Piecing together the patchwork: How a therapeutic school can help adopted children with their sense of identity.

Maria Sheen Kinsella

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Professional Doctorate in Child and Adolescent Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy

Tavistock & Portman NHS Foundation Trust
University of Essex

Submitted September 2022

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

This study sought to find out how staff in a therapeutic school could support adopted children with their sense of identity. It explores whether a therapeutic school can be a helpful environment for supporting identity development. Eight members of staff from one therapeutic school were interviewed, using a semi-structured interview format. A mixture of clinical and education staff were recruited to reflect the integrated nature of the school. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings demonstrated that due to adopted children's traumatic early experiences and multiple changes of caregivers, their sense of identity is disrupted. Therefore, they require additional support in this area in order to develop their sense of self. This study has shown that a therapeutic school is a helpful environment to provide this support. The study makes a number of recommendations for clinical and educational practice. It emphasizes the importance of parent work and the bringing together of professional networks in order support adopted children with their identity development. The study also makes a number of recommendations for further research. As the study was carried out in one specific therapeutic school, further research is needed to see if the findings are applicable to other schools for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties or mainstream settings.

Key words: adopted children, identity, therapeutic school, therapeutic milieu.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study explores how staff in a therapeutic school can help adopted children with their sense of identity. My hypothesis was that this type of setting can offer a range of interventions that could helpfully support adopted children to develop their sense of self. It explores staff's views of adopted children's identity difficulties and how they can help support them, rather than looking specifically at the nature of adopted children's difficulties.

The study has been carried out in one therapeutic school based in a large city. It is an integrated school and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) for children aged 5-14. This means it provides both education and mental health support throughout the day to the students. Staff are made up of teachers, nurses, therapists and support staff. Students are referred to the school due to having significant emotional, behaviour and mental health difficulties. Often children have been excluded from their previous school due to presenting with violent or disruptive behaviour. Most of the children have externalizing difficulties, and often express their distress through their behaviour rather than through words. All of the children have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). At the time of the study, almost half of the pupils in the school were either looked after children or adopted. Over a quarter of the pupils in the school were adopted. This is significantly higher than the proportion of adopted children in the general population. The national statistics on 'Children looked after in England including adoptions' (Department for Education 2021) state that looked after and adopted children make up 0.67% of all children in England. Of all children looked after, only 3% were placed for adoption in 2021 compared with 71% placed in foster care. Perhaps the overrepresentation of looked

after and adopted children in the school reflects their need for specialist schooling due to the impact of their early experiences. Less than half of the children in the school were White British. Around half of the children were of Black or Mixed Black heritage. Staff also came from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds, with around a third being of Black or Mixed Black heritage.

My interest in this area stemmed from my work with adopted children in this therapeutic school. I was struck by the children's sense of confusion about who they were, where they were from and where they belonged. Often, they held misunderstandings about their identity or in some cases had gaps in the information about their histories. I saw their muddle in both my therapeutic work directly with them, as well as in my observations throughout the school. As these children were bringing questions about their identity into the school setting, I wondered about whether it could be a helpful place to support them to navigate these issues.

There is currently a dearth of research into therapeutic education, and particularly about how these settings can support adopted children with their identity development. This study aims to fill this gap in the literature. I will carry out a literature review covering the areas of adoption, identity and therapeutic schools to explore the research that already exists in these areas. Following this, I will detail the methodology that I used to carry out the study. Staff from the school were interviewed to gather their thoughts about how adopted children can be supported with their identity. The transcripts were then analysed using thematic analysis, and themes identified from this. I will report the findings in detail, setting out the six

themes. I will assess the contribution and limitations of my study before going on to

make recommendations for future practice and research in the field.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

<u>Introduction</u>

This chapter provides a review of the literature in relation to identity, adoption and therapeutic schools. It aims to establish this project within the field, by referencing key conceptual ideas, as well as exploring how other studies relate and cross over with it. It hopes also to highlight any areas that have limited pre-existing research, exposing potential areas for future research and exploration. This literature review will set out the strategies used to search for the literature on these topics. It comprises two separate reviews. First, as this study is informed by psychoanalytic ideas, it starts with a narrative literature review of key literature in the field, as well as important psychoanalytic concepts in relation to my project. Research and ideas from a range of other disciplines will also be included. I then present an empirical literature review.

I will set out the different ways I used these approaches and the reasoning behind this. First, I will set out my narrative literature review strategy and findings. This will help establish what is meant by the key concepts in this project, as well as outline some academic papers and studies that relate to these. To gather these papers, I used a range of traditional scholarly methods. Following this I will set out my empirical literature review search strategy, detailing how I found these studies using a database search with strict parameters. I will then set out the findings from this search, which will only include empirical studies. Surprisingly, none of the studies found through the two search strategies overlapped. Therefore, the findings have been reported separately.

<u>Narrative Literature Review Search Strategy</u>

In order to gather a wide range of articles of key concepts I used a narrative literature search. This was done using traditional scholarly methods including a mixture of database searching and articles found via workshops and reading lists from my course of study. Searches were carried out on the PsychINFO database using key words related to the area of study. This database was chosen as it is the most comprehensive database for psychological disciplines. Some additional searches were carried out on Education source, as I was interested in schools. Searches were also carried out on Social Care Online to ensure I gathered relevant articles relating to adoption from the field of social care. I searched for two concepts from my study at a time to yield the widest results. For example, I searched for "adopted child" and "identity" using the Boolean operator "AND". I looked through the results to find articles directly related to my topic. I also gathered articles by looking at the bibliographies of other relevant articles gathered through my searches. As my study is informed by psychoanalytic thinking, I have included some key texts from within this field to frame this perspective.

<u>Narrative Literature Review Findings</u>

Identity

Identity is a topic that has been looked at through many lenses. This project will explore psychoanalytic understandings of identity, as well as briefly touching on some other perspectives that came up via my literature searches. In this section I will define how this project will understand the term identity. Identity as a concept is explored widely in psychoanalytic thinking. I have chosen some key texts to outline

core ideas around identity formation within psychoanalytic thinking. In this section I will include seminal papers of these key concepts.

Freud used the term self rather than identity when grappling with this area. The term identity is a modern conceptualisation which has evolved over time. Psychologists and philosophers have developed this concept, building on Freud's ideas. Self and identity are not interchangeable concepts. However, understanding ideas of self, helps to inform how the concept of identity has developed. I will outline Freud's ideas of self to demonstrate the foundation of some of these ideas, from a psychoanalytic perspective. Freud argued that the self was not one single entity and that identity changes over time. He suggested that we are made up of a multitude of interacting systems and processes. He developed the topographical model to help explain how people had both conscious and unconscious processes working simultaneously; how individuals could both know and not know things at the same time (1895). Freud argued that people cannot be reduced to one part of themselves (Freud 1900). Freud developed his ideas about the self when laying out the structural model. He further suggested that people were made up the id, the ego and the superego (Freud, 1923). Freud described the id as the "core of our being," made up of our drives and instincts (Freud, 1938, p.196). As it is part of the unconscious, it cannot become known. Therefore, many authors challenge whether this can be the true self. Other psychoanalytic theorists argue that ego is the true self. Freud states that the ego is not present at birth but instead develops out of relation to the other and internal perceptions of this (Freud, 1914). Fonagy and colleagues (2002) see the ego as "the product of the connection between the perceptions of what is going on in the inside and the representations presented by the external world" (cited in Vanheule

and Verhaeghe, 2009, p, 400). Therefore, the self develops in a dynamic relationship between people; it is both the drives and urges that come from the body, the resulting demand in the infant and how these are responded to by those around them. This suggests we can only know who we are in relation to others.

This fits with Klein's ideas about how infants develop an integrated sense of self. Similar to Freud, Klein also doesn't use the term identity but instead uses the term self. She explores how children's early experiences shape their emotional development and inner worlds. Klein (1946) states that infants are able to relate to others from the beginning of life. They relate to their first object, the mother's breast, splitting it into good and bad. The infant both introjects the object, taking an image of it into itself, and projects onto it the unwanted parts of itself. This process enables the infant to build up their ego, in other words, who they are. It is through the child's ability to achieve the depressive position, where they can bring together the loved and hated aspects of the object, that they develop a sense of integration. It is through these early relationships and the quality of care received, that infants start to build an identity. How they take in an image of who their mother is, impacts on their developing psyche and is used to form their identity.

Winnicot also uses the terms self and ego when discussing the area of identity. He argues that the ego is present from the start of life but emphasises that in order for an infant to develop a strong ego, they must be able to depend entirely on the mother figure in their early infancy (Winnicot, 1965). At this point, the infant is yet to separate out the mother from the self. He presents the idea of "good-enough mothering", where the mother is so well able to meet the needs of the infant, that the infant is afforded a brief experience of omnipotence. He emphasises the importance

of the environment in helping the infant to develop. If an infant is able to develop under favourable conditions, this will enable their personality to develop as an integrated unit. However, if there is "not-good-enough mothering", the process of ego-maturation and development can be interrupted or distorted. Winnicot argues that when the mother does not meet the child's basic needs, the child is left with unthinkable anxieties.

In the UK, the majority of children who are later adopted have received care that is neglectful or abusive (Rustin 2008). These children have experienced a failure in containment and can develop maladaptive ways of managing their unthinkable anxieties (Fagan, 2011, p.130, Winnicot, 1965). This impacts on their ability to make links with different parts or their personality and leaves them struggling to make sense of the different parts of themselves. Fagan (2011) describes how adopted children have two sets of internal and external parents, both their birth parents and adoptive parents. This can make it hard for them to make sense of their true reality, where they came from and where they are now, leaving them in a "desperate jumble and collapse of the past and the present" (Fagan 2011, p.130). Children can have both conscious and unconscious memories of their birth parents. Hodges and colleagues (2005) argue that although children can develop positive new representations in their mind based on new relationships with adoptive parents, when faced with minor stresses they can fall back on the negative representations that they hold in their minds. Fagan (2011) argues how important it is to understand adopted children's experience of living in two worlds at the same time. Rustin (2008) describes the confused nature of adopted children's internal worlds due to multiple changes in care giver, from birth parents, often multiple foster carers to adoptive

parents. Sometimes individual carers have not featured strongly enough to take up a recognisable shape in the child's mind. When care for a young child is not consistent enough, this interferes with the child's capacity to sort out the self and other in order to develop their own sense of themselves as an individual. Rustin (2006) also talks about adopted children's disrupted sense of belonging. She states that "Children who cannot be brought up in their family of origin suffer a basic disruption in this sense of membership, of knowing where they belong" (Rustin 2006, p.107). She argues that belonging is a "fundamental building block of a sense of personal identity" (ibid). Children can be left with indigested feelings of difference and separateness. They can experience unconscious feelings of confusion, loss and disconnectedness (Rustin, 2006: 108). These feelings can stay with an adopted child throughout their life, and it is therefore important to see adoption as a process rather than a one off event (Rustin, 2008). Many adopted children are adopted as older children and have conscious memories of their earlier family as well as sometimes having continued contact with them (Rustin, 2006, 108-9). Therefore, developing a sense of who they are, and where they came from is an ongoing, confusing patchwork (ibid). Children can feel both rejected by their birth parents but also worry that by accepting their adoptive parents they will be rejecting their original families. This can lead to children acting out in identification with their damaged internal objects, demonstrating behaviours associated with their birth families (Rustin 2006). This project will draw on Rustin's conceptualisation of belonging to understand identity in adopted children. It will consider how adopted children have a multitude of both internal and external care givers which confuse and muddle their sense of identity.

It is important to now look at a modern, psychological model of identity. Richards, a clinical psychologist, states that identity relates to "something felt to be intimately connected with the vitality and meaningfulness of life. Without 'identity' in this sense, we fear ourselves to be lost, or empty, unable to live life to the full, perhaps even unable to live it at all" (Richards, 2002, p.77). He outlines a range of definitions of what identity is. He speaks about identity having a strong component of sameness and commonality with others, such as identifying with a group larger than ourselves: for example, our race, gender, class, language. He states that identity has elements of both individuality and collectivity. Personal identity refers to the particular qualities of an individual such as their strengths, weaknesses and resources. Coleman (1997) argues how important it is to acknowledge the key role race and ethnicity play in identity formation. Due to the race conscious nature of our society, race, ethnicity and culture play a large part in shaping individual development. The "concept of identity is complex, varied and dynamic" and can be used with a variety of different definitions (Coleman 1997, p.34). Therefore, it is important for this project to consider the variety of facets that make up identity. This section has considered different approaches to defining identity and other associated concepts. As outlined above, concepts such as identity, self and ego, are separate but inter-related. The psychoanalysts and psychologists outlined above, as well as those from a wide range of disciplines, have grappled with these ideas using different concepts and terms.

Adoption and Race

I will now go onto look at the research on adoption and race as a lot of the research about adoption and identity explores race, mainly in terms of transracial and

transnational adoption. This research fits within psychological and sociological understandings of the concept of identity, referring to identity in terms of belonging to a particular group. A significant amount of the research is carried out in the US, and some of this will be outlined. There is a limited amount of research that has been carried out in the UK.

A study commissioned by the National Children's Home (Selwyn, Frazer and Fitzgerald, 2004) found that 18% of all the children looked after in the UK and 22% on national adoption register were ethnic minorities. However, they made up only 13% of the children who go on to be adopted. This demonstrates a mismatch between those who are available for adoption, and those who are taken up for adoption. It took children from ethnic minority backgrounds longer to be adopted, even when matched for other variables. There is a shortage of adopters from ethnic minority backgrounds, and a desperate need for Black, Black mixed parentage and mixed-relationship adopters. They looked into the barriers standing in the way of adults from ethnic minority backgrounds coming forward as prospective adopters. They argue that the impact of racism affects people's willingness to come forward. Selwyn, Frazer and Fitzgerald (2004) make a range of recommendations of how to improve the recruitment of adults from ethnic minority backgrounds as adoptive parents. They argue for the need for greater consideration to be given "to how adopters can help children to understand their heritage, culture and form a positive sense of self" (Selwyn, Frazer and Fitzgerald, 2004, p.2). They feel that myths and stereotypes held by ethnic minority communities regarding adoption need to be dispelled and a community development approach to recruitment is needed.

This trend of fewer adopters showing interest in children from ethnic minority backgrounds is mirrored in research carried out in the USA. In the USA, historically, adoption agencies matched children to families of the same racial and ethnic background. However, since 1948, there have been changing attitudes as to whether children can be raised by adoptive families from different racial backgrounds. Sweeney (2013) analysed 15 in-depth interviews with white adoptive parents to explore how they rationalise their choices in regard to the race of children they are willing to adopt. They used purposive sampling to include adopted children with a variation of characteristics, including race and nationality. The results found that participants were reluctant to adopt Black children due to the stigma attached to transracial adoption. Many stressed their unwillingness to adopt Black children, despite being willing to adopt other children of colour. They explain this by the parents living within a racialized society where skin colour hierarchies lead to preferences for lighter skin. Many white parents stated that they were more readily willing to adopt multi-racial children to Black children, as they feel they have more in common with them. However, Sweeney (2013) argues that this can lead to parents raising children who experience racism, which they cannot fully understand, and may not be giving full consideration to. They state, "Societal ideas about race are particularly important to take into account when examining adopter racial preferences because the dominant ideology neglects the importance of race in lived experiences and outcomes, which has implications for child identity, development, and preparation for and understanding of racism". Therefore, they argue that it is important that all children of colour are treated as non-white children, and for parents and adoption agencies to have a better understanding of the experiences of multi-racial children. This study had a small sample. It was carried out in the USA which

has a different adoption system to the UK, as well as a different history of racism. Therefore, there are some limitations in its findings being applied to adopted children in the UK. However, it raises helpful recommendations and considerations for adoption of children from ethnic minority background in the UK.

