panel handbook. Given the responsibilities of the role, more guidance needs to be offered to new panel members to help them avoid the inclination to reassess adults or care plans for children and to spend more time assessing the quality of the paperwork in relation to whether it provides evidence as to suitability.

The idea that panel members are clean slates needs to be challenged, as the study highlights that this notion can lead to flawed decision-making. All parties should be trained and advised of areas for ongoing learning to improve practice.

No single individual, such as the Agency Decision-Maker), should bear the weight of making life-altering decisions alone. Like everyone involved in the panel system, the ADM brings their own conscious and unconscious biases to their decision-making.

> *As the physically weak man can make himself strong by careful and patient training, so the man of weak thoughts can make them strong by exercising himself in right-thinking. (Allen, 2017, p. 27)*

Significant factors influencing recommendation:

Some interviewees, including YP (see below) stated that they had had poor inductions.

> *YP: 'My first panel experience was with the private agency … When I turned up to panel, there was no kind of induction, panel members, I remember, waiting at the elevator to go into the room and were looking at me, oh who is she? What is she? Even the Chair. It wasn't the best experience and there wasn't that many opportunities, I went, I think I observed twice and then I only had one chance of actually taking part. I found it quite, I found them quite unprofessional, really bad communication'.*

In addition, my experience as a Chair and the study observations highlights the need for more thought to be given to the quality and type of training provided for the panel. Pennie (1993) recognised that values may well impact on the panel's functioning. O'Sullivan (2004, 2005) recognised the need for greater clarity in the qualities agencies wanted in panel. The earlier studies mirrored observations OBS 1, OBS 3 and OBS 5, where panel members' subjectivity frequently impacted on the questions asked and the decision-making. In his interview, OO recognised that panel members had been subjective, although he did not recognise his own subjectivity.

> *OO: 'I have begun to slightly reign in some panel members or ensure that, you know, that there's always good ... um ... there's always official conduct and that they don't let slip any side comments, you know, which are really just personal values.'*

11. Panel Administrators' roles to be clearly defined, and they should be supported to remain within the parameters of their non-voting role.

There was observed to be an over-reliance on administrators unqualified in social work. This is dangerous as they bring their own personal perspective but do not have voting rights. As such, they should only be called on to comment on administrative issues, not on the cases presented.

Significant factors influencing recommendation:

OBS 1 & OBS 3 evidenced that panel administrators were operating outside their roles, which has also been the researcher's 'insider experience, as well as a consideration to be explored given the findings of Pennie (1993) on the influence of values.

7.3.2 Structure (organisation before, during and after the panel):

12. Panel Chairs and Advisors to ensure that sufficient time is afforded to each case and that, as far as possible, the agenda is followed, to ensure good timekeeping and show respect for all attendees.

13. Panels need to provide robust challenge to the paperwork presented.

The quality of the paperwork provided to the panel is frequently of a fair to poor standard, resulting in agencies either expecting the panel to perform the quality assurance functions of managers and panel advisors, or wanting panel to rubber-stamp their recommendations, thereby not respecting the panel's independence or role of scrutiny.

Significant factors influencing recommendation:

OBS 5 and OBS 6 provide further evidence of poor facilitation and timekeeping with self-justifications by the Panel and Chair for why this was acceptable. Section 5.6.5 above evidences a 13-minute exchange, discussing the feedback from panel attendees in relation to the effects of poor timekeeping.

Some of the difficulties documented by O'Sullivan (2004, 2005) were observed in OBS 1, specifically 5.2.4, in relation to the panel observation abstract and panel effectiveness, and OBS 3 highlighting poor scrutiny of the paperwork.

14. Agencies to ensure that the panel rooms are always well-lit and welcoming and are suitably formal but relaxed.

15. Agencies to provide waiting rooms and refreshments for attendees.

Panel is an important and often life-changing event in the lives of all the stakeholders: children, applicants and adopters and foster carers. All attendees need to be afforded the

respect of having an adequate waiting area and refreshments, which can help to calm nerves and anxieties about attending panel.

Significant factors influencing recommendation:

> *'Chair: Okay, you will remember this from last year. If we can ask the three of you to leave and hover, then we will ask you to come back in. Is that okay?'*

OBS 1, OBS 3 and OBS 6 evidence the difficulties caused by inadequate facilities.

7.3.3 Professionalism (professional versus unprofessional):

16. Agencies need to review panel-reporting structures – Panel Chairs should routinely report to the Agency Decision-Makers rather than the Panel Advisors with whom they work with on a day-to-day basis.

Independent Panel Chairs are treated like gods and are often dreaded by agency workers, as illustrated by the wariness of many of the presenting social workers. Panel Chairs are often afforded unquestioned levels of autonomy which is not robustly challenged by senior officers. Many are appointed in a self-employed capacity and are not supervised in exploring their own biases or monitored in terms of professional development.

Significant factors influencing recommendation:

> *RM: 'With M (previous Chair) I remember because M was terrifying, wasn't she, and I got such a presence, like her very presence and her knowledge … Then the next two panels I heard people's feedback, sometimes quite silly things to the panel. M almost eating them alive for their stupidity, which she did, do you know what I mean … That was the biggest impact was that, finding the courage to talk to M.'*

The above extract demonstrates the power of a Panel Chair; although RM is talking about a previous Chair in her narrative, the first observation of OBS 3 also highlights her awe and reverence towards the existing Chair. Additionally, the observations of other panel members not forming part of the sample group as well as my experience as a Panel Chair have informed this recommendation.

7.3.4 Scrutiny (good quality assurance/scrutiny versus a conveyor belt/rubber-stamping of recommendations):

17. Agencies should consider having an independent advisor with sufficient management knowledge and expertise to be the conduit of information between the agency and panel and vice versa.

18. Agencies should review the inputs to panel in terms of conducting quality assurance processes on reports.

Whilst there is no regulatory requirement to have a Panel or Agency advisor for fostering panels as in the case of adoption panels, this role ensures high levels of quality assurance for reports to panel, which will assist panel to remain on task and make robust recommendations.

Significant factors influencing recommendation:

Figure 6.4 shows that OBS 4 and OBS 7 had good quality paperwork. In particular, OBS 4 had active Panel Advisors, who provided robust advice to the panel. SM particularly was observed assisting the Chair to keep panel members on task. This supports the findings of O'Sullivan (2004, 2005) in relation to the inputs and outputs of the panel.

7.4 Chapter summary – final words

The panel system has been perpetually under review over the last 10 years, with many influential bodies commenting on its value. Although 22 panel members and 15 panels were observed, this thesis is based on the analysis of nine panel members and six panels, which leads to limitations in terms of the accuracy of biographical data and an ability to make generalisations to test validity.