Coleman (1997), working as a psychologist in the UK, argues that it essential to actively aid children to develop healthy racial concepts wherever they are placed (foster home, residential provision or home of origin). She emphasises the need for positive information about people of colour to be made consistently available to children. Role models and mentors can play a key role in this. She suggests the provision of support groups for parents of Black mixed parentage children to help them voice some of the complexities of rearing mixed parentage children in a predominantly white society underpinned by racism. Tizard and Phoenix (1993) suggest that children of mixed heritage dealt with racism more confidently when there was more communication about it in the home. They felt more confident when they had developed strategies to deal with racism, including non-aggressive ways of tackling racism directly. Coleman argues for the need for a genuine commitment to explore race dynamics with children and the importance of creating space for an understanding of the development of the child's ethnic and cultural identity. Research carried out in the USA into white transracial adoptive parents' engagement with racial socialisation came to similar conclusions. Hrapczynski and Leslie (2018) recruited 80 transracial adoptive parents to participate in an online survey. The survey aimed to determine their colour-blind attitudes, multi-cultural experiences and racial socialisation. They found that parents interacting with others from ethnic minority backgrounds were less likely to engage in unhelpful colour-blind attitudes.

This led them to be more likely to expose children to their cultural heritage and engage in preparation for bias behaviours. This supported children to have strategies to manage discriminatory experiences. They found that being aware of the importance of race in one's life was more helpful than holding colour blind attitudes. They made recommendations for transracial adopters to actively engage in racial socialisation. They also suggested the need for adoption professionals to assess prospective adopters' capacity to do this as well as supporting them to do so. The above research outlines the importance of understanding and supporting adopted children with their ethnic and racial identity. It suggests that race is a core part of one's identity and taking a colour-blind attitude to race does not help nurture an understanding of this part of oneself, both in terms of their cultural heritage and in terms of how to manage discrimination faced in society. Although the above literature is not specifically about schools, learning can be taken into this context in relation to professionals creating an environment where the child's cultural identity can be explored and understood.

Schools and Therapeutic Communities

I will now look at the research that has been published on schools and therapeutic communities. There were no papers that looked at how therapeutic schools could help adopted children with their sense of identity. Therefore, this section will look at the literature on adopted children in school. It will then separately look at schools and race. Finally, it will look at the therapeutic community model, which therapeutic schools are based upon.

Schools and Adoption

This section will look at some of the literature surrounding schools and adopted children, exploring some of the specific issues that arise for adopted children in school and how they can be supported with these in this setting. Brown, Waters, and Shelton (2017) carried out a systematic review of adopted children's performance as well as emotional and behavioural adjustment in school. They found in 14 out of the 15 articles they reviewed, that adoption was correlated with lower academic attainment and increased behavioural problems. They state that looked after children's academic data is routinely monitored by the local authority, however, this is not the case for adopted children, despite both groups having similar levels of adverse early experiences. The data from studies gathered through their review shows that adoptees perform slightly better than their looked after counterparts, but significantly worse than the general school population. They argue that the education system is overlooking adopted children and there is a need for the school performance of adopted children to be routinely monitored. Furthermore, they feel additional work needs to be done to recognize the challenges faced by adopted children. They argue more work needs to be done with families, schools, practitioners and researchers to enable adopted children to have the best outcomes. Barratt (2012) echoes this argument, stating that when looked after children are adopted, they become invisible in the education system, and lose out on the special provision they previously received. She argues "that early abuse and neglect has a profound and lasting effect" on children's educational attainment and that remedial action is needed to address this in school (Barratt, 2012, p.143).She argues that CAMHS practitioners can play a role in working with schools and adoptive parents to help children manage the school setting. She directly discusses issues of identity

that can arise for adopted children in school. They discuss how challenging it can be when topics such as family, and "where I come from" arise in school. She makes suggestions about how clinicians can help children and their families come up with a tool bag of responses to difficult topics such as stating, "I don't want to talk about it". She also suggested helping children to create a simplified narrative about their birth families that they felt comfortable to share with others, such as saying their parent was ill, rather than stating they had issues with drugs. Soares and colleagues (2017) state that children's level of social competence impacted on their school experience and ability to navigate the social reaction to their adoptive status. Therefore, social skills are a protective factor and supporting children with them could help adopted children to succeed in schools. Roberts (2017) writes a lived experience paper, reflecting on her experience of being adopted as part of her Master of Education programme. She cited research by Verrier (2005, p.3) which states that despite adoptees only making up 2-3% of the population, they make up 30-40% of children in special school, juvenile hall and residential treatment centres. This highlights a higher level of need for specialist provision among this population. She also argues that often adoption can be treated as a taboo topic in schools. However, instead she argues it should be part of the inclusion focus in the curriculum, helping adopted children to feel represented and see positive representations of people from similar backgrounds to themselves.

School and Identity

A range of the literature found discussed how schools could support pupils with their sense of identity. The papers identified related to race identity. Racial inequality is ubiquitous, and power and privilege along racial lines transcend all systems,

including schools. Therefore, Candelario and Huber (2002) argue that racist policies and practices can manifest in special educational provisions and have a negative effect on staff-pupil relationships. They facilitated two concurrent psychoeducation groups to address race and racial identity within a therapeutic school setting. One group was entirely made up of Black students and the other entirely of white students. They found that Black children had a lot to say on the topic of race. They stated that doing anti-racism work with emotionally disturbed children is difficult but possible and important. They argue that racial differences can be thought about in supportive settings to affect social change. They stress the importance of clinicians being self-aware, considering their own racial identity and considering this in relation to young people they are working with. Important learning can be drawn from this paper as it is based on work with a similar client group and within a therapeutic setting. Koenka and colleagues (2020) suggest that a lot of the research into adopted children in schools focusses on adopted children's academic outcomes. Instead, their research focusses on academic motivation. They found that children with a stronger sense of belonging to their ethnic group identity tended to have a stronger sense of school belonging. This led to more favourable expectancies for success and intrinsic value. Therefore, helping children to make sense of their sense of personal identity has an impact on their belonging to their peer group at school and can help them be more engaged in education. These studies show the importance of schools creating an environment where identity and race can be thought about openly.

Therapeutic Communities

I will outline some of the research about the therapeutic communities, as this is the model that therapeutic schools are based upon. In the UK, Therapeutic Communities grew out of the Northfield experiments, which attempted to treat soldiers with psychoneurosis during WW2 (Harrison, 1999). They are based on the principles of psychoanalysis and systems theory; they worked by examining the social systems within the institution, dealing with the reality of the 'here and now', examining member interrelationships, paying attention to psychodynamics and working with the group transference (Hinshelwood, 1999, Harrison, 1999). It is the atmosphere that is the most important element of a therapeutic community, creating a culture of trust, preservation of individuality, responsibility and engagement in work (Clark, 1999). Although initially therapeutic communities were designed for adults, over the years they have been created for children and adolescents in both mental health and education settings. The group itself can create a powerful psychotherapeutic experience, and individuals can find they play an important role within the group despite their own levels of disturbance (Rose, 1999). A number of the research papers found in searches for therapeutic communities and identity related to adults in drug and alcohol recovery units; particularly how this client group moves from a user identity to a recovery identity (Dingle et al, 2015a, 2015b). Dingle and colleagues found that participants spoke about their experience in a therapeutic community in terms of building a sense of belonging to a recovery community. Irving (2011) explores how life story work can be used as an effective tool for identity reconstruction. He also looked a drug and alcohol users within therapeutic communities. As well as analysis of the participants' written life stories, he undertook follow-up interviews to further explore the identified themes and gain insight into their

experience of writing their life story. He argues that life story work can be a powerful tool for renegotiating the past and reconstructing their sense of identity, especially when participants were given the opportunity to talk about it. Other research explores identity change among serious offenders in the process of desisting from criminal activity, whilst in therapeutic community prisons (Stevens, 2012). Stevens interviewed prisoners and staff in therapeutic prisons. She found that prisoners were able to identify ways in which they had changed and felt that their revised self-concept was no longer compatible with offending. Group therapy was used to help them understand how their past histories had influenced their present behaviour and were supported to see that it did not need to determine their future outcomes. Stevens emphasizes how positive changes to one's narrative identity can act as a bridge, rather than a barrier, to a new sense of self. Adults with substance abuse issues or criminal backgrounds are a different participant group to the children in therapeutic schools. Although useful information can be drawn from the above research, it is important to look at the research for therapeutic communities for children and young people.

The Mulberry Bush is a therapeutic education and care setting that is based on the therapeutic community model. They have an active research department which aims to shape practice in their setting and other similar settings. Price, Jones, Herd and Sampson (2018) carried out a qualitative research project at the Mulberry Bush School looking at its model and how they work with children with severe social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties. They used a naturalistic psychoanalytic observation model alongside interviewing current pupils, staff, and partner agencies. They found that the therapeutic milieu model creates an environment where children

can feel safe and secure as well as being able to express their emotional disturbance and this not being suppressed. They highlight how reflective practice can help staff think about their own behaviour and reactions both individually and as a group, to understand what is being communicated about the dynamics in the setting. Despite this research being carried out in a residential setting, the research is based on a school with a similar model and therefore, relevant learning can be drawn from this study. The Mulberry Bush carries out research about the model, but they do not currently have research into how to support adopted children and their identity.

Empirical Literature Review

Empirical Literature Review Search Strategy

I will now outline the research gathered through empirical literature research strategies. I carried out my database search on PsychINFO, as this yielded the most relevant results to my topic area. Initially I had used the words adopt and adoption as key terms. However, this brought hundreds of unrelated results, linked to the other meanings of the word "adopt". Therefore, I instead used the phrases "adopted child" and "adopted children" to ensure articles were relevant. I combined terms in searches using the Boolean operator "OR", to yield the widest search results relevant to these areas. The other key terms I used were "school" or "therapeutic school" or "therapeutic community". Finally, I searched for "identity" or "identities". I combined all three searches using "AND" to find papers which covered all three areas. This returned 110 results. I decided to apply a range of limiters to narrow the search down. I limited the search to articles published in the last 20 years, to find the

most contemporary and relevant articles. I removed articles that were not empirical studies, were not in English and were dissertations. This left me with 27 articles. I excluded six as they were about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) adopted parents, and these focussed more on the identity of the parent than the adopted child. I decided that this was beyond the remit of my study. Two studies were excluded as they were about the representation of adoption in the media. There were very limited results for UK based studies, therefore, I decided to include research from other English-speaking countries, with similar cultures (North America and Australia). I have therefore excluded four studies which came from countries from beyond my remit (Portugal, India, Sweden, and Tahiti). This left me with 15 studies that I will look at in further detail.

Empirical Literature Review Search Findings

This search did not identify any studies that explored how therapeutic schools could help adopted children with their sense of identity. None of the articles focussed on therapeutic schools. Therefore, this highlights gaps in the research and areas where further research could be carried out. What has been found includes articles that cover some elements of my research project, such as adoption and racial identity, or schools and adoption.

Transracial Adoption

A large proportion, nine out of the 15 studies found, focus on transracial and transnational adoptions. All of these were US based research projects. Seven of these looked at the adoption of Asian children into US homes, coming from countries such as China and Korea. The other two studies included adoptions from other

countries internationally as well as adoptions of children from within the US. However, even within these two studies, the majority of the sample was children adopted from Asia into American families. This reflects the nature of adoption in the USA, as there are a high proportion of private adoptions, many of which are international. China has been the largest sending country for US adoptions for two decades (Xing Tan et al 2021). However, this is a very different landscape to the UK where private adoptions are illegal and international adoptions are less common. Therefore, there is limited generalisability beyond this population group to adopted children in the UK.

A number of the studies address white adoptive parents' colour-blind attitudes and the negative impact these have on transracially adopted children (Barn 2018, Bergquist, Campbell, and Unrau, 2003, Chang, Feldman and Easley, 2017, Morgan & Langrehr 2019). When referring to colour-blind attitudes, they are referring to the adoptive parents claiming to not see race, seeing their children as the same ethnicity as them and a pervasive avoidance of acknowledging race. In Bergquist, Campbell, and Unrau's (2003) study of the parents of 117 adopted families with a transracially adopted Korean child, they found that parents did not recognise their children's Korean identity beyond their physical characteristics. The majority believed their child looked Korean, however, less than half believed their child to identify with the Korean race. Bergquist, Campbell, and Unrau felt that parents minimised their children's 'Korean-ness' by identifying them as American. They stated that "most parents in this study saw the addition of a Korean child to their family as changing the family's racial identity to "Caucasian with Korean children," rather than [becoming] a multiracial or multicultural family unit" (Bergquist, Campbell, and Unrau, 2003, p.55-56). Barn's (2018) interview study of 15 parents of transracially adopted

children, similarly, found that some mothers saw their children's ethnicity as being the same as them, white and normative. Chang, Feldman and Easley's (2017) explore this further and look at the impact of this attitude on the adoptee. They carried out a number of focus groups of 34 Korean American adopted adults to explore their experience of their parents' racial social socialisation strategies. Racial socialisation refers to building links to diverse communities, developing strategies to manage racism and engaging with your cultural heritage. They found that adoptees had felt silenced and unable to talk about issues of race with their adopted parents for fear of causing parental discomfort. Participants described experiences of their adopted parents minimising and not taking seriously their reports of their racist encounters. This then led to them stopping telling their parents about these experiences in an attempt to smooth interracial relationships and promote interracial harmony between them. However, this left the child alone managing painful and confusing feelings of racial marginalisation. Chang, Feldman and Easley (2017) argue for the importance of parents examining their own racial biases and educating themselves about racism in order that they can create a home environment where children's concerns can be openly discussed and explored. Studies discuss the negative impact that feeling ethnically marginalised can have on their psychosocial wellbeing (Shin 2013, Xing Tan et al 2021, Yoon 2004). Shin speaks about the sense of isolation that can be felt when growing up as the sole person from an ethnic minority in a family, and how compounding this can be if denied the opportunity to explore one's roots. Xing Tan and colleagues argue that being a racial minority resulting from adoption could be a risk factor for maladjustment as the adoptee is close to the systemic privileges that their parents have but cannot access them due to their racial identity.

The majority of the studies about transracial adoption emphasised the importance of racial socialisation (Xing Tan et al 2021, Barn 2018, Bergquist, Campbell, and Unrau, 2003, Fong and Wang 2001, Yoon 2001). Yoon (2001) studied the effects of ethnic identity development in children's psychological adjustment. He analysed the responses of 241 Korean born adolescent adoptees to questionnaires exploring this area. The results demonstrated that when parents were supportive of ethnic socialisation, this had a positive impact on the adoptee's sense of ethnic identity. He went further to state that a negative sense of ethnic identity was linked to being vulnerable to psychological difficulties. He argued that adoption agencies should help adoptive parents to explore questions around ethnic identity and engage them ethnic socialisation processes. Other studies also argued that post-adoptive services should support parents to have culturally relevant parenting skills and provide spaces for adoptees to explore their identity (Bergquist, Campbell, and Unrau, 2003). Many found that parents' colour-blind attitudes acted as a barrier to them engaging with racial socialisation and culture keeping (Barn 2018 and Morgan & Langrehr 2019). Barn (2018) argues that it is important for transracial adoptive parents to build social networks across racial boundaries and embed their family within diverse communities, promoting social capital. She argues that this can help garner the adopted child's sense of belonging and identity. She argues this can provide them access to people who can provide practical support, such as with hair braiding, skin care and cuisine skills. However, furthermore, this would provide emotional, psychological and social support, gaining access to an understanding of the lived experience of people of colour.