Doctoral research requires that findings contribute to professional practice. Through the recommendations, the study calls for an increased understanding of the role of personal history in social work settings. For far too long, it has been assumed that those working within these systems are non-judgmental and are instinctively and naturally able to be objective in making decisions and recommendations. The study calls into question the concept of professionalism in the care sector; simply being able to undertake the task,

which tends to be the requirement in the social work sector, is not useful if individuals are not conscious of self.

Future studies will need to explore whether people can be trained to use emotion-regulation strategies to improve their competency in recommendation-making as panel members. This is also applicable for decision-making of professionals in child protection and child in need cases. It is anticipated that the knowledge generated from the study will be used more immediately in relation to what makes a good social worker, at the point of recruiting people onto social work training courses.

Additionally, further research should explore reflexivity and emotional intelligence in social work practice. In relation to panels, what people bring to their work should be considered, and how individuals and organisations can be helped to think about the impact of social class, ethnicity, gender and race. Specifically, we should examine why panels are permitted by agencies to continue without being more critical of the key players.

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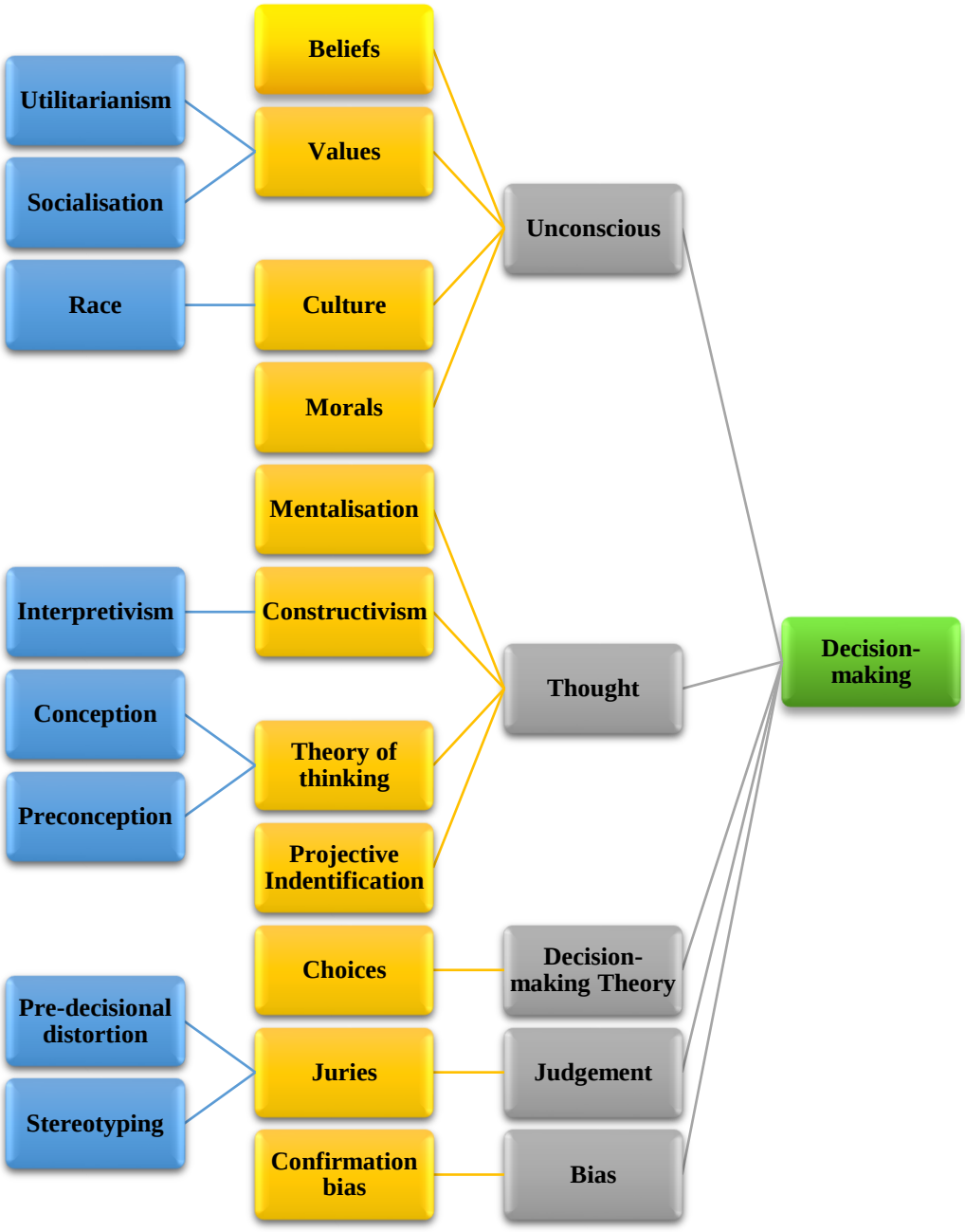
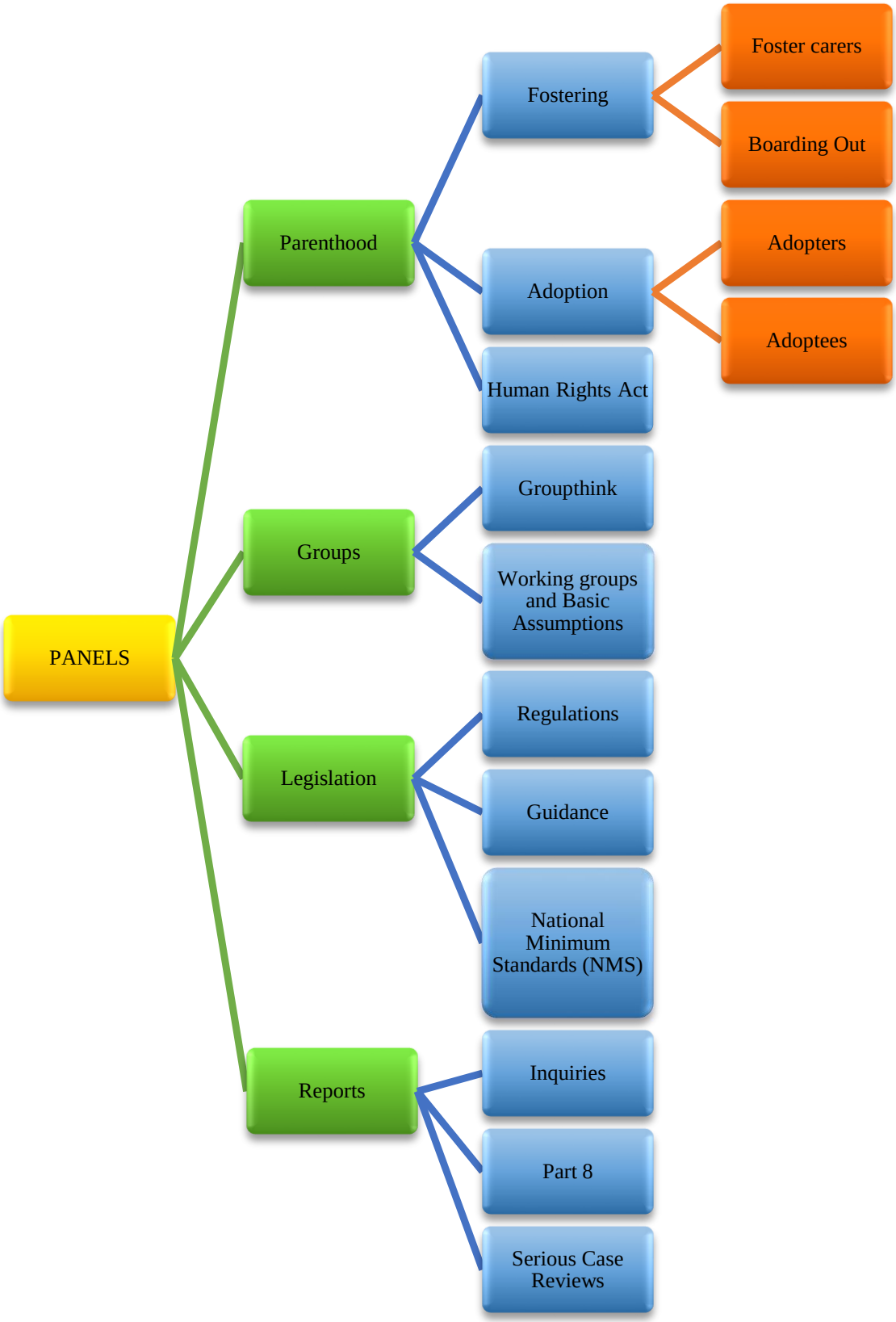
9 Appendices