Some studies looked at what it is that makes some parents of transracially adopted children engage with racial socialisation, where others do not. Morgan and Langrehr (2019) found that parents that had experienced adoption stigma were significantly more likely to recognise their adopted child's racist experiences. They argue that this shows that they used their own experience of marginalisation to make sense of the child's situation. They stated that their findings supported the benefits of transracially adopted parents being helped to explore their own socio-cultural identity to enhance their ability to notice the discrimination faced by their adopted children. Shin (2013) carried out a study on English speaking mothers who were engaged in learning Korean, the birth language of their adopted child. This study focussed on parents who had already made the decision to engage in culture keeping through language learning. It, therefore, wanted to understand the motivations of these parents, and did this by carrying out in-depth interviews with four adopted mothers. Mothers stated that they wanted to help facilitate their child's Asian American identity which they felt was necessary to combat racism. They found that these mothers had also reinvented their own sense of identity through adopting a Korean child, now seeing themselves as parents of transnational adoptees. This differs greatly from the findings in Bergquist, Campbell, and Unrau's (2003) study where parents did not see themselves as a multiracial family.

Although these studies are carried out on a different population group to this research project, it is vital to consider the importance of racial socialisation for children who are adopted by parents of a different race or culture to themselves. Arguments for professionals supporting parents to explore issues of identity with their adopted child are compelling, whether this is done by social services or CAMHS

clinicians. However, further research is needed to be carried out on transracially adopted children in the UK to confirm whether similar results are found.

Life Story Work

Two of the papers looked at life story work as way to support adopted children with their sense of identity (Watson et al 2015, 2020). Watson Latter and Bellew (2015) explore adopted children's views and perceptions of their life story books. It examines the role of life story books as a form of narrative that contributes to identity formation. They interviewed 20 children adopted from the UK care system. Purposive sampling was used to recruit adopted children, via wider research on life story work that their adopted parents were already involved in. Participants were mainly White British (n=16) with two participants of mixed ethnicity and two of eastern European origin. Transcripts were analysed using general inductive thematic analysis and the study was based within an exploratory interpretative framework. The main themes that were identified were the child's story, identity and communicative openness. They found that children felt life story books had the potential to convey a narrative but not all felt that theirs did. The results showed the role life story books played in children's identity formation, with photos and objects playing a central role in connecting them to their past and to previous relationships. Children highly valued their life story books and how they contributed to their understanding of why they were in care, building a sense of who they are and where they came from. Watson, Latter and Bellew (2015) argue for the need for training in order to ensure life story books achieve a balance of honesty, age appropriateness and do not demonise birth parents. They argue that training should also be done with adopted parents to support them to build on life story books as the child gets older.

This research draws attention to the importance of life story books in adopted children's identity formation. Although this research is not done within the context of a therapeutic school, thought needs be given to the role a setting like this can play in supporting this work either directly with adopted children, or through supporting their adoptive parents and professional networks. Further research is needed in this area to develop an evidence base.

In a later study, Watson, Hahn and Staines (2020) look into the importance of material objects for looked after and adopted children and incorporating these into their life story work. It aims to capture perspectives on the range of approaches to life story work that are being carried across the sector. This research follows on from research into the development of an interactive memory store called "trove". The findings from this study drew attention to the importance of tangible objects for looked after children. The paper is written within the framework of life story work and based on narrative identity and socio-material theories. They recruited participants using purposive sampling, they interviewed nine people working across key statutory and voluntary sectors with a range of roles and levels of experience. They used semi-structured interviews focussing on current life story work practice, how objects were used and ways to increase the use of objects. The transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis. Their findings demonstrate the need to support children to tell their own life story and the importance of the role of objects in this process. They argue that objects represent past relationships and can be powerful at filling in gaps in incomplete personal histories. Watson, Hahn, and Staines suggest that "trove" is one possible way to do this, but other ways such as taking photographs, or using other software could also be helpful. As trove was co-designed with looked after

children, rather than adopted children, further research is needed to be carried out to explore whether it can be applicable to this group. However, as both groups are likely to be care experienced and can often have complicated and unclear histories, important learning can likely be taken.

Experiences of adopted individuals

A number of the studies in the database search directly gathered the views and experiences of adopted individuals (Yoon 2001, Kohler, Grotevant and McRoy, 2002, Hanna et al 2011, Jordan and Dempsey 2013, Watson, Latter and Bellew, 2015, Chang, Feldman and Easley, 2017, Crowley 2019). Some of them gathered the views of current adopted children (4 studies) and some gathered the view of adults who had been adopted as children (3 studies). Some of these have been referred to already under other headings (Yoon 2001, Watson, Latter and Bellew, 2015, and Chang, Feldman and Easley, 2017). I will set out the remaining studies below. Crowley's (2019) study explored the views of adopted children in relation to their education and social development. She was interested in how being adopted impacted on children's self-esteem and identity. They carried out semi-structured interviews with four young people aged 10-16 from one English Local authority. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. She identified five themes from the interviews: identity and self, relationships, school, attachment and adoptive status. The findings showed that self-esteem was affected by a number of factors; early relational trauma led to insecure attachment patterns which impacted on young people's social, emotional and behavioural difficulties at school. These impacted on both their educational development and peer relationships which led to low self-esteem. However, they

also found that adoption was a positive intervention that led to developmental catch up and could have a positive impact on relationships, school achievement, self-esteem and their sense of self. However, the study had a small sample of four participants, all of which are girls. It highlights the need for further research to gather the views and perceptions of adopted children and corroborate these findings. Another study, by Jordan and Dempsey (2013) gathered the experiences of adopted people. This study focussed on the implications of adopted people's experience of therapeutic practice. They recruited 14 adults who had been domestically adopted as infants. The participants were made up of 12 females and two males aged 18-58. All participants were Caucasian. They used a semi-structured interview technique which allowed for open-ended questions. Grounded theory methodology was used to analyse the interview transcripts and identify themes. Jordan and Dempsey found that participants all expressed that adoption was "not a point in time occurrence" but instead something that needed to be negotiated throughout the adopted individual's entire life (2013, p. 40). They drew attention to participants having a differing understanding of their adoption at a variety of time-points, such as struggling with feelings of loss and abandonment being stirred up as teenagers and adoptees attempting to numb these feelings in young adulthood. They emphasised that identity formation is a pivotal issue for adopted individuals. They stressed the negative impact that a lack of access to personal information can have, which could contribute to low self-worth and evoke feelings of not belonging. Participants spoke of their desire to seek out commonalities with their adoptive families, such as similarities in physical appearance, mannerisms, shared interests and values. When these similarities could be seen, it contributed to participants' sense of belonging. The researchers drew attention to the struggles adopted individuals had in starting,

maintaining and ending relationships. They suggest that this has important implications for clinical practice, where practitioners should explore this through the therapeutic relationship. This study gives rich insight into adopted individuals' reflections on support they need. They argue that networks and services around adopted children can learn from these findings. The importance of access to historical information about their early experiences and family is particularly pertinent.

Hanna and colleagues (2011) explored the experience of adopted young adults' journey from foster care to adoption. This study was interested in examining the concept of adoptive identity. They carried out semi-structured interviews with 30 adopted individuals aged between 18 and 25. They decided to interview only participants who had been adopted after the age of eight, as past research has shown children then have a more comprehensive understanding of adoption. Efforts were made to ensure the sample was ethnically diverse. Interviews were transcribed and then coded. A grounded theory approach was used to analyse the data and themes were developed out of this. They found that the adoption experiences of the youth participating in the study varied widely; the variables included the type of adoption, their age entering foster care, the number of foster placements prior to adoption and whether they had contact with their birth family. These factors all influenced each individual adoptees story and outcomes. They identified three themes from the data: sense of belonging, second chance at life and sense of self-worth. They found participants varied in where they felt they belonged. The need to belong was primarily met by the adoptive family for most participants. However, some felt they belonged with their birth families, some to both adoptive and birth

families and some to neither. Many felt that being adopted had provided them with opportunities related to their life and education. They felt that adoption had taken them away from unsafe situations and given them the chance to overcome adversity. The study argues that the sense of belonging to a family has a significant impact on a child's self-worth.

Kohler, Grotevant and McRoy (2002) carried out a study looking at the relationship between the intensity of adopted adolescents' thinking about their adoptions and their adoptive family relationships. The participants were 135 adopted adolescents who were involved in an ongoing study looking into openness in adoption in the USA. They did not include those who were adopted transracially, internationally, or with special needs. They interviewed adopted adolescents and asked family members to complete a written questionnaire as well as participating in a brief family interaction task. They found that adolescents who reported high levels of preoccupation with adoption, reported greater alienation with their adoptive father than those reporting low to moderate levels of preoccupation. Those with extremely high levels of preoccupation reported significantly higher levels of alienation and significantly lower rates of trust for their adoptive parents than those with low levels of preoccupation. Contrary to their hypothesis, they found that those in confidential adoptions, where adoptees knew very little about their birth parents and adoption histories, did not report significantly higher levels of preoccupation with their adoptions than those in open adoptions. Therefore, they deduce that many factors contribute to people's desire to gain information about their birth families, rather than this stemming from a lack of information. The study hypothesised that the strength of the relationship with adoptive parents was a by-product of the degree to which the

adopted adolescents were preoccupied with their adoption. However, following their results they considered that this direction was unclear, and they could instead have a reciprocal relationship. To illustrate, they suggest that dynamics with the adoptive family could contribute to adopted children's preoccupation with adopted status and this could lead to increased emotional distance in the relationships. A limitation of the study is that it is limited in how it assesses the adopted children's exploration of their adoptive identities, only considering how they reflect on their adoption rather than considering other behaviours in identity exploration.

Conclusion

The literature highlights how complicated it is for adopted children to make sense of their identity. The research has shown this can be due to their traumatic early experiences impacting negatively on the development of their sense of self. It has also shown how the experience of not being able to live with their original families disrupts adopted children's sense of belonging. Many studies highlight the importance of adopted people's access to information about their early experiences and family, and the key role that this plays in helping them to develop a sense of who they are and where they are from. A significant proportion of the literature in this area is carried out in the US on transracial, and often transnational adoption. Evidence for the importance of adoptive parents acknowledging children's race and engaging in racial socialization behaviour is clear. Despite useful learning being drawn from these studies, it has limited transferability to the UK adoption context. Further research needs to be carried out in the UK on how to support adopted children of colour to develop strategies to manage racism and build a sense of their own cultural identity, particularly when placed with an adopter from a different ethnicity or culture

to themselves. The research shows that schools can play an important role in supporting adopted children with their sense of identity. These findings were also mirrored in research about therapeutic communities and how they could help adults with their sense of identity. However, there is limited research on therapeutic schools. Further research is needed in this area to develop an evidence base for whether they can be a helpful setting to support adopted children with their sense of identity. The gaps highlighted in this area from the literature search, emphasized the importance of my research project into how adopted children can be helped with their sense of identity and future projects in this area being carried out.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Study design

This is an interview study in which eight staff from a therapeutic school were interviewed. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate to research how a therapeutic school can help adopted children make sense of their identity. Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured approach. This involves having a number of predetermined questions, but also allowing interviewers to ask participants to ask follow-up questions which are relevant to the initial question and enable them to expand further (Arthur and Nazroo, 2003). Interviewers encourage participants to talk freely when answering the question (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003, p. 141). This approach was taken in order to allow participants to have a structure, giving them a starting point but allowing them space to bring their own thoughts.

Thematic analysis was chosen as it "is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke 2006- 79.) Thematic analysis organises and describes your data in rich detail; it also often goes further and interprets aspects of the research topic (Boyatiz, 1998). It is a flexible and fully qualitative method of research (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2018). It was felt that this method fitted the project, as the research question was focussed on how the school can support the children. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was briefly considered as a method, however, as this method fits better with studies exploring lived experience, this was decided against (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009). One way in which thematic analysis is flexible is that researchers can start with a

research question or can find it from the data. In this project, the research question was formulated before beginning. A strength of thematic analysis is that it does not carry its own ontological or epistemological position (Clarke and Braun, 2018). Instead, it allows the researcher to bring their own theoretical framework of understanding to the method. Researcher subjectivity is seen as a resource rather than a problem to be managed (ibid). "Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data" (Braun and Clarke 2006). This project will draw on psychoanalytic thinking to understand the data, particularly drawing on Kleinian psychoanalysis and Rustin's ideas about belonging in relation to adopted children (Rustin 2006). When using thematic analysis, the researcher plays an active role in identifying themes and patterns in the data, selecting those of interest. Identifying themes is not a passive process by which themes emerge from the data (Clarke and Braun, 2018). In the project, psychoanalytic ideas will inform and shape this process. Through the development of psychoanalytic research, thematic analysis has been adapted to enable the study phenomena of unconscious mental life (Rustin and Rustin, 2019). Psychoanalytic concepts can be an object of research in their own right (ibid).

Ethics

I discussed the project with the head teacher and senior member of the clinical team. They gave their support and written permission to carry out this project. I discussed with them the best way to recruit from with their service and followed their guidance. I completed an application to the Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC) detailing my research proposal and what it would entail. I was given permission by

TREC on the 2nd of December 2020 to carry out my project (see appendix B). I used the Health Research Authority decision tool to determine whether I needed to gain permission from the NHS Research Ethics Committee. Due to the scale and remit of my study, it determined that I did not need to gain this.

Nonetheless, it was important that I consider the impact of the research on the participants. Identity and adoption can be sensitive and emotionally stirring subjects. Following the interview, participants were given a debrief letter detailing places they could receive emotional and practical support, both within and outside of the service, if they needed it (See Appendix C).

Participants and Recruitment

I aimed to recruit a sample of six to eight members of staff from within the therapeutic school. This number was decided on as the school has around 25 members of staff; this allowed for a significant proportion of the staff to be interviewed and ensured a range of staff experiences were gathered. It also allowed room for the assumption that a number of members of staff would not want to participate. The aim was to recruit a range of qualified professionals who work for the service, including two child and adolescent psychotherapists, two clinical nurse specialists and two teachers. Recruiting from different professions within the service was done to reflect the integrated nature of the education and clinical elements of the service. The intention was to provide a holistic picture of how the service supports the children to make sense of their identity from different perspectives: including in the classroom, in individual psychotherapy, though parent work and organisationally. If recruitment was difficult from the prescribed professions, it was

decided that the remit could be widened to staff who had left in the past year as well as other professions such as psychiatrists, systemic therapists, and classroom support staff. If more than eight participants volunteered to take part, I would aim to include a balance of both clinical and educational staff, first from the predetermined professions. If more than two members of staff from each profession volunteered to take part, participants would be selected randomly from within these groups. Ideally staff would come from a range of backgrounds such as different race, class, nationality and gender, as this may influence people's understanding of identity. It felt important to capture a wide range of perspectives of what identity can be understood to mean as it is such a broad and subjective concept. However, this would be limited by the staff working within the service. If there were limits to the diversity of the staff recruited, this would be thought about in the analysis of the project.

I recruited staff by speaking about the study in team meetings. This took place in a mixture of in-person and Zoom (video-call) meetings, where the aims of the study and what was required from participants was explained. Staff were given the opportunity to ask questions about the project in the meeting or advised to get in contact separately. Following this, the whole staff team were sent out an email outlining the project with a participant information sheet attached (See Appendix D). Participants signed up to taking part in the project either verbally or via email. Many participants came forward offering to participate. The topic area seemed to capture the interest of the staff; identity was an area that was being thought about a lot within the school due to the children's current presenting difficulties relating to identity and the global situation following the death of George Floyd. Due to high rates of staff

turnover within the service, I felt it was important that participants had worked in the service for long enough to have a sense of the work that was being done around identity. Therefore, participants needed to have worked within the service for six months to participate. At the time of recruitment, the school only had one qualified child psychotherapist within the service. Therefore, a previous member of staff was approached and invited to take part. A number of support staff came forward to participate in the project, so I decided to interview two, taking the total participants to eight. When more participants came forward than could take part, timing played a part, as if two staff of a certain profession had already been interviewed the participant was not able to be considered. The participants that were selected and took part included two clinical nurse specialists, two child psychotherapists, two teachers and two support workers. A number of the participants were also members of the senior leadership team. I will not say which professions or what role in the senior leadership team as it will risk exposing participants' identities. Seven participants were female and only one was male. This reflected the staff make up at the time of recruitment. Six participants were white and two were from ethnic minority backgrounds. Again, I will not give further details of the participants' ethnicities to avoid them being able to be identified due to the small staff group within the service. As I am a current member of staff within the service, I have considered how this might affect participants' decision to participate. For some members of staff, it may have encouraged their participation due to having a pre-established working relationship with me. However, for others, it may make them less likely to take part or censor what they say.

<u>Procedures</u>

Data Collection

Participants were offered a choice whether they had their interview in the school building or an alternative building within the trust. This was offered in case they felt uncomfortable carrying it out within their place of work. Some participants chose to be interviewed outside of the school building. A number of interviews also took place over Zoom as this research study took place over the COVID-19 pandemic, and interviews began during the second national lockdown. The later interviews were carried out in person, as restrictions eased, and staff were more regularly onsite. As staff within the school were part of a "bubble" (i.e., deemed able to work together within the then system of pandemic restrictions), and the school remained open for service, interviews could take place if both the participant and I were working onsite. Precautions were taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19. I confirmed with participants whether they had any COVID symptoms prior to the interview. It they had symptoms, were self-isolating or shielding, interviews would be held on Zoom or rescheduled for a time when it was safe to have a face-to-face interview. No interviews needed to be rescheduled due to COVID-19, but some were reorganised due to staff sickness or other commitments. Face-to-face interviews followed the guidance of the school and the trust it is within. They took place in rooms big enough to allow for social distancing and windows were kept open to provide adequate ventilation.

Interviews lasted between 40 minutes and one hour. I allowed for up to an hour and a half for interviews so there was time to debrief if participants needed it. Interviews

were recorded using an electronic recording device and saved in a secure drive on a Trust device. Participants signed a consent form agreeing to participate before the interview (See Appendix E). Consent forms and other paperwork were kept in a locked cupboard. They were given an outline of the topic area in advance, so they were aware of the remit of the research. However, a decision was made to not share the interview schedule in advance, so participants did not feel they needed to prepare answers. I wanted participants to feel able to think freely and be able to give spontaneous answers. Participants were asked seven questions using a semi-structured interview. Please see table below.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE		
Question No.	**Question**	**Prompts**
1	How would you define identity?	-social identity: race, class, ethnicity -personal identity: strengths, weaknesses, sense of belonging, who they think they are
2	What does identity mean for you?	
3	How do you perceive the identity issues in the adopted children you work with?	

4	What is it like to work with adopted children in a therapeutic school?	
5	Can you tell me about the work you have done to support adopted children to make sense of who they are?	
6	How do you think therapeutic schools help adopted children to make sense of their identity?	-individual work -class based interventions -parent work -work with the network
7	What more do you think they can do to help adopted children in their setting?	

Table 1

Prompts were given and follow-up questions were asked to help participants expand on the answers related to the initial questions.

Data analysis

Interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. I transcribed the recording following each interview. The data was analysed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). As it was being analysed using thematic analysis, rather than an approach such as discourse analysis, non-verbal utterances and stuttering were not transcribed. The project is interested in capturing the content of the participants' responses rather than their non-verbal cues and understanding the meaning of this. Following the transcription process I read and re-read the interview transcripts a number of times to familiarise myself with the content. Through this process I became fully immersed in the data as is required in thematic analysis. The data was then coded, line by line. Each interview was coded in full. Coding comes from deep engagement with the text (Clarke and Braun, 2018). Coding enabled me to break the interviews down into concise units of data rather than staying with each interview as an individual narrative. A code needs to be more than just descriptive of the data and should not just summarise what is being said. It should go beyond this and distil meaning. Occasionally a line in the text did not need to be coded, as it already summarised something important about the topic area. Therefore, I kept the wording directly from the interview. These are called in-vivo codes (Braun and Clarke 2006). As I went through the interview, some codes came up repeatedly. However, other codes were similar, but it was important to capture the nuance of what was being said, and sometimes I revised them to make them more specific so as not to lose the specificity of what was being said. I went back over my codes a number of times, in order to revise and refine them.

During the transcribing and coding process I began to notice potential themes. I made a note of these initial ideas to come back to when I started the process of organising the codes into themes. These formed the basis of the initial themes. It is important to state that themes are an active creation of the researcher, and do not passively emerge from the data set (Clarke and Braun, 2018). Themes were not simply chosen based on the prevalence of codes linked to a certain topic but settled on to reflect the aim of the research and answer the research question. I was grouping themes that answered the question "how does a therapeutic school help adopted children with their sense of identity?" In order to identify initial themes, I re-read through the codes. When I recognised similarities, I began to group them together under themes. I made a large table and considered which theme each code best fitted under. New themes were added when a code did not fit under a theme already set. The number of themes grew throughout this process. Themes were broken down into subthemes, to capture the nuances within themes. Some codes were placed under "Miscellaneous"; they were placed here particularly when codes did not relate to the research question. This column was returned to at the end of the grouping process, to see if they now fitted better under the themes. Once all codes had been sorted, themes were revised. Some of my initial themes were too descriptive and needed to be revised to be more analytic. Some subthemes were too specific and were blended together, and others were split up to capture a more nuanced understanding of this area. The names of the themes and subthemes were reworded to capture the codes in their group more accurately. I settled on six themes:

1. Building a sense of identity

2. Disrupted sense of belonging

3. Expectations vs reality of adoption

4. Difficult topics to talk about

5. Fragmented understanding of oneself

6. The role of the therapeutic school

Following the themes being decided upon, I went back through each interview transcript and selected quotations that clearly captured something about a specific theme or area. I deliberately chose quotations that were relevant to my research question and helped to answer it. I ensured that each theme and subtheme could be illustrated by a quotation. I decided not to state the roles of each participant, as this would more likely expose the participants and quotations may have been possible to link back to particular members of staff.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The findings have been organised into the six themes set out below.

- Building a sense of identity

- Disrupted sense of belonging

- Expectations vs reality of adoption

- Difficult topics to talk about

- Fragmented understanding of oneself

- The role of the therapeutic school

This section will report the findings of each theme, exploring the subthemes within them. This will be illuminated by quotes from the interviews. The findings reflect staffs' views of adopted children's identity issues, rather than attempting to define the nature of the difficulties themselves.

Theme 1: Building a sense of identity.

Theme 1	Subthemes
Building a sense of identity	Difficult to define
	How identity is built
	Many elements to identity
	Built in relation to others
	Choice about your identity
	Adopted children's identity

Table 2

All participants spoke about how they believed identity was built, what it was made up of and how it changed over time. There was a shared sense across the interviews that identity was made up of many elements and was a complex concept to articulate. This is why it was felt to be helpful to start with the theme "building a sense of identity", to outline the variety of ideas about what identity is, and to frame the understanding for the rest of the themes.

Difficult to define

Many participants commented that identity was difficult to define and said that the question in relation to it was difficult to answer. The quote from P7 demonstrates this:

> *When you asked me, 'how would you define identity?' You saw I struggled, you know, there's so much to it.*

This participant directly acknowledges just how hard this concept was to put into words. P7's statement that there is "so much to it" was echoed in the definitions given by all participants, with a multitude of elements that make up identity being listed. Some participants expressed shock at being asked to put it into words and that they wished they had given it some thought before the interview. Some suggested that identity was subjective and that it meant different things to different people. Therefore, due to this subjectivity it becomes a difficult concept to pin down and put words to. It was also stated that it was hard to define due to its changing nature, as it does not have a start or an end. Identity was described as big, complicated and unclear.

How identity is built

Participants spoke about how they understood identity to be built in relation to others.

> *P6- you need to have a secure relationship with one person. inside you, to be able to then feel safe enough to separate enough to go and take in from other people that build up your identity.*

P6 is describing the process of how a baby needs a secure relationship with its primary caregiver, and how this creates the first building block in the development of identity. Some participants spoke about how infants introject from their parents, taking something of them inside themselves, and this contributes to their sense of identity. Many spoke about how separating from parents plays a key part in developing one's own sense of identity. It was referenced that adolescence is a key time when identity is reworked as you separate out from your parents.

> *P4-I think it shifts at different times in life…we may assume different ways of understanding ourselves throughout life based on different experiences that we have at different times, it's something dynamic, probably something that comes about through physical development.*

Some participants mention the significance of adolescent's changing bodies and how this impacts on their sense of who they are. It was emphasised that building a sense of identity is a struggle for all children. The process of identity formation for adopted children is layered with complexity due to their experiences of trauma and their disrupted relationships with birth parents. Participants spoke about how life experiences shape who we are, and when one's early life experiences are traumatic this has a significant impact on our sense of self. It was emphasised how identity

develops over time and changes with age, forming over a lifetime, being shaped by both nature and nurture, as well as internal and societal factors.

Many elements to identity

Participants emphasised how identity was made up of many elements. The following quote demonstrates the breadth of areas that make up identity.

> *P7- I guess at the core of it, my understanding of identity would be an individual's … sense of self, really, which would encompass just so many aspects of life. You know, everything and anything from knowing one's personal history, how they came into being in the world, where and how one was born to whom, when, why, religious upbringing, familial setting, language, a sense of place in the world, really a sense of belonging, and a sense of a self-esteem... there are so many other aspects that one can consider that develop and evolve as you grow up … But at the core of it, I think is an individual's subjective sense of where have I come from, where do I belong? And maybe not, where am I going, but a sense of purpose and direction really, drawing upon all those various aspects of, of identity that perhaps the external world decide for us. In terms of gender, sexuality, age, all of those things that we think about.*

This captures both the concrete factual elements that make up identity, as well as the more abstract ideas that need to be grappled with. Participants listed many elements that make up identity. I have categorised many of them in the tables below, splitting them into internal or external elements of identity.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ELEMENTS OF IDENTITY AS MENTIONED BY PARTICIPANTS IN INTERVIEWS	
Internal	**External**
Self-image	Race
Sense of self	Culture
What you feel you are made up of	Age
Feeling of agency	Gender
Knowing who you are	Sexuality
How you see yourself	Disability
	Political
	Family
	Social
	Diagnosis
	Job
	Language
	Education status
	History

Table 3

It was stated that people can be more than one thing, and present different sides of themselves in different contexts. Some participants stressed the struggle in bringing together and integrating all the elements of one's own identity.

Built in relation to others

Participants spoke about how people can be different versions of themselves with peers, adults, family etc. One participant suggested that we develop identity by working out who we are the same as and who are we different to. People spoke

about an important element being where we feel we fit in society and also where society perceives us to fit. P1 spoke about how understanding oneself develops through the "mirror that comes back at you" from other people's understanding of you. This suggests that identity is relational and dyadic. One participant speaks below about a child whose sense of self is directly linked to another.

> *I find that … he can't feel that he's alive, unless he feels he's in somebody's mind. And so, when I was teaching in there. If I take my eyes off him, he'd be in something.*

They are describing the sense that some children need to feel that they are constantly being thought about, and being given attention to feel secure enough in themselves and have a sense that they exist. This suggests that they have not been able to separate from a primary caregiver in a secure enough way to have their own solid sense of identity. P8 describes this as a "common feature" of the children at the school.

Choice about identity

Some participants spoke about people being able to make a choice about certain elements of their identity and that they are not all determined by others' perceptions.

> *P8- I think it's really important to find your own identity, I guess, be aware of what you want to take and what you don't want to take from what's given to you by society, by your own family, whatever, but I think we all have to find our own identity.*

This suggests that there is pressure for your identity to be influenced and shaped by external expectations and assumptions. However, these are not binding. Some participants spoke about being able to step out of their identity and choosing to identify with certain groups and not others. One participant emphasised the importance of owning who you are and choosing to live in a way that feels right to yourself.

Adopted children's identity

All of the subthemes set out above lead us to understand how complex developing a sense of identity is for adopted children. P6 brings to life that struggle.

> *Ordinary development involves separating from parents, from feeling that you don't have to just be a carbon copy, you can be some version of yourself, while also feeling you can hold on to that relationship without ruining it. And so for adopted children, that process can be really, really complicated, because they've already lost the kind of first version of themselves, if you like, the first template…But then there's also the reality of a lot of adopted children having been through multiple carers, often having had really difficult experiences, even in the womb…identity you can also think of a sense of home a sense of place, a sense of where you belong, and as if right from the start, that's been terribly disrupted.*

All participants echoed how they understood the difficulty that adopted children have in building their sense of identity. Some suggested that they felt the disruption in their early lives makes it difficult for adopted children to develop a life story and this contributes to their sense of fragmentation. Moving between families has an impact on their sense of belonging and all participants spoke about belonging being a key component of identity. Participants conveyed that the children they work with can

appear to feel made up of confusing and disturbing bits and feel like they have a "patchwork" identity (P8). The challenge of not having reference points from parents to ground their understanding of themselves was cited as a contributing factor.

Therefore, adopted children need support in order to explore their sense of identity due to their disrupted relationships and sense of belonging. This draws attention to why it is important to consider how a therapeutic school could help to facilitate this.

Theme 2: Disrupted sense of belonging
The below table sets out the five subthemes that make up the overarching theme. These will be explored in this section.

Theme 2	Subthemes
Disrupted sense of belonging	Feeling unwanted
	Making sense of link to birth family
	Struggle to belong to adopted family
	Caught between two families
	Fragile sense of security

Table 4

Belonging was spoken about widely in relation to identity. It was emphasised by participants, as they felt that this was a central part of identity that is disrupted for adopted children.

Feeling unwanted

Participants spoke about their sense that adopted children carry a deep sense of being unwanted inside of themselves. They spoke about how through their work, they have observed children trying to make sense of why they cannot be cared for by their birth parents.

> *P3-For a lot of our kids, I think around self-esteem and feeling … that somewhere along the lines you weren't wanted or weren't cared for. But often it's internalised into feeling that it's, it's something wrong with them, as opposed to a lack of in others.*

P3 suggested that adopted children are more likely to think that this happened due to something bad inside of them rather than linking it to a lack in their parent's capacity to care for them. This can leave them feeling rejected and abandoned and questioning where they fit. P4 spoke about how complicated it is when children are not placed with their siblings, when some of the family are still together. Questions about who is included and who is excluded were thought about and who feels left out.

Participants spoke about how children in the school can express their feelings of being unwanted by rejecting others around them. Through their violent behaviour, they attempt to push people away and repeat this experience of feeling rejected and unwanted. Participants spoke about how they have seen adopted children perpetuating their sense of being unwanted in a range of contexts; in previous foster placements, adopted placements and school settings. Participants felt that it was adopted children's fear that they are unwanted that can push them to illicit these

feelings in others. Participants felt that a strength of a therapeutic school is its ability to be aware of these dynamics, and not be pulled into rejecting the child but instead understanding the meaning behind the behaviour. This will be explored further under theme six which addresses the role of the therapeutic school.

Making sense of link to birth family

Participants spoke about how they have observed adopted children's complex relationship to their birth families. Some participants raised the fear children can hold that they will end up like their birth parents. However, it was raised that some children want to end up like their birth parents. The below example describes a boy in the school.