Appendix 1 Keywords




PANELS
Parenthood
Fostering
Foster carers
Boarding Out
Adoption
Adopters
Adoptees
Human Rights Act
Groups
Groupthink
Working groups and Basic Assumptions
Legislation
Regulations
Guidance
National Minimum Standards (NMS)
Reports
Inquiries
Part 8
Serious Case Reviews

Appendix 2 *Man in the mirror*

(Ballard and Garrett, 1987)

I'm gonna make a change
For once in my life
It's gonna feel real good
Gonna make a difference
Gonna make it right

As I turn up the collar on
My favourite winter coat
This wind is blowin' my mind
I see the kids in the street
With not enough to eat
Who am I to be blind
Pretending not to see their needs?
A summer's disregard
A broken bottle top
And a one man's soul
They follow each other on the wind you know
'Cause they got nowhere to go
That's why I want you to know
I'm starting with the man in the mirror
I'm asking him to change his ways
And no message could have been any clearer
If you wanna make the world a better place
Take a look at yourself and then make a change

I've been a victim of
A selfish kind of love
It's time that I realize
That there are some with no home
Not a nickel to loan
Could it be really me
Pretending that they're not alone?

A willow deeply scarred
Somebody's broken heart
And a washed-out dream
(Washed-out dream)
They follow the pattern of the wind
You see
'Cause they got no place to be
That's why I'm starting with me

I'm starting with the man in the mirror
I'm asking him to change his ways
And no message could have been any clearer
If you wanna make the world a better place
Take a look at yourself and then make a change
I'm starting with the man in the mirror
I'm asking him to change his ways
And no message could have been any clearer
If you wanna make the world a better place
Take a look at yourself and then make that change

I'm starting with the man in the mirror
I'm asking him to change his ways
('Cause you better change!)
No message could have been any clearer
If you wanna make the world a better place
Take a look at yourself and then make the change

You gotta get it right
While you got the time
'Cause when you close your heart

You can't close your mind
(Then you close your mind!)

That man, that man, that man, that man
With that man in the mirror
(Man in the mirror, oh yeah!)
That man, that man, that man
I'm asking him to change his ways
(Better change!)
You know that man
No message could have been any clearer
If you wanna make the world a better place
Take a look at yourself and then make a change

Gonna feel real good now
Oh, no, oh, no

I'm gonna make a change
It's gonna feel real good
Shamone
Change

Just lift yourself
You know
You've got to stop it yourself
(Yeah! Make that change!)
I've gotta make that change today
(Man in the mirror)
You got to
You got to not let yourself, brother
(Yeah! Make that change!)
You know
I've got to get that man, that man
(Man in the mirror)
You've got to
You've got to move
Come on! Come on
You got to stand up! Stand up! Stand up
(Yeah. Make that change)
Stand up and lift yourself now
(Man in the mirror)

(Yeah. Make that change)
Gonna make that change
Come on
(Man in the mirror)

You know it
You know it
You know it
You know

Change
Make that change

Appendix 3 Personal inspiration for postgraduate study

The inspiration to write the text below came to me on 25 March 2012 when driving to work. – thought sh*t needed my dictate phone – I wrote it up on 28 March 2012.

I am aware that I am a black, heterosexual, practising Christian, a successful businesswoman who has moved from the working-class to the middle-classes. I have been married, divorced and remarried and have raised children as part of a couple, as a single person and as a stepmother. I have a house and two seemingly successful children, am slim, with an invisible disability, and am married to someone who has a life-threatening health issue which he struggles to manage. I have never drunk or smoked and was raised by a single mother; I have three siblings from my mother and five from my father, but have never met these five and have had no contact with my birth father for 30 years. I have supported my husband to gain contact with his daughter.

I have tried to list as many of the identities I hold as possible to give you a complete picture of me as an individual, as I believe that the recommendations I make at panel are in some way based on my own identities and values.

I do not know whence my interest in this area came. Is it from my interest in alternative families for children? Even if this were the case, I am again not entirely sure where this story starts. Could it be due to my African Caribbean heritage which is steeped in the legacy of slavery? Or to my love of all that is history? I think back to my memory of the television series *Roots*, which highlighted how the slave masters split up slave families, husbands and wives, parents and children, mothers and children. Or is it my childhood memory of my mother's stories of her life up to the age of 19, living in the Caribbean where families helped each other out by looking after other people's children. My mother told me that her godparents, who had no children, sometimes cared for her. Could it be my own experience of being cared for by my older cousins (whom I called Auntie Norma and Daddy) from the ages of 5 to 9 years old? My mother was a single parent in the mid-1960s and worked as an auxiliary nurse; as our older cousins had two older sons in a local school, I went to live with them so that I could access school and church. As far as I remember, I saw my mother every day, but I left at the age of nine due to domestic violence between my cousins and one of my mother's frequent temporary fallings out with our cousins.