> *P1-it was like it was mapped for him, that in his mind, 'I'm going end up in prison and I'm going to be a drug addict. I'm going to be just like my birth parents.' … my theory is that there was something about a sort of identification or closeness with them … it was very self-destructive, … I always had a sense that it was like, on some level, that helped him feel a bit closer to them. And that he could never quite come away from that*

This quote illuminates that participants have witnessed children being drawn into behaviour that appears to be identifying with birth parents negative or destructive traits in an attempt to feel closer to a part of their identity that may feel out of reach. Participants felt that children can feel loyal to their birth families, and fear betraying them by allowing themselves to belong somewhere else. Birth families are a part of adopted children's identities, and it varies how much children know about them and their histories with them. P3 spoke about the complicated balance between sharing enough information with children about their early experience so that they are not left

to fill in the gaps with their own imagination and with sharing too much. Other participants spoke about how curious children can be about their birth families and have a strong wish to know them.

Some participants spoke about the complexity of children navigating their sense of belonging when they were still in direct contact with birth parents and siblings. It was suggested that this could lead to confusion and competing ideas around where they felt they belonged.

Struggle to belong to adopted family

Participants spoke about how hard it seems to be for adopted children to develop a sense of belonging with their adopted families. One participant suggested that children may feel under pressure to assimilate to the adopted family's identity. A number of participants discussed children being placed with families from different cultural backgrounds to their own. They outlined that some children in the school were said to have adopted the culture of the adopted family, while others felt connected to their country of origin and wanted to research the country and language.

They outlined that sometimes children may feel that they do not look like their adoptive parents.

> *P5-I think puberty's a change isn't it and their bodies change and their faces change? They probably end up looking more like the birth family…. And they can see more clearly than ever… that they're not looking like adopted mum and adopted dad.*

This outlines how participants feel that physical traits can contribute to a disrupted sense of belonging and may be intensified if an adopted family have their own

biological children who look more obviously physically related to the parents. Participants spoke about how hard it may be for adopted parents to acknowledge the existence of the child's birth families, and there may be a wish to be the child's "true family" (P6).

Caught between families

Participants spoke about how, through their work they have seen that adopted children can be left with a feeling of being caught between different families, stuck in a loyalty conflict. They had the sense that children can feel as if they are being pressured to choose between their birth family and adopted family. They felt that children can feel very guilty about allowing themselves to build relationships with their adoptive family. P6 spoke about how a child doesn't become a new person when they move placement and need support to understand how to allow themselves to belong to their adoptive parents without losing their previous parents. It was emphasised how complex a task it is to integrate both families into your sense of identity successfully.

Participants raised that children can be placed in very different families to their birth families.

> *p1-I think another thing that's quite complicated is when you get children who've come from really low income families and there's been a lot of neglect, low income or otherwise, and then they go to really affluent families, and how they make sense of that and I think those children often really show off about what they've got. But I think there's still a sense of neglect…I think that must be really confusing.*

This highlights how children carry their early experiences with them, even when in new settings. A number of participants raised that it is not just the birth family and the

adopted family that these children are caught between. They outline how many of the children have also lived in multiple foster placements, adding to the numerous templates they carry within themselves. Participants spoke about how children can appear to wish to belong to the new family, and be the new child, rather than carrying baggage from before.

Fragile sense of security

Participants spoke about how they felt that the children's experiences of being removed from their birth families has disrupted their sense of security in their adoptive placements. They felt that this is compounded for many children in the school who have had multiple foster placements and even break downs in their adoptions.

> *P8- There's always going to be a sense that you could be given up, I think, unfortunately… it's a lived experience that I think is really profound. Whatever your [adoptive] parents are like.*

Therefore, participants argue as illustrated above, that children carry a sense that even adoption may not be permanent. Participant 1 described their understanding that adopted children always carry the sense that families are "conditional". Participants discussed how the impact of the fear of impending loss, seems to interrupt adopted children's ability to build new relationships. Participants expressed that it is risky for adoptive children to allow themselves to feel secure in their new families for fear that they could be removed. Therefore, participants discuss how some children can push adoptive parents to reject them, as this is what they expect will happen eventually.

Participants demonstrated the level of thinking done by staff in the school to understand the emotional experience of adopted children. It demonstrates the value in school staff seeing behind the behaviour to understand what is motivating it, rather than seeing children as bad or disruptive. This level of understanding helps to prevent children being excluded again, when they attempt to push others away and repeat the rejection they expect from others.

Theme 3: Expectations vs reality of adoption

The table below outlines the subthemes under theme 3.

Theme 3	Subthemes
Expectations vs reality of adoption	Motivation to adopt
	Expectations of adoption
	Reality of adoption
	Differences between adoptive and non-adoptive families
	Adoptive children are varied

Table 5

Participants drew attention to their sense that there was a disjunction between adoptive parents' expectations and the reality of adoption. There was thought given to the impact of these expectations on the child, and how this can affect the adoptive parent child relationship.

Motivation to adopt

Participants discussed their understanding of what motivates adopted parents to adopt. Many referenced that parents may decide to adopt due to not being able to have their own biological children, and that they may carry grief or trauma in relation to this.

> *P3- I was also thinking about what parents might bring, in order to have adopted, they may have had quite a journey, some may have chosen … to go straight to adoption, some may have had to try for years… I think that plays a big part in what might, what that child might inherit. A bit like … an IVF [in vitro fertilization] child that kind of sometimes inherits the pressures… how much gets put into them by their new family.*

P3 is stating that it is important to understand parent's motivation to adopt as it has a significant influence of the child's experience. Other participants were curious about the impact it has on the dynamic between the adoptive parent and child. It was also raised that some adoptive parents can conceive naturally and still choose to adopt.

Expectations of adoption

One participant spoke about the assumption that many hold, that the adoption will be good for the child.

> *P7-I think there's probably a general generalised assumption or hope, really, that taking a child, removing a child from the care of their birth parents for whatever reasons, to protect them, and placing them with a different family to be adopted where they are wanted, and they are loved, the general assumption that that will be good for them, or that that will make things better is still very painful, because what we see is that that's not the case. You know, it's, I guess, the children we're working with at CAMHS, you know, they are the children who come to us because at a level, it's still a huge struggle for*

them for whatever reason, it maybe trauma from the past, it may be the fit with the adoptive families is a bit mis-attuned, maybe various different you know, expectations and fantasies that have existed in the parents or the family that have needed to be thought about and reworked.

They highlight how there can be gap between the expectations and reality of adoption. Participants discussed the hope that the love of the adopted family could offset the child's negative early experiences. Participant 8 outlined how detrimental it can be when the disjunction between the adoptive parents' expectations for a certain type of child do not match with the reality of the child they have. There was a feeling that this disappointment can get into the dynamic and stunt the development of the child.

Reality of adoption

Participants emphasised how adoption can be a struggle and parents can feel unable to fill a psychological void for a child. P7 raised that the reality of adoption within the UK, is that children come from the care system with a history of trauma. Participants spoke about how hard they feel it is for a child to settle into their new home, as they come with their history and need help to make sense of their experiences.

P1 you can read things in a file. And, you know, I think the reality of what the children bring is really different.

Participants spoke about how children can act out at home and present challenging behaviours that they did not feel prepared for. They also highlighted that sometimes adoptive parents are given very little information about the child's history.

Participants also raised that parenting may not be what adopters had imagined, and they may question "did we sign up for this?" (P3).

Differences between adoptive and non-adoptive families

Participants discussed that adopters may *'second guess'* ordinary parenting experiences.

> *P1- I often think with adopted families, that there are really ordinary experiences that you might have as a parent. But if your child's adopted, I would imagine, sometimes you second guess everything. So, the more angry or destructive feelings or thinking 'oh god I just want a week off of them' or 'just shut up,' I would imagine there's a sort of layer of guilt maybe around that, that birth parents might not have.*

This demonstrates an undermining doubt that gets in the way of adoptive parents allowing themselves to experience ordinary emotions that go alongside parenting. Some participants spoke about how it was normal for parents to question having children but that adoptive parents wouldn't necessarily be aware of this. Participants also drew attention to the difference between adoption and fostering. Some suggested that adoption was more secure than fostering. They outlined the practical differences, such as foster carers being paid and children having regular medical checks. Participants suggested that these differences could have an impact on the child-carer relationship and disrupt a sense of belonging.

Adopted children are varied

Participants drew attention to the fact that it was hard to make statements that applied to all adopted children.

P7-I think what I've discovered is it's so hard to generalise, you know, for adopted children or any children in general, when it comes to identity. And I think what I've realised is what I might assume, or think is significant and important and needing to be thought about might be very different to the child's preoccupation.

They highlighted that assumptions should not be made and what is important to a child should be thought about on an individual basis. Participants emphasised the importance of recognising the diversity within adopted children as a group; some children are adopted from other countries; children experience different types of trauma as well as the specific adopted family having an impact on the child.

It was emphasised how children in the school are a very particular group of children, so the adopted children attending are not representative of adopted children in general. They outlined that children attend the school due to their emotional and behavioural difficulties and often display externalising behaviours such as physical violence.

This theme draws attention to the fact that adoption "isn't the Disney fairy tale that many would hope that it is" (P7). Therefore, it draws attention to areas that a therapeutic school can support both children and their families to explore further.

Theme 4: Difficult topics to talk about

The table below outlines the subthemes in theme 4.

Theme 4	Subthemes
Difficult topics to talk about	Need to be ready to discuss
	Child's understanding
	What can children speak about
	Classroom not the right place

Table 6

Participants spoke about how they feel that identity, adoption and children's early experiences are all topics that are difficult to talk about. There was a lot of deliberation about when and how it is appropriate to address these areas within the school setting.

Need to be ready to discuss

Participants felt that there needs to be consideration of when the right time and setting is to discuss topics such as identity, adoption and children's histories. It was emphasized how important it was to be in touch with how painful certain topics are and allow children a choice as to whether they want to discuss them. One participant suggested that a child's basic needs must be met before they are able to think about their identity, thinking about it can be disturbing and evoke emotional responses. It was felt that it was hard to get to a place where children were able to think about their identity and often, they were just able to get to the surface whilst at school. It was felt that children needed also to be emotionally ready, and secure in their adoptive placements before they were ready to hear about their histories and birth families. Participants highlighted that thought also needs to be given to what information is shared with adopted children.

Participants also spoke about how hard it was talk with adoptive parents about adoption and identity.

> *P7-what I have learned…is that …timing, I guess, is everything. …there's one [family] I can think of in particular, they don't want to think about it at all.*

The participant emphasised how resistant families might be to exploring these sensitive topics and how they had to go at the families' pace. It was also stated that it was important for staff to have good relationships with parents and children to have conversations about these sensitive topics. However, a number of participants also raised the importance of not avoiding addressing sensitive topics.

Child's understanding

Participants spoke about how varied children's understanding of their history can be. It was stated that this can be dependent on the child's developmental stage. Some children understand things very concretely and others display magical thinking, and this has an impact on the way they make sense of the information given to them. P1 gives an example of a child's understanding of their situation.

> *He said, 'well I'm like this because I've got ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder] because … when my mum was pregnant with me, she took loads of drugs and drank loads of alcohol. And that's why I've got ADHD and ADHD means … it's about attention. And I need a lot of attention.'*

Through this confused account of their difficulties, the participant argues this demonstrates the child's attempt to make sense of himself with the pieces of information he has. Participants felt that children held an idea that damage has been

done to them and they have something bad inside of them, which is exemplified above. It was emphasised that there is a difference between knowing details about your history and really understanding what it means. In certain circumstances, children do not have many details of their birth histories shared with them, and participants spoke about how children can fill in the gaps with their own fantasies.

What can children speak about?

Participants spoke about how children can struggle to put words to their experiences as for many, their traumas happened when they were preverbal. They felt that as adoption and identity are anxiety provoking topics, they often do not get spoken about. One participant spoke about children's fear of not being understood getting in the way of opening up and therefore, how important it was to have an opportunity to speak to people who they felt would understand. Many participants gave the example of ensuring that the staff group reflected the children's ethnic and cultural backgrounds in order for them to feel they could speak about their cultural identity with someone they felt could understand.

Participants commented on children using their own personal histories in an interesting way.

> *P6-it's interesting what conversations the adopted children are willing to have with adults and also what they share … amongst themselves … Because it would seem they share a lot of their backstory or their history and the details they have with other children, perhaps in an attempt to be understood, or in that moment of realising 'you were adopted, I'm adopted. This is my story; this is your story.'*

This quote demonstrates that children in the school share their histories with other children in an attempt to connect with each other and find others with similar backgrounds. However, P6 also commented on how this sharing of personal information can be misused by the children.

> *He's told that child… about himself… and now … they're using this in an interesting way against each other. But I think the individual child's sense of vulnerability around knowing and feeling secure within their own sense of identity is often shared in a way that then comes back at them in a hurtful way, again, and reinforces a sense of insecurity or vulnerability once more.*

This quote demonstrates how children's attempts to connect by sharing something very personal and vulnerable opens themselves up to being hurt by others, in a certain way, repeating and entrenching their sense of vulnerability.

Classroom not the right place

Participants considered whether discussing adoption and children's early histories was best placed for the classroom setting. They felt unsure whether whole class discussions about such personal information would be helpful. Many felt that these conversations were better placed to be had 1-1 with an adult or in therapy.

> *P5-I've got children who just blurt things out [in class], some children … just say, oh, I miss my mum, she's missing. And ...that information needs to be treated in a sensitive way. So, what I could do is offer for that person to go in a separate space with a member of staff to talk about it. But I wouldn't continue talking about it in class, because that's not what we're there for…But it's about channelling the feelings into contained spaces.*

There was a sense that children needed guidance to know when the right time and place to talk about their personal situations is, so that their emotions can be attended to. It was felt that school should offer these spaces for children. Therefore, this shows that the school can support adopted children with their identity by creating a containing and supportive environment for children to feel able to talk if they choose to, and helping to facilitate these conversations if and when they feel ready to.

Theme 5: Fragmented understanding of oneself

The table below shows the subthemes in theme 5.

Theme 5	Subthemes
Fragmented understanding of oneself	Focus on negative parts of identity
	Bring together splits and talk about the whole child
	Incoherent and incomplete records
	Misconceptions

Table 7

Participants spoke about the sense of fragmentation that can surround these children, both inside of themselves, as well as being reflected in their externalising behaviour. Participants felt that this was compounded by fragmented understanding of the children in the networks around them.

Focus on negative parts of identity

Participants spoke about how many children in the service have built an identity as a naughty or bad child. They have developed a negative self-perception and believe they are difficult at home and school. Participants spoke about how others can start to see these children in a negative way.

> *P2- We work in quite an understanding field, but sometimes… there can be an image of a child…as this terrifying, naughty child that sets fire to things and brings knives and does all this dangerous stuff, and they can't be trusted. And then we think, oh, but what about all these other things about the child? And they don't really do that. Like they've done that a couple of times but that was not them all the time.*

Participants demonstrate how people working with a child can become overly focussed on the negative parts of their identity, overlooking the more functional parts of them. They outline how the perception of the child can become distorted and inaccurate. One participant spoke about how children's behaviours can become unhelpfully pathologised.

Bring together splits and talk about the whole child

Many participants spoke about how children can present very differently in different contexts. For example, bringing their challenging behaviour to school but protecting their adoptive placement by holding themselves together at home. Participants emphasised the importance of bringing together these different parts of the child to be thought about.

> *P3- bringing the two together, because I think there's something about bringing this identity that they have at home, together with the identity at*

school, because that's where the school and the parents often get into conflict, because they're like, everyone becomes quite polarised, and it's in the interest of the child for those two perceptions in a way to come together.