Does my interest stem from being married to my ex-husband, who was privately fostered by a white working-class woman, in a predominately white area in the 1970s where he experienced abuse from the carer's older daughter, traumatising him and causing him to suffer from depression throughout his adult life? Or is it from my stepmother-in-law's experience of fostering in the USA, which differed from fostering in the UK. Or from my many friends who have either fostered or adopted children in the UK, giving me first-hand experience of living with adoption and fostering.

Could it be my own experience, when, several years after the breakup of my marriage, I was assessed and approved as a foster carer, having been persuaded by a social work colleague who was herself a single foster carer? Given my social work skills, I thought I could supplement my income by being a carer; however, during the assessment I realised it was not for me, after hearing about excrement smeared on the walls. Once approved, and having had no placement as I had to do the school run for my own children, I asked to be de-registered as I knew I did not have what it needed. With two children of my own, my sense of fairness dictated that if I could not do for a foster child what I did for my own children, such as take them to activities, I should not foster.

Or was it my experience as a leaving care manager, working with teenagers who had experienced breakdowns in their adoptive placements? Or my experience as a service manager for fostering and adoption? Or the resolve from my Christian faith that recognises the importance of taking care of children, in Bible verses such as:

> *'Father to the fatherless, a defender of workers…… God set the lonely in families.' (Psalm 68:5–6)*
>
> *'Do not take advantage of a widow and orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear the cry.' (Exodus 22:22–23)*

Perhaps it is my experience over the last ten years of chairing an independent Adoption and Fostering Panel for several local authority and independent fostering agencies, fuelled by a constant sense of justice and fairness in relation to class, values, prejudice and equality which I have had since secondary school and was fed by my experiences while studying for my CQSW/BA in Applied Social Studies. I am not in denial; I think I am just learning to accept that the glasses through which we see the world are tainted by our own experiences.

As a researcher, the more I read on fostering and adoption, the clearer it becomes that every recommendation I have made is based on my prejudices and biases, and based on my life experiences and identities. Yes, I use these words deliberately, as I have never accepted the belief held by some that they are not prejudiced and are non-judgemental. My view is that we are all prejudiced: what we should strive towards is not to discriminate based on our prejudices. As such, I want to explore the processes used by panels and individual panel members in arriving at their recommendations on the suitability of foster carers/adopters and matches with children.

Appendix 4 Research documentation

Appendix 4.1 Research recruitment advert

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

UEL University of East London

Recruiting participants for research project

Study title:

The complexities of making recommendations for adoption and fostering panels: an investigation of the biographic and professional discourses of panel members' decision-making and attitudes

Are you a member of an adoption and fostering panel? Do you have direct experience of making panel recommendations?

As a current Panel chair, I want to conduct a study of how panel members from different personal and professional backgrounds make recommendations, by exploring panel members' experiences on panel. As such, I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

The purpose of the study is to collect your views on:

1. why you chose to become a panel member
2. what professional and personal experience you bring to the task of making recommendations
3. whether panels are the 'best' structure to determine who is suitable to foster or adopt and to be placed with which child(ren).
4. how panels arrive at their recommendations on the suitability/approval of foster carers/ adopters and matches,
5. how the panel operates as a group/team in making recommendations.

If you would like to take part in this study, either by being part of a panel I observe or by being interviewed individually, please **read the Participant's Information Sheet** which tells you more about the study and what it involves. Then please **contact Arlene Weekes** by phone or email.

Arlene P Weekes

Researcher

Mobile: 07506828555

apwconsultancyservice@gmail.com

Appendix 4.2 Information sheets interview and observation

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

UEL University of East London

Participant Information Sheet

This sheet gives you more information about the study and what it involves. Please read it carefully before you decide whether or not to take part. If you have any questions, please ask for additional information.

What are the aims of the study?

1. To explore the underlying thinking of panel members when arriving at their recommendations on the suitability/approval of foster carers/adopters and matches.
2. To explore the group processes at play when panels make their recommendations.
3. To explore whether panels are the 'best' social structure to determine who is suitable to foster or adopt and to be placed with which child(ren).
4. To identify systems, methods and techniques to improve panel decision-making/recommendations.

Who is organising and funding this study?

The researcher is a student at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust/University of East London, studying for a Professional Doctorate in Social Work. There is no external funding for the study.

Who is eligible to participate?

All members of adoption and fostering panels who have direct experience of making panel recommendations. The researcher aims to recruit at least 8 participants for this study.

What does participating in this study involve?

The researcher will conduct a face-to-face interview with participants which will last up to 1 ½ hours. The interview will be conducted at a time and place convenient to you. Additionally, the researcher will observe up to 4 panels.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reasons. Even after the interview (or being a member of a panel that has been observed), if you feel you are no longer comfortable about participating in the study, you can withdraw and all the information collected from you will be destroyed.

What will happen to the information I give you?

The interview will be recorded using a digital recorder. This is to make sure that your views are represented correctly in the study. The information you give will be used along with the information obtained from other participants to write and publish a thesis.

How will you keep the information I give you confidential?

After the interview is transcribed, your name will be removed from the written account, so as to protect your identity. Any information that might identify you or your social networks will be changed or made anonymous. The information you give will be used only for this study and will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, on computers protected by user names and passwords. Only the research team will have access to this information. The only exception to this, where a breach of confidentiality might be required, is if there were issues around child protection, a risk to yourself or others, or malpractice. Any such occurrence would be discussed carefully with you before any action was taken.

What are the benefits in taking part?

There may not be any direct benefit to you personally. The benefits for taking part are that you will be sharing your experiences and helping others learn from them. If you would like to receive a summary of the study findings, this can be requested by ticking the relevant box on the consent form.

Will I be paid?

There is no offer of a monetary contribution for your involvement in the study but it is hoped this will not stop you from participating. The researcher believes that those who contribute are rewarded by sharing their experiences.

What are the risks in taking part?
Although it is highly unlikely that there will be any major risks in taking part in the study, you may become upset during the interview when talking about your experiences. If this happens, you can stop the interview. The researcher has put procedures in place to enable you to access any support you might need via the Panel Advisor.

Additionally, please feel free to discuss any concerns before you decide to participate.

What should I do if I decide to participate?

If you decide to participate, please contact Arlene (the researcher), who will ensure that you have understood the purposes of the study and what is expected of you. You will then be asked to sign a consent form, a copy of which will be given to you to keep along with this information sheet.

What if I have a complaint about the study?

Despite all best intentions, sometimes things can go wrong. If this happens, please inform the researcher so that every effort can be made to put things right and to prevent such errors in the future. If there is a complaint about this study, contact **researchethics@uel.ac.uk** who will investigate the complaint and try to resolve the problem.

Who has reviewed this study?

The study has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC).

Contact information

If you have any questions about the study, please contact **Helen Hingley-Jones**

on **020 8938 2582** or email **cdee@tavi-port.ac.uk**

Thank you

Appendix 4.3 Consent forms interview and observation

Interview Participant Identification Number:

CONSENT FORM

The complexities of making recommendations for adoption and fostering panels: an investigation of the biographic and professional discourses of panel members' decision-making and attitudes

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project. If you have any additionally questions, please contact the researcher **Arlene Weekes 07506828555**

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. Any data collected up to that point will be destroyed. ☐

I agree to the interview being audio-recorded, to ensure accuracy and so that my comments can be typed and used as research data. ☐

I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, articles, or presentations by the researcher. ☐

I understand that my name will not appear in any such reports, articles, or presentations. ☐

I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

I would like to receive a summary of the study findings. ☐

I understand that the confidentiality of the information I provide is subject to legal limitations in data confidentiality (i.e. the data maybe subject to a subpoena, a freedom of information request or mandated reporting by some professions).

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Researcher	Date	Signature

When completed, please return in the envelope provided (if applicable). One copy will be given to the participant and the original will kept in the file of the researcher at:

APW Consultancy Service, PO Box 1062, HA3 3HY.

Observation Participant Identification Number:

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

UEL University of East London

CONSENT FORM

The complexities of making recommendations for adoption and fostering panels: an investigation of the biographic and professional discourses of panel members' decision-making and attitudes.

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project. If you have any additionally questions, please contact the researcher

Arlene Weekes 07506828555.

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. Any data collected up to that point will be destroyed. ☐

I agree to the interview being audio recorded, to ensure accuracy and so that my comments can be typed and used as research data. ☐

I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, articles, or presentations by the researcher. ☐

I understand that my name will not appear in any reports, articles, or presentations. ☐

I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

I would like to receive a summary of the study findings ☐

I understand that the confidentiality of the information I provide is subject to legal limitations in data confidentiality (i.e. the data maybe subject to a subpoena, a freedom of information request or mandated reporting by some professions).

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Researcher	Date	Signature

When completed, please return in the envelope provided (if applicable). One copy will be given to the participant and the original to be kept in the file of the researcher at:

APW Consultancy Service Po Box 1062 HA3 3HY

Appendix 4.4 Historical background questions

I would like to speak to you about your personal background and professional experiences to learn more about the history of decision-making as it relates to adoption and fostering panels. I have allowed up to two hours to undertake this research interview.

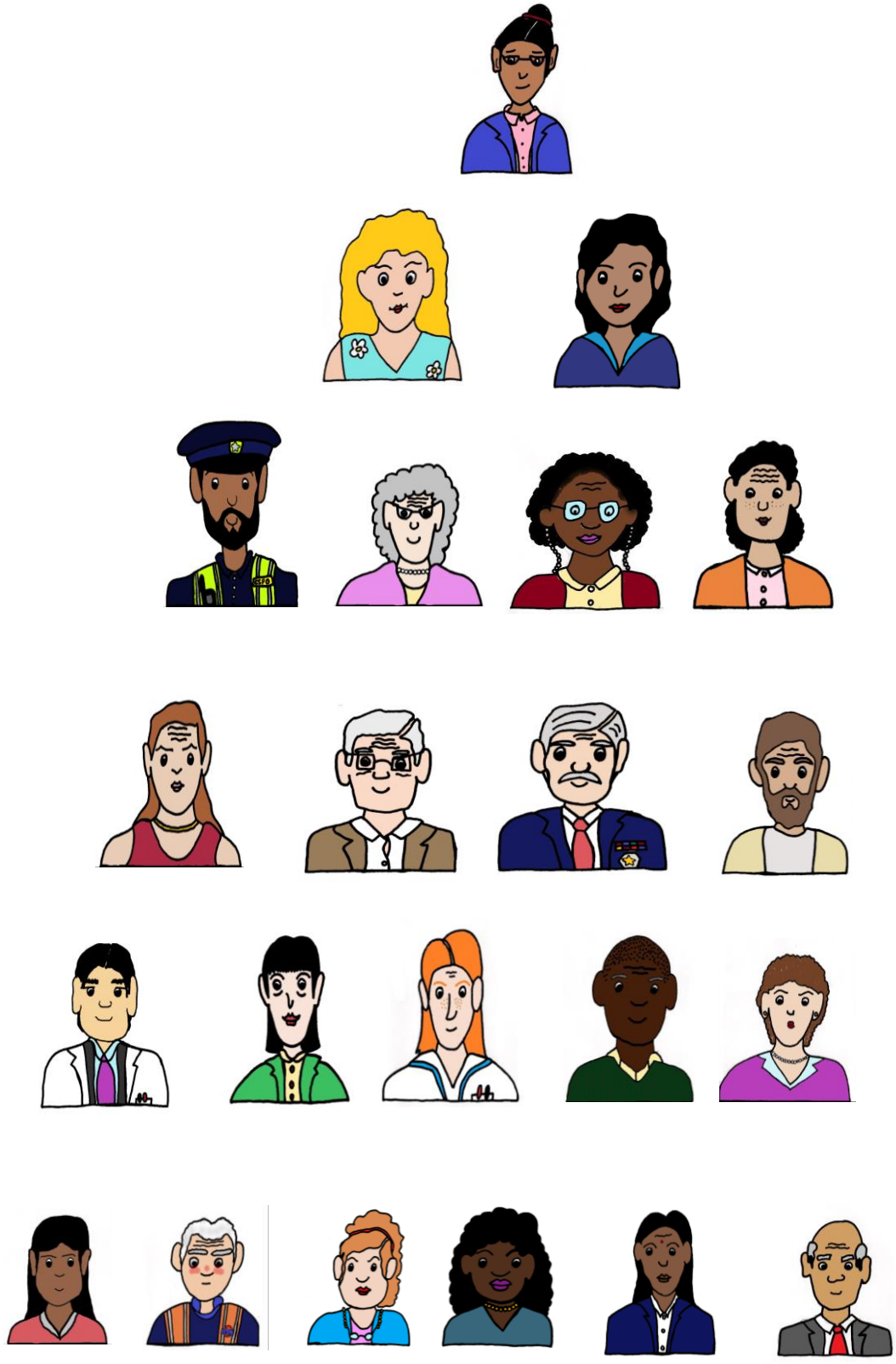
Additional questions:

1. How long have you been involved with adoption and/or fostering?
2. What have been your roles?
3. Can you explain what the system and processes were when you first became involved?
4. Do you know how long that system was in place?
5. What were the strengths of that system?
6. What were the problems/difficulties with that system?
7. When did the system and processes first change?
8. What were the strengths of that system change?
9. What were the problems/difficulties with that system change?
10. What are your views of the existing system and processes?
11. Which factors do you consider most important in enabling panel members to contribute to the decision-making/recommendation process?
12. Which factors do you consider most hinder panel members' ability to contribute to the decision-making/recommendation process?
13. What are your thoughts about ADMs solely making decisions about children placed for adoption, without the involvement of a panel?
14. What are your views on the possibility of panels no longer existing?

Appendix 5 Example of 3-column summary (RM)

Biographical Data Analysis (BDC) 1s	Phases of Subjectivity (SSS) 3rd	Thematic Field Analysis (TSS) 2nd
• Until 16, security and stability within a large, Scottish, working class family. • 16 – 21 Independence from family, own income brings freedom to move to another country. • 21 – 22 Meets a black person and disabled person. Becomes a Union/Women's Rights Representative. • 23 – 26 Marries and has her first child. Becomes a working mother when daughter is 4 months old. • 27 – 35 Divorces first husband, period of being a single parent before meeting and marrying second husband. Experiences 3 miscarriages over a 10-year period. Leaves the Civil Service. • 36 – 40 Son is born, and she becomes a foster carer for 2 children, who leave when son aged 2.5 years. • 46 Trains to become a social worker in a fostering team and a social work representative on an adoption panel. Worked as a part-time social worker whilst still fostering. • 48 – 59 Searching for career path in social work. Becomes a social-work manager for a Local Authority and in the voluntary and private sector. ***Searching for identity and purpose within family and in external organisations.***	A. **Searching for meaning through work: 16 – 40 years old '**I joined the Civil Service, when I was 16, thinking I could just go and help people, wanted to do what my dad did informally.' 'I ended up being the Woman's Rights Union Representative.' 'It gave me which I didn't realise at the time, an incredible amount of social-work skills, before I was a social worker.' 'I decided that I could do better and studied to be a Social Worker, aged 40.' B. **Making sense/exploring identity: 6 – 21 years old** Disadvantaged upbringing, youngest of 6, with closest sibling 8 years older, so they …. seemed very grown up. Father had mental health problems (agoraphobia) and was housebound; his role-modelling informed my social conscience. He was also the man who had time to sit and talk to me about values and ethnics. I had never met a black person until I came to London … I didn't know anyone that was disabled, the man across the road had MS.' C. **Struggling with perceptions: 6 – 54 years old '**At the time I didn't ... I just thought Mum was judging him very harshly … he was my hero. My perceptions changed as I became a woman and a parent myself. I was thinking as a father he was perfect; as a husband, I would have probably divorced him...' 'I genuinely thought like, these people don't know the children.' 'I never quite understood why she was so regimental about expectations.' 'I have been very concerned about the conduct of some panel members.' D. **Self-doubt 1993–2003:** 'lack of insight about impact of fostering on son/I hadn't noticed.' 'I was really quite insecure; I suppose in my own self-belief.' 'Genuinely thought I won't be good enough; they won't want me.' E. **Managing loss 1986–2011: '**It was only when the child wasn't there; we suddenly thought we really want to have a child.' 'I remember the time … it is all a little bit blurry ... being put in a ward of mothers who had babies ... I was wailing.' 'I did leave, and it was a good thing … probably not a good thing to come back.' ***1. Disadvantaged and working-class upbringing*** ***2. Trying to identify with other marginalised people.*** ***3. Trying to do better than the people she admires/envies e.g. father, other mothers, sister, social workers, Panel members/Chair.*** ***4. Not sure who she is or where she fits in.***	i. Description - Became a career Civil Servant from 16–37 years old. I joined the Civil Service to formally help people. Didn't love the career but stayed due to economic necessity. ii. Report - Journey into fostering, had second child, who was a boy, and became foster carers for 10/11 years. My sister, who was a foster carer, recommended I also become one, partly to be at home with my son. Our thinking 'great being present, not of loss on my son as a child in a fostering family'. iii. Report/PIN - life lessons: married, parent, divorced, remarried, miscarriages, son born. Had first child – no problems in conceiving or parenting, but disappointing first marriage. Tried for 10 years with second husband to have a second child. First pregnancy unplanned so not so disappointed, second and third miscarriages tough as I had to go through labour; I was wailing on the ward whilst other mothers celebrated their births. Son's birth followed total bed rest, 'probably not the best parents we could be … he was over indulged.' iv. Report/PIN - Becoming a social worker. 'Frustrated by what I perceived as the inadequacies of social workers … I decided I could do better.' 'Some didn't know the children, made false promises, unrealistic plans, didn't write up supervision notes, I wasn't empathetic to those workers. But I also met some fantastic and inspirational ones who I learnt from. Social work was the right career for me.' v. Evaluation/description - I really like/I feel/I can/I am/I know ... When we stopped fostering, we didn't know how to be adults. Fostering was fun, rewarding, there was love and great times. My children, especially my daughter, got a lot out of being part of a fostering family. vi. Argumentation - we pay lip service/an area we do nothing on … the children of carers. The impact of sharing mother's/father's lap, the children who move on. vii. Report/evaluation/PIN - Contribution to panel - Panel Advisor, trained a few panels, of panel and Manager of IFA and LA teams. 'It was never about promotion, nothing I ever do is about that, it was about genuine passion for the task.' Developed confidence to challenge others especially on issues of diversity/injustice or how panel members framed questions. 'You have no bloody idea what you are talking about, how dare you be so judgmental.' 'As a collective, those views can be openly aired in a structured, non-confrontational format, so it is not face-off, not a fight, not an argument, not a he /she thinks. The fact that opposing views can be aired in a relatively civilised way, talked about.' ***Tormented by the fact that she has been hindered in life from achieving her goal of being like her father in helping people more formally. The Civil Service did not allow her to help people in economic need. As a foster carer, she was unable to prevent children from being let down by their parents or social workers. As a social worker, she did not have the capacity to do her job effectively. Finally, whilst on panel, she has not always been able to prevent other members from being judgmental about applicants/foster carers/adopters and have a fuller understanding of their individual life journeys. She appears not to feel fulfilled in life.***