This quote demonstrates how allowing splits to perpetuate can have a negative impact on the child and can get in the way of a positive relationship between home and school. Participants also spoke about the importance of noticing ordinary behaviour in the child and drawing attention to their strengths. This helps to create a more balanced, holistic picture of a child and can help shift negative perceptions of them. Participants spoke about how split perceptions of a child can pervade across their whole network: home, school, social care, CAMHS etc. They spoke about the importance of keeping networks up to date with a child's progress to ensure they are not holding an out-dated, negative view of a child that is no longer accurate.

Incoherent and incomplete records
Many participants spoke about how hard it was for children to have a coherent sense of their histories due to their social care files being incomplete and inaccurate. It was felt that children's incoherent sense of self was mirrored in the external understanding of them.

P6-there's an internal confusion for these children about how they fit together. But there's also often externally not a very clear understanding. You know, and I think actual understanding for these, for anyone, about these sorts of really difficult experiences they've had is going to come and go. But sometimes there's not even a kind of structure of a narrative to help them make sense of any of the history actually.

Participants argued that these factual gaps in the children's files made it hard for them to piece together a personal history and make sense of themselves. Many participants spoke about information regarding children's cultural and ethnic identity being inaccurate or missing in their files. An example was given of a child who had been told they were from one country and later found out this was incorrect and how complicated it was to make sense of this in terms of their identity. Participants spoke about how the therapeutic school pays attention to the gaps in information and thought is given to how this is managed, addressed and spoken about.

Misconceptions

Participants spoke about how children can hold misconceptions linked to their adoption; some felt children thought the reason they had been adopted was due to something being wrong with them. The quote below shows a misconception about race linked to adoption.

> *P1-one boy … one of his birth parents is white and one Black. And … his adoptive mother is Black. And he was being very racist when he first came [to the school]. And his mum said the way he understands it, is that his skin colour changed when he was adopted and got darker. So actually, for him, it's quite synonymous with his adoption, the colour of his skin.*

This demonstrates how children attempt to make sense of their histories with the information they have but in a confused and inaccurate way.

> *P1-I think there can be a real disconnect between children understanding or knowing their story in words, but really kind of understanding the impact of it on them on a really deep level, which I wouldn't expect children to understand.*

This participant outlines how hard they feel it is for children to make sense of the information given to them, and how likely it is that they will draw misconceptions from this. Some participants also spoke about how professionals and adoptive parents can also make assumptions that children's distress is always linked to their trauma and early experiences. They argued that sometimes the children's distress was not necessarily pathological but was often seen through this lens unhelpfully. One participant stressed the importance of considering the impact of the adopted family on the child and their more recent experiences.

Therefore, the findings show that the therapeutic school can help bring together splits in the network and change perceptions of how the child is seen. It can play an important role in helping the child to change their own negative self-perception. Also, it can support making sense of the confusions and misconceptions that they hold about their own identity.

Theme 6: The role of the therapeutic school

The table below sets out the subthemes within theme 6.

Theme 6	Subthemes
The role of the therapeutic school	Therapeutic milieu
	Pupils
	Staff
	Helpful interventions -with parents -with child -in class

	How the school could do more

Table 8

For the final theme, it felt important to capture the nature and function of the therapeutic school. This will be more descriptive than the previous themes, as in order to directly address the research question, it was necessary to outline how the school can support children with their difficulties in practical terms. Therefore, the subthemes refer to component parts of the school, how it is distinct and works to support the pupils. The answers given to that question grouped closely into this theme in a different way to the rest of the interview. The description of this theme therefore reports that final part of the findings in a different way from the rest of this section.

Therapeutic milieu

Participants spoke about how the school runs using a therapeutic milieu model. Participants stressed the importance of having many thinking spaces for staff to reflect as part of this; these include supervision, reflective practice and work discussion. They spoke about how important it was for staff to link up to discuss how the children present in different settings.

> *P1-I think there is something about a big team, trying to make sense of all the bits that make them up and trying to … if there's real split or fragmentation or, they're very unintegrated, there's something about trying to bring those bits together so they're not so vastly extreme really. And really thinking about our responses to them.*

Participants spoke about the importance of bringing together children's presentations in class, therapy and at home. They outlined that different people will be holding different parts of the child. Participants spoke about how the staff focus on what behaviour is communicating and reflect on using the feelings children evoke in them as a clue to what is going on for the child. They explained how the school works towards helping children understand how they feel, who they are and reflect on the choices they make.

Pupils

Participants spoke about there being a very particular cohort in the school. They outlined how there are a high number of adopted and looked after children in the service. Participants stressed that the adopted children who attend are not representative of all adopted children. They stated that all of the children in the school had difficult early experiences and had similar presenting difficulties. The quote below illuminates how they present.

> *P6- In the therapeutic school, particularly, we work with children who I would say come because they make others feel, that their form of communication is to make others feel, the terror, the rejection, the awful feelings really, that they felt. So, they communicate through aggression, often, and that's why they end up there. And also, what that means is that they repeat rejection. Because if you're a crying child, you're more likely, not always, to get somebody come towards you to look after you. If you are a hitting, biting, spitting child, you're more likely to push people away and be pushed out. So, in a way, one thing we see is these children struggle with identity, where do they fit? They repeat and repeat and repeat not fitting.*

This quote demonstrates how the children act out with physical violence to keep others at arm's length, displaying behaviours that will ensure others reject them in

the way they fear will happen. Others spoke about how children have attachment difficulties, particularly disorganised attachments, and these patterns of relating get played out in the school context.

Staff

Participants spoke about how staff can be pulled into intense and complicated relationships with the children. They spoke about how staff can find themselves acting out of character with certain children, sometimes enacting past relationships in the child's life; for example, they may find themselves drawn to being more punitive around a particular child. They spoke about the need to pay close attention to their own reactions. Some staff understood these dynamics through ideas such as projection and countertransference. Some participants spoke about how different people in the team can hold different feelings towards a child and how important it is to bring these together and avoid getting split. They spoke about the impact of the work, particularly when working with violent and distressed children. They spoke about being filled with intense feelings such as terror.

Many of the participants also spoke about how important it was to have a diverse group of staff.

> *P4- it's important to have people from different cultures and different experiences, with different skills and different trainings … I think that's vastly important frankly, that's something that I value about [the school] actually.*

Many highlighted the importance of children seeing their own cultural background being reflected in the staff team. They argued that this could help children to feel able to speak about certain topics and expect to be understood. One participant spoke about the importance of sharing one's own identity with the children to help

them start to explore their own identity. They gave examples of teacher's sharing their own religion and culture through cooking activities in lessons, as well as sharing their own learning difficulties with the children to demonstrate that adults have things that they find difficult too. It was argued that staff could support children with identity by modelling confidence and pride in their own background. The above quote also draws attention to the multi-disciplinary staff team and how the clinical and educational teams are integrated, drawing on a range of approaches to inform practice.

Helpful interventions

Participants described many helpful interventions used by the school to address adopted children's identity issues. There is not space to detail them all, but an overview will be given. Helpful interventions that have been mentioned in other areas of the findings will not be repeated.

Participants spoke about how the framework of the school could be helpful; they felt it was able to provide a consistent framework with predictable boundaries. The below quote describes the way boundaries are thought about in the school.

> *P8-the importance of both holding a boundary, but actually holding it in a thoughtful way so that you're actually working with that child, parent, member of staff, to think about why that boundary is there, rather than it just being something to butt against, because everyone will butt against the boundaries but it's about creating a culture which is, 'Yeah, we're going to hold this boundary but this boundary is not punitive, this boundary is to make things feel safe, and also is a point at which we can explore things.'*

This demonstrates how this participant felt the school uses challenging behaviour as a starting point to explore the reasons behind it and develop self-reflection. Therefore, they felt rules are a vehicle for thinking rather than something to be used to shut behaviours down.

Participants spoke about how both clinical and educational input was provided onsite in an integrated way, which was particularly helpful for children who are so unintegrated. This way information could be brought together between the therapist and the class teacher, so that information could be pieced together and not get lost. Tree of Life was mentioned by a number of participants as a helpful tool for exploring identity; it was stated that it was used in the school with children individually, as part of class groups, and with families (Denborough, 2012). It was suggested that it could be helpful to also use it with staff in the school. Participants felt it was helpful as it allowed people to determine what identity meant for them, and they could start where they were at the time of undertaking it.

Parents

Participants spoke about how working directly with parents is an important feature of the work that the school does. One participant described how she works with parents.

> *P7-it's more containing the parents to contain the child… I think it's about just really helping the parents think and absorb some of their anxieties and concerns that come to the fore, and also their own thoughts and feelings about having to do this work with their child, which, again, can be very stirring.*

This refers to how overwhelming some of the feelings can be from parenting an adopted child and that it is important that adopted parents are given support with this. Another participant referred to how difficult it can be for adoptive parents to voice the difficulties that they are having but also that if they are supported to do so, it can help to make things more manageable. They suggested that adopted parents may need support to feel they are able to be a parent to their child. It was acknowledged that the child they adopt may not meet their expectations and they may need support to accept their child for who they are. Participants spoke about doing direct work with parents around the child's identity and history to support with this.

Child

One participant outlined how psychosocial interventions can help children to think about their identity on a symbolic level.

> *P1- I'm a big advocate of psychosocial interventions, … I think there's something about growth and nurture that can be really symbolic, and I think sometimes things like gardening … There's something about growing something, which I think is so meaningful, especially for adopted children actually growing something from the beginning, … waiting for it to grow and thinking about the environment it's in. And you wouldn't have to give any words to that for a child. …I think things like that can also be very valuable.*

This participant outlines how this approach can be helpful for the children in the service who may not yet be ready to put words to their difficulties and confusion. Participants raised that targeted interventions for identity are helpful. There was also

a thought that interventions that support children's social skills and life skills could have an indirect impact on their sense of self.

Classroom

Many participants spoke about the importance of incorporating identity into the curriculum. People discussed this including topics such as cultural diversity and diversity in family make-up (adoption, single parent families etc.). Participants felt it was important that children were being taught about historical figures that reflected their own identity, whether this be people who share their race, religion, gender or adoption status. They felt this would help children feel represented and not feel limited by their own identity. There were also thoughts shared about how teachers in the school adapt sensitive areas of the curriculum for children.

> *P5-I think it's important to be sensitive, but … I would rather they come across it in school, in this contained environment…I've taught inheritance in biology… you do... Genograms… a child came up to me and said, 'I don't know my mum' and that's a very difficult one. I said, "Okay, well, how about you do a genogram for this situation instead? You don't have to do it for yourself. Do it for this family … of koala bears.*

This demonstrates how staff can be thoughtful about the impact of certain topics on children's emotional states and be responsive to this in their planning and delivery of the curriculum. Participants demonstrated how within this setting, teaching staff work in a therapeutically informed way.

How the school could do more

There was a feeling among some participants that although there was a lot of support in place, they felt more could be done to explicitly address adopted children's identity. Some participants felt that there weren't set frameworks in place

and that the interview had helped them to start thinking about these issues through a different lens. People listed a number of ways they could do more, including building links with specialist fostering and adoption services and having more training in this area for staff.

However, P8 felt that a reason that the school wasn't able to do more was that some of the children's difficulties made it hard to get beyond the surface when thinking about identity.

> *There are all sorts of things around identity that would be really fun to do actually with the kids, if you could get there but the trouble is they're so troubled that you end up - I think we ended up kind of just getting to the surface but hopefully if we can get them interested enough in themselves. Maybe it's something they'll do later in their own lives.*

Therefore, this participant argues that the work the school does around identity is sewing a seed of interest in the child that can continue to be explored at their own pace, when they are ready. As suggested in people's definitions of identity, the process of working out who you are is a life-long journey.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This project has sought to explore how a therapeutic school can support adopted children with their sense of identity. Basing my definition of identity on the psychoanalytic conception of the self, while drawing also on the psychological and more popular definition of identity as involving a sense of belonging to a group or culture, I hypothesised that adopted children have a disrupted sense of identity due to their difficult early experiences and that a therapeutic school could be a helpful place to support them to make sense of these identity difficulties.

In this study, two main findings stood out, emerging through the six themes that derived from the data analysis. These were the importance of the role of parent work and working with the network to help adopted children build a coherent sense of identity. This section will give an overview of the findings from this research project and how they relate to the existing body of literature in this area. It will be organised in sections around the themes laid out in the findings:

- Building a sense of identity

- Disrupted sense of belonging

- Expectations vs reality of adoption

- Difficult topics to talk about

- Fragmented understanding of oneself

- The role of the therapeutic school

I will set out the implications of these results, how they are clinically significant, along with any recommendations for clinical practice. The limits of this research will then be discussed, and suggestions made for further research in this area.

Theme 1: Building a sense of identity

All participants spoke about how they felt that identity was complex, made up of many elements and hard to define. They all set out a multitude of components that make up someone's identity, including external elements, such as race and gender, and internal elements, such as self-image and a feeling of agency. The idea that identity is complex and varied was echoed in the literature (Coleman, 1997). Richards (2002) refers to how identity is both about our individuality but also about how we fit within groups, such as within our race, class and gender. Some participants spoke about how there is an element of choice in which groups we choose to identify with, such as choosing to identify with the nationality of the country we live in rather than where we were born. One participant suggested that despite external expectations and assumptions that can be made about our own identity by others, these are not binding, and we can choose how we identify.

Participants spoke about how our identity is built in relation to others. This fitted within the psychoanalytic literature regarding identity development. Klein (1946) argued that identity develops through early relationships. Participants described how children take in something from their parents and this is foundational in building their identity. Participant 1 spoke about how our own understanding of who we are develops through the "mirror that comes back at you" from other people's understanding of you. This emphasizes the relational and dynamic elements to identity formation. This brought to mind Fonagy and colleagues' (2002) idea that

identity develops in the connection between what is going on in the internal and the external world: in other words, the relationship between what is going on inside someone and what is going on in the world around them. We might thus regard the self as developing in the space between us and the person we are interacting with, starting from the ways in which an infant is shaped by how those around them respond to them. We only develop a sense of who we are through our relationships with others.

The complexity of identity formation for adopted children was raised by all participants. It was felt that their traumatic early experiences and disruption in their relationships with primary caregivers led to a significant impact on their sense of self. This brought to mind Winnicott's (1965) idea about the importance of the environment in the development of an infant. He argued that favourable conditions, where the parent is able to meet the infant's needs, would enable the personality to develop in an integrated way. However, in the wrong conditions, where an infant is left with unthinkable anxieties, personality development is interrupted and distorted. In these conditions, children develop maladaptive ways of managing their anxieties (Fagan, 2011). Furthermore, the literature in this area corroborates the idea that was raised by participants, that disruptions in early relationships with primary care givers complicates identity development. Fagan (2011) and Rustin (2008) both speak about the confused nature of adopted children's internal objects as they have had multiple caregivers in their lives and have taken in different elements from each of them. This can lead to an internal muddle and sense of confusion. It can also lead to difficulties with an ordinary separation from caregivers, as their first separation may have been sudden and total, rather than gradual and at a pace that they were ready for.

Participant 6 explored the complexity for adopted children, who may feel they have to be a "carbon copy" of their birth parents in order to keep a link with them, as they may feel that they lost the first version of themselves in this early separation. Whereas, an ordinary part of development is working out what parts of our parents we want to keep as part of our identity and which parts we do not identify with. This is one of the key tasks of adolescence. Participants spoke about their understanding of adopted children's sense of fragmentation, having a patchwork identity made up of confusing and disturbing bits. Rustin also used the word "patchwork" in her description of adopted children's identity (2006, p.108-9).