Appendix 6 All interviewees

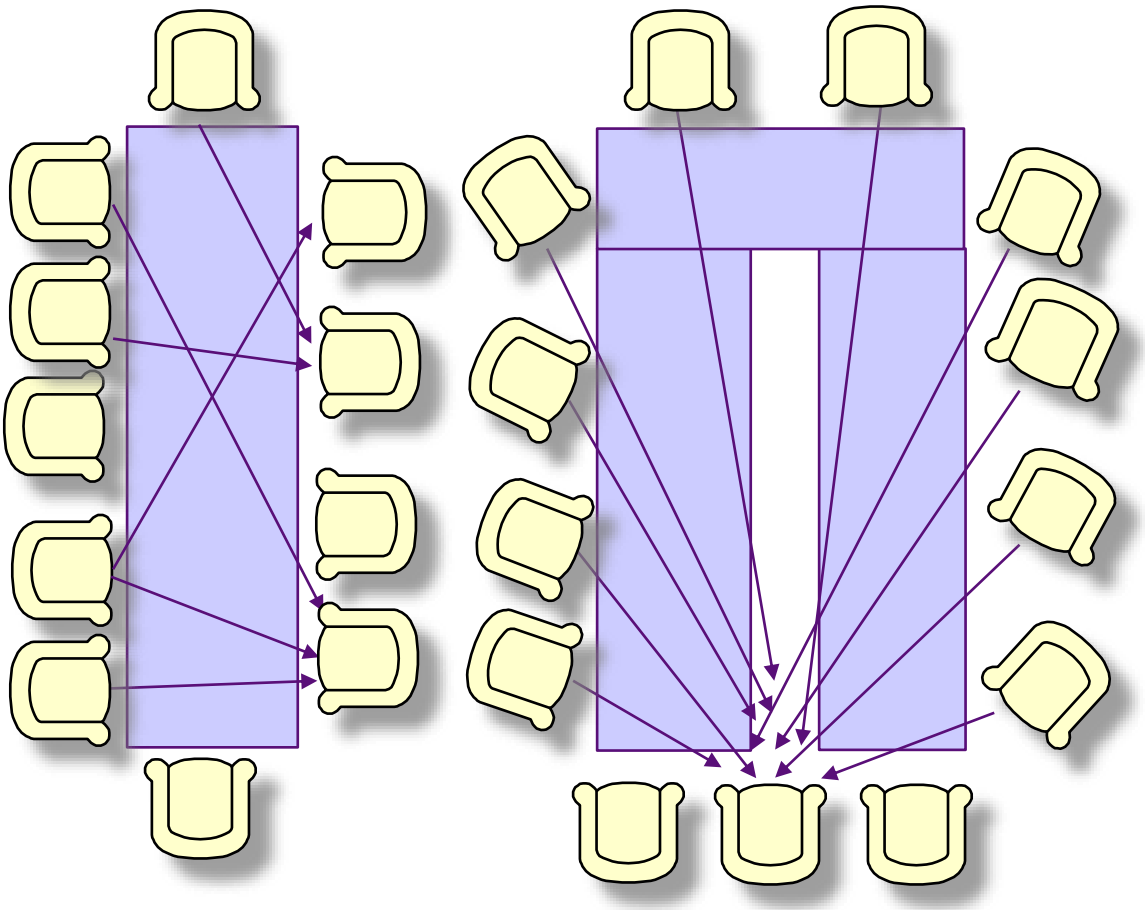


Appendix 7 Panel configurations

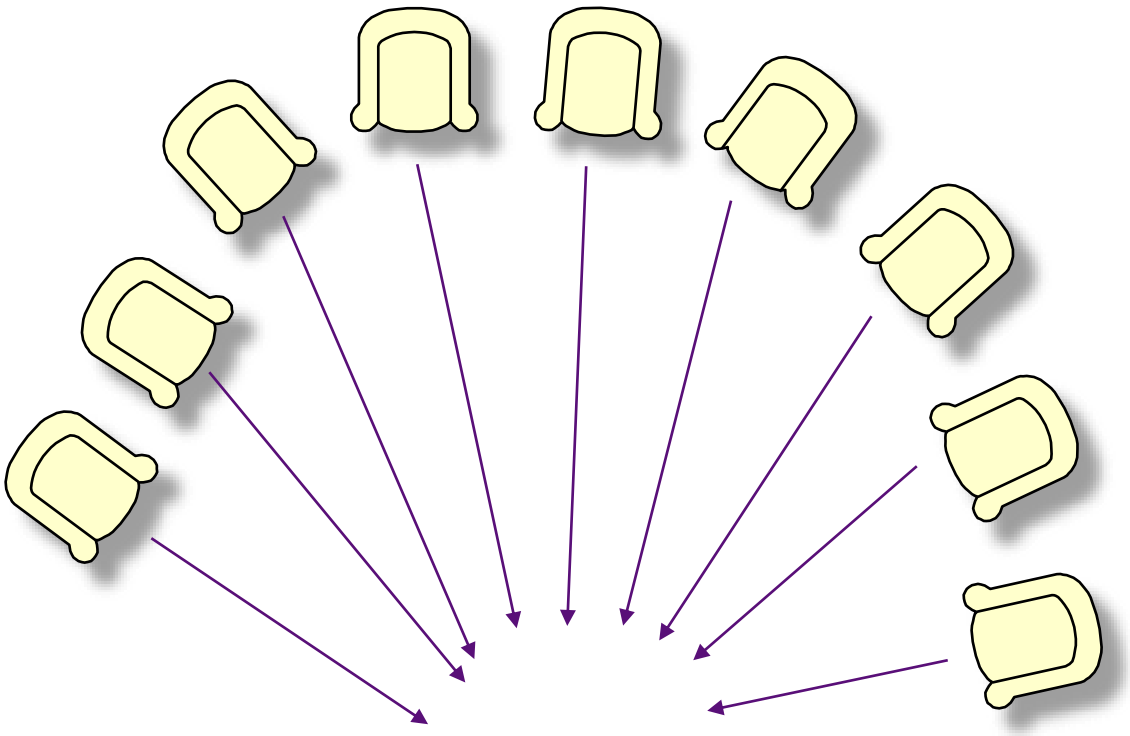
Appendix 7.1. Usual layout

Appendix 7.2. Problematic layout

Appendix 7.3. Conventional table layouts



Appendix 7.4. Unconventional layout without table



Appendix 8 Recruitment and selection processes

From Choosing with Care HMSO (Dept of Health, 1992, pp. 183–196)

I. Defining the job and postholder (recommendations 2 & 3) – Agencies should ensure that both the job descriptions and person specification making what the role is.