Both the findings from my study and the research in the area demonstrate the complexity of the concept of identity, and how the early experiences of adopted children compound the process of developing a sense of self. Therefore, this suggests that additional support should be put into place for adopted children to help them with this process. However, most of the literature in the area of defining identity was theoretical rather than field research. There is room for further qualitative research into this area to corroborate these findings and ideas.

Theme 2: Disrupted sense of belonging
The idea that adopted children have a disrupted sense of belonging was communicated strongly by all participants. They acknowledged how they felt belonging formed a key component to identity. This overlaps with Rustin's thinking about belonging being a "fundamental building block of a sense of identity" (Rustin 2006, p.107). Participants spoke about how they felt that this sense of belonging had often been disrupted for adopted children due to their very early experiences. They

felt the children had internalised an idea that something was wrong with them and carried a deep sense of being unwanted. The findings suggest that adopted children feel rejected and then go on to repeat this experience of rejection by pushing others away. They felt that children carried a fear that they could be given up, and that the adoption was not permanent. It was suggested that they attempt to make others reject them in order to create the expectation they hold. This was illustrated in examples of children in the school demonstrating violent behaviour, testing boundaries and pushing others to their limits. It was argued that this can be seen in a variety of settings, including the adoptive home and the school. In schools it can be seen through children showing challenging behaviour until they are excluded, whilst in adoptive placements it can be seen through adoption breakdown. Participants emphasised the importance of the school being able to reflect on the repeating dynamic of rejection playing out, rather than joining in the enactment. A therapeutic school can play an observational role, where behaviour is understood rather than repeated, bringing the enactment of past experiences of rejection into conscious thought to be reflected upon. Barratt (2012) emphasises that CAMHS practioners can play an important role in working with schools to help manage adopted children to manage in their setting. Their recommendations do not acknowledge the importance of paying attention to unconscious dynamics that play out. Their paper is describing an external CAMHS service supporting a separate school. However, a therapeutic school is an integrated CAMHS and education service, so provides an opportunity to bring an increased psychological understanding of the day-to-day interactions during a school day. There is a paucity in the literature on therapeutic schools. Further research in this area is needed to confirm the unique and important role that a therapeutic school can play. By paying attention to unconscious

processes within a school setting, this can help prevent repeated enactments of rejection and support adopted children with their sense of belonging.

The results of this study found that, in the views of therapeutic school staff, children were faced with a dilemma in how they identified with their birth families. Some feared ending up like their birth parents and others strongly identified with them. This sometimes involved children engaging in self-destructive behaviours linked to the birth parents, in an attempt to maintain a link with and feel close to them. This correlated with Rustin's (2006) ideas about how children can act out in identification with damaged internal objects, and this can be seen in them demonstrating behaviours associated with their birth families. Furthermore, she argued adopted children can feel torn between two families and can carry a deep fear of rejecting their birth families. A number of participants echoed this, feeling that children can hold a loyalty conflict and feel caught between two families. This can lead to them feeling a heavy sense of guilt about developing new relationships and disrupt the potential for a positive relationship with their new adopted family. They argued that adopted children need support to navigate this in order to be able to integrate both families. In contrast, Hanna and colleagues' (2011) research found that most adopted children felt their need to belong was met by their adopted family. However, some of the adoptees continued to struggle with their sense of belonging, where some felt they neither belonged with their adopted nor their birth families. In line with the findings under theme one, children's identities form through an interaction between people and their external environment. When adopted children have lived with multiple caregivers, in multiple environments, and have a family in the past and a different one in the present, this adds a layer of complication to their identity. This

may contribute to a feeling that it is hard for them to tether themselves to a specific place and garner a sense of belonging.

A number of participants felt that many adopted children can feel the pressure to assimilate to their adopted families' identity, perhaps as a way to garner a sense of belonging. This correlates with Jordan and Dempsey's (2013) research that demonstrated adoptees' desire to seek commonalities with their adoptive families, with similarities in physical appearance, mannerisms and shared interests helping them develop a stronger sense of belonging. One participant in my research highlighted the difficulty faced during puberty when some children start to look increasingly different to their adoptive parents. Bergquist, Campbell, and Unrau's (2003) research into transracial adoption found that white adoptive parents minimised the differences between them and their Korean adopted children and did not acknowledge their Korean identity beyond physical characteristics. In Chang, Feldman and Easley's (2017) study, adoptees felt silenced and unable to talk about their racial identity within their families. This led to adoptees not speaking about their own experiences of racism out of fear of causing parental discomfort through highlighting an area of difference. The participants in my study also spoke about things that were difficult to talk about within the adoptive family. They spoke about adoptive parents' struggle to acknowledge the existence of birth parents and the children's stories of origin. One participant expressed this as the wish from the adoptive parents to be the "true family". Perhaps both findings suggest the painfulness of acknowledging the adopted child not being biologically theirs, and the lengths that are gone to avoid this. Participants in my study highlighted the importance of parent work to help give a space for the more painful, unspeakable

thoughts and feelings experienced by adoptive parents. This could help contain difficult feelings of guilt and allow for understanding. As a result, this could lead to improvements in the relationship between adoptee and adopter. The importance of parent work is a key finding in my study and can inform future practice for work with adoptive parents in order to support their children's identity development.

Theme 3: Expectations vs reality of adoption

Participants spoke about how they had observed the impact of adopted parents' expectations on their child's identity. They explored how parents' journeys to adopting, such as fertility struggles, can lead to loss and grief that, if left unprocessed, can be passed onto the adopted child. They felt adopted children can inherit expectations and pressures from their adoptive parents. They may have to manage parents' feelings of disappointment if they do not live up to their fantasies, which can have a negative impact on their development. My literature searches did not uncover many papers that explored parental expectations of adoptees as it was not directly linked to the search aims. However, the findings of this study demonstrate that these expectations are projected into the adopted child and shape their identity development. Therefore, I will cite some research on this area here. Sprince (2015) found that adopted parents can wish to claim ownership of their child, as a way of integrating them into their family. However, they argue that due to adoptees' traumatic early experiences, attempts to be owned by another will evoke feelings of mistrust. This further emphasises the importance of a space for adoptive parents to work through their feelings about the adoption, the process of coming to adopt and the disjoint between their expectations and the reality of it. Engaging in parent work could be one way to processes some of these feelings.

Participants spoke about the assumption held by adopters and underpinning the wider social care system, that removing a child from abusive birth parents and placing them for adoption will make things better for them. Participant 7 challenged this idea, and emphasised how they felt adopted children's difficulties persist beyond the point of adoption. It is important to consider that being removed from your birth family could itself be considered a trauma. This idea stems from the literature and findings, through bringing these together one starts to build up a picture of relational trauma emerging for adopted children. With adoption, there is a severing of legal ties to one's birth family, and formally joining a new family. The impact of this can also add to the complexity of the early trauma, rather than erasing it. Linked with the theme above, the experience of feeling displaced and not having a strong sense of belonging contributes to adopted children's ongoing difficulties. The literature in this area reiterates some of the ideas raised by the participants. A number of authors write about the hopes and fantasies held by parents, that adoption could be a "new beginning" (Sprince, 2008, p.99). Jordan and Dempsey emphasise the importance of thinking of adoption as a process that has to be negotiated throughout life, rather than a "point in time occurrence" (2013, p. 40). They emphasise the importance of reworking the feelings linked to adoption at different time-points over the course of an adoptee's life. This echoes the ideas of Rustin, who argued that feelings of disconnectedness, loss and confusion can stay with adopted children throughout their lives and therefore she also feels that adoption should be seen as a process rather than a one-off event (2006, 2008).

A number of participants in the study spoke about how adoptive parents can enter into adoption hoping that the love they give their child will be enough to offset their negative experiences. They discussed they can be filled with feelings of failure and devastation when they realise that they are unable to fill the psychological void. This corroborates what Miller (2008) argued when she stated that adoptive parents can hold a lurking resentment when they are unable to fix the child, and then do not want to be associated with their difficulties. In contrast, Hodges and colleagues (2005) found adopted children were able to take in the love offered to them by their new parents and take in internal representations of this type of care. However, in line with my findings, they argued that when faced with even minor stresses in their lives, adopted children return to the negative representations, linked with their early caregivers. In other words, they return to their expectations that caregivers are dangerous and that the care offered is harmful. This gets in the way of their ability to make use of the love and care offered by their adoptive parents when faced with difficulties in their lives. My findings also highlighted that the fit between the child and the adoptive family plays a vital role in a child feeling settled enough to develop. Participants spoke about the challenges that arise when there is a mistuned match in adopted parent and child, and the challenges this creates for their ongoing relationship. Research by Kohler, Grotevant and McRoy (2002) found that the match with the adopted child and parents, and the dynamics within the family, could contribute to an adopted child's preoccupation with their adoption status and this could lead to increased emotional distance in their relationships. A lot of the literature in this area focusses on the impact of the early trauma, and there is room for further research into how adopted children are matched with prospective adopters. Sprince (2008) speaks about the importance of professionals helping parents to understand

and accept the child's history, in order to accept the child for who they are and help prevent them being pulled into enacting unconscious dynamics from the adoptee's relationship with their biological parents. Findings from my research emphasised the importance of parent work with adoptive parents, to explore dynamics being played out between parent and child and understanding the emotional communication. Participants also spoke about how adoptive parents, who haven't had their own biological children, may second guess ordinary parenting experiences. They may feel guilty around negative feelings they have towards their child. These feelings can also be thought about and explored in parent work, as a way to contain these feelings and prevent them from impacting negatively on the parent-child relationship or child's sense of self.

One area not covered directly by participants in my study is the impact of identity in the case of transracial adoption. However, thinking about this is important when considering this theme. Sweeney (2013) argued that in cases where white parents are raising adopted children of colour, the child's lived experience of race can be overlooked, as their parent doesn't fully understand this. A large amount of the research into transracial adoption emphasises the importance of adoptive parents engaging in racial socialisation (Xing Tan et al 2021, Barn 2018, Bergquist, Campbell, and Unrau, 2003, Fong and Wang 2001, Yoon 2001, Hrapczynski and Leslie, 2018). This can help children to explore and develop their racial identity and help them to navigate racism that they are faced with. Adoptive parents can be supported to explore these ideas and develop their capacity to engage in racial socialisation with help from professionals, such as in the form of parent work within a therapeutic school.

Theme 4: Difficult topics to talk about

A number of participants spoke about how topics such as race, identity and adoption can be difficult to talk about and provoke strong emotional responses. They discussed the importance of creating a school environment where these topics could be discussed openly. Participants emphasised the importance of a child's racial identity being explored and understood. This fits with research in the area. Candelario and Huber's (2002) research in a therapeutic school demonstrated that psychoeducation groups can be helpful spaces to discuss race and identity. They found that when provided with an appropriate space, Black children had a lot to say. This suggests that creating safe spaces enables difficult topics to be spoken about. Research emphasises the importance of talking about race in the home, and when conversations are shut down, children are left carrying experiences of racism and discrimination on their own, without the resources to manage (Chang, Feldman and Easley, 2017, Coleman 1997, Tizard and Phoenix 1993). Therefore, it is important that thought is given to how to facilitate these conversations for children at home and at school. Although the literature tends to think about how to facilitate racial socialisation for transracially adopted children at home, perhaps there can be a role for schools in racial socialisation. The findings of this study demonstrate how important it is for the staff to reflect the ethnic make-up of the children in order to allow children to feel represented. It was felt that this would help children feel that there could be someone that might understand them, particularly when thinking about their cultural identity.

Participants also raised the importance of adoption, identity and early childhood experiences being thought about. The research in the area speaks about how the

education system can overlook adopted children; their performance is no longer routinely monitored once they move from being a looked after child to being adopted and they no longer receive special provision (Barratt, 2012, Brown, Waters, and Shelton, 2017). This suggests adopted children are systemically overlooked in education. However, in my findings, there was a sense that the children in the school raised topics linked to their adopted status and brought the complexities of this into the classroom. This then created a complex situation for staff to navigate and manage; my findings showed that staff had conflicting ideas about whether school was the right setting to discuss such sensitive issues. Some personal topics, such as children's early childhood experiences, were felt not to be appropriate for whole class discussion but were better for therapy. It was felt that children may share this information with their peers to try and connect but could open themselves up to being hurt and entrench their sense of vulnerability. It was felt that therapy sessions may be a better space to explore these areas within the school. Perhaps due to the nature of the children in the school, who display externalising behaviours and are less filtered with their responses, these children are perhaps more likely to directly address sensitive or taboo topics. This avoids them becoming overlooked in the way some adopted children are in other educational institutions. Roberts (2017) feels that adoption should not be treated as a taboo topic and should be integrated into the school curriculum. She emphasised the importance of seeing positive representations of people from similar backgrounds to ourselves. This fitted with my findings, where one participant spoke about using examples of adopted scientists in science lessons, or reading books with adopted people in them, and how important this is for children's sense of self.

Participants also thought about how it was important to think about the right timing for these topics to be explored. Children need to be ready, such as feeling settled and secure in their adoptive placements, before being able to think in detail about their birth families. Participants also felt that children needed guidance about where and how to speak about these areas. This fitted with Barratt's (2012) research; she argued that in school environments children can be confronted by difficult questions about their family, from their peers and in lessons. She argued that CAMHS clinicians can support adopted children and their parents to develop a tool bag of responses such as a simplified narrative about their birth families that they feel willing to share. Therefore, within a therapeutic school, which is an integrated CAMHS and education service, there is a unique opportunity for this work to be thought about in a joined-up way.

Participants thought about how for many adopted children, their trauma took place when they were pre-verbal, therefore compounding the difficulty to put words to their experiences. There were conflicting thoughts among participants about whether putting words to this, and giving the children information about those experiences was helpful. Participants weighed up the dilemma between not sharing information and allowing children to fill in the space with their own fantasies, with giving too much information that was inappropriate for a child's age. Kohler, Grotevant and McRoy (2002) had hypothesised that withholding information would motivate adoptees to seek out additional information about their birth families. However, their findings did not support this, and they felt many factors contributed to a desire to learn about their histories. Staff felt that children often struggled to make sense of the information given to them and emphasised the difference between knowing and

understanding. Watson, Latter and Bellew's (2015) study chimes with this; they looked at the function of life story work and found that although life story books had the potential to help children to develop a narrative of their lives, participants did not all feel that their life story books did this for them.

Theme 5: Fragmented understanding of oneself

Participants spoke about the sense of fragmentation that surrounded adopted children. It was argued that children had a sense of fragmentation inside of themselves, linked to their confused sense of who they are. Participants argued that this sense of fragmentation was compounded in the wider networks understanding of the child, where different professionals held conflicting and confused understandings of the child. This can happen when a child has very different presentations at home and at school. Participant 2 spoke about how children can become unhelpfully pathologised by the network, who focus on the negative behaviours and overlook the more functional parts of them. Participants emphasised the importance of bringing together the splits that the child presents with in order to create a holistic picture of them. The results highlight the importance of holding all the parts of the child in mind in order for them to develop an integrated sense of self. Although these ideas are based on Klein's (1946) concept of splitting, none of the literature explored the splitting that takes place in adopted children's professional networks. However, this area does fit with Britton's (1981) ideas about how professionals and institutions can reproduce the pattern of object relationships of the family they work with. Professionals may find themselves acting in a way that does not fit with their usual practice and therefore it can be helpful for professionals to hold an observational stance and reflect on their actions. Ensuring that the network is functional is key in

helping the child and family progress. The idea that working with the network can be an important way to help the child develop a coherent sense of identity is a key finding in this study. It is important that further research in this area is carried out to corroborate the findings of this study.