II. Advertising (recommendation 3) – positions are externally advertised to ensure competitive recruitment.

III. Application Forms (recommendations 8 & 9) – applicants for a given post must complete an application form.

IV. Selection for interview (recommendations 10, 11 & 13) – to ensure as full proof an appointment there should be a panel of diverse people who interview the applicant more than once using a variety of methods: written and group exercises, observations.

V. Preliminary and Final interviews (recommendations 16, 21 & 23) – enabling questions about competency relating to the role as well exploring values and attitudes of the applicant.

VI. References and checks (recommendations 17, 18, 19, 25 & 27) – previous and current employers provide information alongside criminal record and identity checks.

VII. Performance monitoring (recommendations 36, 42, 43, 44 & 45) – measures are in place to support and guide the appointee in their role, via supervision and appraisal.

VIII. Staff development (recommendations 61 & 65) – agencies to ensure a structured induction is in place and ongoing personal and group training is provided.

Appendix 9 Warner questions

No.	Question	Purpose
1	Give us an overview of your work history to date and why you think being a panel member would be a good move for you.	To establish motivation. To relax applicant.
2	If appointed, you will be one of the 'corporate parents' to the children known to Social Care. From you experience of being parented &/or being a parent, what have you identified as good parenting qualities?	Provides an indication of whether the applicant has any unresolved issues in their own childhood. Does the applicant understand their wider role?
3	Describe a situation when someone asked you to do something you totally disagreed with. How did you deal with it? On reflection, what did you learn about yourself?	Encourages the applicant to demonstrate emotional resilience. Demonstrates capacity to challenge in appropriate ways.
4	Can you tell us about a time when you or someone you know experienced being bullied or discrimination; how did it make you feel?	Allows the applicant to show their understanding of anti-discriminatory practice.
5	Safeguarding children is key to all aspects of children's work. Can you give an example of when you have taken action to ensure a child has a safe environment?	Demonstration of emotional resilience and maturity.
6	What sort of things may people verbalise or write that make you upset or angry? How would you respond?	To establish whether the applicant can demonstrate self-awareness.

		To highlight whether the applicant understands how to respond appropriately to behaviours.
7	What would you do if another panel member confided in you that, due to personal commitments, they have not been able to read the panel papers for the last three panels – and have been 'blagging' their way through the panel?	To see if they would breach confidences. To see whether they would provide advice. To check whether they would have any personal difficulties with this situation.
8	Can you share a personal or professional situation where you have responded in a way you are now not proud of?	To establish whether the applicant demonstrates self-awareness. Ability to reflect
9	On the application form we asked whether you had any criminal convictions or disciplinary actions against your name. Are you aware that this post is exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act?	Gives the applicant the opportunity to disclose any information. To make sure applicants are fully aware of the requirements for this type of work.
10	Please can we see your qualifications?	Verify the information in the application form
11	What actions would you take if you received feedback to suggest that your own actions were not seen to be trustworthy?	Recognition that, in order to build effective relationships, trust needs to be two-way.

12	Tell us about a time when you had to manage large amounts of paperwork.	Ability to produce quality outcomes.
13	Tell us about a time when, in order to maintain your integrity, you had to express an unpopular viewpoint.	Willingness to hold others accountable. Ability to do the right thing no matter how difficult.
14	Can you tell me about a situation when your work was judged or criticised unfairly, or your intentions were misunderstood?	Open to challenge. Taking onboard the views of others. Ability to listen.
15	What has been the most difficult challenge that you have faced personally in working co-operatively with another person who did not share your values, beliefs, or ideas?	Open to challenge. Taking on board the views of others.
16	Tell us about a time when you had to conform to a policy or procedure you did not agree with.	Service delivery. Taking on board the views of others.
17	Tell us about a time when you had to deliver on a commitment that was difficult for you.	Commitment to putting things right.
18	Tell us about a time when you had to change your point of view or your plans to take into account new information or changing priorities/circumstances.	Learning through mistakes. Open to challenge. Taking on board the views of others.
19	Tell us about a time when you confronted a co-worker or supervisor because you knew they had made a mistake.	Learning through mistakes. Going the extra mile.

20	Describe a situation when it was critical that you established an effective working relationship with an individual, either to complete an assignment or deliver a service?	Working with others. Service delivery.
21	Some situations with service users require us to express ideas or opinions in a very tactful and careful way. Tell us of a time when you were successful with this particular skill.	Going the extra mile.
22	Tell us of a time when your active listening skills spotted either a key issue or idea, in relation to a service users' feelings or needs, that others missed.	Taking time to listen and observe body language.

17 March 2015

Dear Arlene

Project Title:	**The complexities of making recommendations for adoption and fostering panels: an investigation of the biographic and professional discourses of panel members' decision-making and attitudes.**
Researcher(s):	**Arlene Weekes**
Principal Investigator:	**Helen Hingley-Jones**
Reference Number:	**UREC_1415_42**

I am writing to confirm the outcome of your application to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), which was considered at the meeting on **Wednesday 21st January 2015**.

The decision made by members of the Committee is **Approved**. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Your study has received ethical approval from the date of this letter.

Should any significant adverse events or considerable changes occur in connection with this research project that may consequently alter relevant ethical considerations, this must be reported immediately to UREC. Subsequent to such changes an Ethical Amendment Form should be completed and submitted to UREC.

Approved Research Site

I am pleased to confirm that the approval of the proposed research applies to the following research site.

Research Site	Principal Investigator / Local Collaborator
Premises of local authorities/organisations: Calderdale, Harrow, Leicester, RFP (IFA), Bromley, and locations of interviewees' choice	Helen Hingley-Jones

Approved Documents

The final list of documents reviewed and approved by the Committee is as follows:

Document	*Version*	*Date*
UREC Application Form	2.0	09 March 2015

Participant Information Sheet	2.0	09 March 2015
Consent Form	2.0	09 March 2015
Consent letters from organisations	1.0	09 March 2015
Recruitment advert	1.0	22 December 2014
Interview questions	1.0	22 December 2014

Approval is given on the understanding that the UEL Code of Good Practice in Research is adhered to.

Please note, it is your responsibility to retain this letter for your records.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of this project.

Yours sincerely,

Rosalind Eccles
University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)
UREC Servicing Officer
Email: researchethics@uel.ac.uk