Participants drew attention to how historical records detailing the children's lives were incoherent, inaccurate and had significant gaps. It was argued that the external understanding of the child mirrored the child's internal confusion in their sense of self. Factual gaps in children's histories make it harder for children to piece together a personal narrative and make sense of themselves. This cycle perpetuates their sense of confusion. This confirms Jordan and Dempsey's (2013) research which argues that lack of access to personal information can have a negative impact on a child's sense of belonging and contribute to feelings of low self-worth. They emphasise the importance of adopted children accessing historical information about their early experiences and family. Therefore, perhaps there is a role for staff in a therapeutic school to work as part of the professional network to help to fill the gaps in information and piece together a coherent and accurate history for the child. Participants also spoke about observing children struggling to make sense of the information given to them, even when provided with accurate information. They emphasised the difference between knowing and understanding, as well as how hard it can be for adopted children to understand the real meaning of the facts presented to them. They felt that many children can hold misconceptions about the reason they were adopted, often feeling that there was something wrong with them. A therapeutic school can give adopted children a space to voice their understanding and help to unpick the confusion. Watson, Latter and Bellew's (2015) research

demonstrates the importance of life story work in helping children develop a sense of identity. It can contribute to their understanding of who they are, where they came from and why they are in care. They argue that adoptive parents should be trained to help them build on life story work and further develop children's sense of self, so that life story work is not a time-limited piece of work but an ongoing process. Participants in this study also emphasised the importance of life story work and how it could take place in school also. However, there is currently no literature on whether school can play a role in life story work. This needs to be explored in further research to develop the nature of the role a school can play in this task.

Theme 6: The role of the therapeutic school

The role of the therapeutic school has been touched on throughout the discussion in relation to the other themes, as the results show how this environment can help with all of these areas. However, due to the focus of this project, I will give further space to how this type of setting has a role in supporting adopted children with their sense of identity. I will not repeat areas that have already been explored under other themes.

A core component of a therapeutic school is the therapeutic milieu. Participants emphasised the power of the environment for helping children to develop. They drew attention to the importance of thinking spaces, and reflection in this model of working. They discussed staff playing close attention to the emotions evoked in themselves and whether they are being pulled into complicated interactions with the children, enacting the children's past relationships. Hinshelwood (1999) emphasised the importance of therapeutic communities running in this way, paying attention to the psychodynamics and social systems playing out in the institutions. Results of this

study show the importance of having staff from a range of professional backgrounds, cultural backgrounds and drawing on a range of theories and approaches. The service's integrated nature, bringing together clinical and education staff, is something unique that it has to offer and can help to avoid important information being lost between services. As the literature pays attention to therapeutic communities that work with adults, and there is limited research into therapeutic schools for children, it is important that further research into therapeutic schools is carried out to confirm the findings of this study.

Participants also spoke about the importance of boundaries and the need to hold these in a consistent and predictable way. It was discussed that boundaries needed to be held in a thoughtful way, in order to understand the behaviour rather than just provide something for a child to challenge. It was emphasised that in this environment, boundaries were not to be used in a punitive way. Instead, they are seen as an opportunity for learning. Psychosocial interventions were mentioned by a number of participants as useful tools for identity development. The Tree of Life intervention was highlighted as an intervention that can support identity exploration and one that can be adapted to meet the needs of a child for the stage that they are at (Denborough, 2012). The symbolic power of interventions such as gardening, by demonstrating growth and development, were also discussed. Participant 8 drew attention to the limitations of identity work with children with these particular difficulties whilst at this stage of development. They suggested that despite thoughtful input from staff, children can struggle to get beyond the surface. However, instead a school can play a role in sewing a seed for exploration in later life. Due to the dearth of literature about the way therapeutic schools run, further research in this

area is needed to corroborate the findings about how helpful these interventions can be for adopted children.

Strengths and limitations

To my knowledge, no other study explores how a therapeutic school can support adopted children with their sense of identity. The findings of this study have highlighted the complexity of identity formation for adopted children. Due to their early experiences and multiple caregivers, their sense of belonging is severely disrupted. Therefore, the findings have shown how important providing additional support to adoptees in order to help them to navigate this challenge is. This study has shown that a therapeutic school is an appropriate environment to provide this support, whether directly to the children, to their adoptive parents or within the professional network. A therapeutic school provides a unique setting that combines education and mental health support for children and is well placed to think reflectively about these adopted children's difficulties. Important learning about specific interventions that can support this process has been highlighted. There were two key findings of the study. These findings are being highlighted due to their clinical relevance and emergence across a number of the themes. The first key finding being that parent work can be a powerful tool to support adoptive parents process their emotions and expectations around adoption, as well as get support with meeting the child's cultural needs. It has been demonstrated that staff felt that though this support, adopted children will be helped to develop an integrated sense of self. The second key finding concerned the professional network. Staff felt that different parts of the professional network held separate parts of the child's identity, and working closely together could help bring these parts together and make sense

of the child in a holistic way. The idea of the self being made up of multiple parts, links to Kleinian ideas about the self. Staff drawing on these Kleinian ideas could be due to the fact that the school uses a psychoanalytic framework of understanding. It is possible that some of the learning can be used and applied by other special schools, such as schools for children with emotional and behaviour difficulties, and even potentially some mainstream schools.

A limitation of the study, however, is that it only interviewed members of staff from one specific therapeutic school. The school has a very particular cohort, and the adopted children who attend do not represent all adopted children. They tend to display externalising difficulties such as violence and destructive behaviours. Not all adopted children present these types of behaviours or require specialist schooling. Therefore, generalisations of these findings cannot necessarily be made to all adopted children, or to other institutions. Further research into how a wider range of schools can support adopted children with their identity development would be helpful in ascertaining whether the findings can be used more widely.

A limitation of the study is that there were only two participants from ethnic minority backgrounds. Although I did not set out to purposively sample participants from ethnic minority groups, and therefore this does not reflect a failure to recruit to my original aims, it still represents a limitation to my findings. It is important to acknowledge that at the time I was carrying out my project, race was an area of interest and tension in the service. Pupils in the school were using a high level of racist language towards each other and towards staff. Some staff, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds, were on the receiving end of physical attacks from

pupils which appeared to have racial motivation. There were processes underway exploring how to address this and many staff had strong feelings about what was happening. It is possible that this context impacted on staff from certain ethnic groups participating in the study. This was likely further compounded by the fact I was a white member of staff. This could have made it harder for some staff to feel comfortable speaking about identity with someone from a different ethnic background to themselves.

As race is a significant part of identity, people's lived experiences due to their skin colour, ethnicity and culture, will shape their view of what identity is. Therefore, it could contribute to a different understanding and perspective of my research question. However, it is important that the voices of ethnic minority participants are present in the findings. It is vital to consider whether my own position as a white woman had a negative impact on certain groups, such as people of colour and men, feeling comfortable to put themselves forward to be interviewed.

My sample was also restricted by a small staff group and the diversity of the demographics among them. However, if further research into this area is carried out, it would be important to recruit an ethnically diverse sample. Another factor that could have impacted on participants volunteering to participate and also their ability to speak freely was that I was also their colleague. This could have motivated some staff to volunteer to take part as they knew me and wanted to support this project. However, for others it could have impeded on their wish to participate and their ability to share their true thoughts or feelings.

It is also possible that the answers of staff that participated were shaped by the context of racialised behaviour in the institution and how it was being addressed. Perhaps it made it harder to speak frankly about race and racism in their interviews.

Participants possibly felt more comfortable to speak about the positive role the school could play in helping adopted children with their identity. Perhaps feeling able to voice the messier side of this work, and the limitations of the institution was difficult for staff. I, as a trainee and a member of staff within the institution, often interviewing senior members of staff, may have held back on asking participants directly about this. I may have been influenced by interviewing my colleagues and needing to maintain future working relationships. Therefore, this study does not capture this area of difficulty surrounding identity work in the institution and is a limitation of the research.

Semi-structured interviews can, therefore, be an unreliable method of gathering authentic data, as they rely on participants being honest and freely able to speak. This study is informed by psychoanalytic ideas and therefore has an understanding that people repress and fail to say things that are difficult to say: things that are emotionally charged often do not get said. Therefore, there is an understanding that important areas in relation to this topic may not have been captured using this method. I also needed to be aware of biases in relation to what was being said in the interviews as I had worked within the services, I had my own thoughts and opinions on the children and service. I paid close attention to my own reactions and allowed space for the interviewee to share their own thoughts.

Some participants commented on how hard it was to answer some of the questions, particularly when asked to define identity. Some participants expressed that they wished they had considered their definition of identity beforehand. If I were to carry out this study again, I would consider whether to share the questions with them in advance to help them feel they had a chance to think through this beforehand.

However, there is something about the nature of the topic of identity, which is complex and varied, that makes it hard to put into words even with preparation time. The prompts used in the interview helped participants to consider a wide range of elements in relation to identity.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to explore how staff in a therapeutic school can help support adopted children with their sense of identity. Despite there being research on some areas of adoption and identity, particularly transracial adoption, no research was found that explored how therapeutic schools could support adopted children with their sense of identity. This study has sought to address this gap in the literature. The findings demonstrated that staff felt adopted children often have a complicated and fragmented sense of self due to their traumatic early experiences and multiple changes in caregiver. Therefore, the results have shown that they need additional support in order to navigate these complexities. The study has found that staff feel therapeutic schools are a setting that can helpfully support adopted children to develop their sense of self. The participants outlined a number of ways that a therapeutic school can support with identity. The two main findings of the study are the importance of working with parents and the professional network to develop understanding and support adopted children with the complexity of their identity development. These have been determined as key findings due to their clinical significance, and the implication for future practice. Both interventions emerged as ideas across multiple themes. The findings have helped to develop my own clinical thinking about adopted children and will shape my practice going forward. In particular, it will help inform the way that I work with professional networks, aiming to bring together divergent ideas about a child, in order to bring a holistic view of them to the fore.

<u>Recommendations</u>

I will set out the key recommendations that have been identified from the findings of this study, drawing on both clinical and research recommendations. The use of observation and reflection are key functions that should be used in a therapeutic school. The use of these skills can help staff to notice the dynamics that are playing out and avoid them "acting in" and repeating something from the child's past. This creates space for something to be understood and worked through rather than repeated. The findings of this project also show that parent work is a powerful tool for helping adopted children to make sense of their identity. By clinicians working with parents to think about the child's behaviour, emotional communication, history and ethnicity, they can be helped to support their child to develop a sense of self. This project has also shown the importance of the professional network working closely together. Joining together can help avoid a fragmented picture of a child developing and allow a child to be seen as a whole. Due to the lack of research into the splitting that takes place in networks regarding adopted children's identity, there is need for further research into this area. The project has also shown how important it is to incorporate topics such as race, identity and adoption into the curriculum. This can help prevent these areas becoming taboo topics and ensure children feel acknowledged and represented in their school environment.

As this is the first study exploring how a therapeutic school can support adopted children with their sense of identity, it is important that further research in this area is carried out. As this is a very specific school, it would be interesting to see whether if a similar study was carried out in other schools, for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties or even mainstream settings, whether similar results would be

found. Participants in my study spoke about schools playing a supporting role in carrying out life story work. However, the literature speaks about this being carried out by social workers and adoptive parents. Therefore, further research into whether schools could helpfully play a role in this area needs to be carried out. The literature around identity was predominantly theoretical and therefore, further field research into identity would be important to empirically support the theoretic conceptualisations.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A- Table of Acronyms

PHRASE	ACRONYM
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services	CAMHS
Education, Health and Care Plan	EHCP
Tavistock Research Ethics Committee	TREC
In Vitro Fertilization	IVF
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	ADHD

APPENDIX B-TREC APPROVAL LETTER

<div align="center">

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

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Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699
https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/

Maria Sheen

By Email

2 December 2020

Dear Maria,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: How do staff in a therapeutic school setting help adopted children make sense of their identity?

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

Please be advised that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc., must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Paru Jeram
Secretary to the Trust Research Degrees Subcommittee
T: 020 938 2699
E: academicquality@tavi-Port.nhs.uk

cc.   Course Lead, Supervisor, Research Lead

The Tavistock and Portman
NHS Foundation Trust

Post-Interview Information and Debrief Letter

Project Title: How do staff in a therapeutic school setting help adopted children make sense of their identity?
Principle investigator: Maria Sheen

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking part in my research study. I hope that your generous contribution will help to develop the understanding of how therapeutic schools can support adopted children to understand their identity.
If taking part in this study has left you with any concerns that you would like to explore further, I hope you are able to access support from the network around you. Using your supervision or speaking with your line manager could be a helpful arenas to discuss these concerns.
Alternatively, and as an employee of the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, you can access support with practical and emotional matters from Care First, an independent provider of professional employee services. These services are free and accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year by phone or online.
To access the service, visit www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk and log-in with the following details:
Username: ███████
Password: ███████
Or call ███████ *and speak to a professional counsellor or information specialist in confidence.*

If you have any questions or would like further information here are my contact details:
Email: ████████████████   Phone: ██████████
If you have any concerns about how the study has been conducted please contact myself, my supervisor Dr Jocelyn Catty (████████████████) or Simon Carrington, Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance (██████████████████████).

Kind regards,
Maria Sheen

APPENDIX D- PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

The Tavistock and Portman NHS

NHS Foundation Trust

23rd September 2020
Project Title: How do staff in a therapeutic school setting help adopted children make sense of their identity?
Principle investigator: Maria Sheen

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in this research project. This information sheet will explain what is involved if you decide to take part.

What is the purpose of this study?
In this study, I want to explore how staff feel a therapeutic school can help adopted children make sense of who they are.

Who is conducting the study?
My name is Maria Sheen. I am undertaking this research as part of my training to become a Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist with the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. This project has achieved ethical approval from the Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC). The course is overseen and certified by the University of Essex.

What is involved?

This project is an inquiry into how staff think therapeutic schools can help adopted children make sense of their identity. For this, you will be invited to take part in an individual interview. You will be able to speak freely about this topic, with prompts and questions from myself. During the interview, I would be interested to hear about your own personal experience working with this client group, using examples of children you have worked with. The interview will last approximately one hour and will be audio recorded. I will aim to hold these interviews face to face, in Gloucester House or at the Tavistock Centre. However, if this is not possible to due to COVID-19, they will take place via telephone or over video link. The interviews will take place at a time that is mutually convenient.

Do I have to take part?
No, it is your choice whether you would like to take part in this research. If you do choose to take part, you can withdraw without giving any reason up to 3 weeks after the interview. This time scale has been decided upon as the data will then be being processed and analysed. If you do decide to withdraw, all the date collected or about you will be destroyed immediately.

Criteria to take part

- Staff who currently or have previously worked at Gloucester House Tavistock Children's Day Unit
- Either clinical or educational staff
- Has worked with adopted children in this setting

What will happen to any information I give?

The interviews will be audio recorded using a voice recorder. I will play this back and transcribe the interview in full. At this point I will destroy the recording. I will anonymise and analyse the transcript in order to write up the research study.

Your name and personal details will be stored separately from the transcript in accordance with the University of Essex Data Protection Policy and the General Data Protection Regulations 2018 (GDPR, see below). This means that all electronic data will be digitally encrypted and stored on a password protected computer which only I will have access to. Any paper copies will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office. All data will be destroyed no later than 3 years after the study has been written up for academic submission.

Quotes from your transcript may be used but efforts will be made to anonymise these. However, due to the small sample size, and small staff group at Gloucester House, it may be possible that colleagues may recognise some quotes given as you. Every effort will be made to prevent this.

There will be limitations to the confidentiality of information provided if it is deemed yourself or someone else is at risk.

Confidentiality of the data is subject to legal limitations. You can find out more about the legal framework within which your information will be processed by contacting the sponsoring Trust's Clinical Governance and Quality Manager, ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

What will happen to the results of the project?

The results of this study will be used in my research dissertation project for my doctoral qualification. It may also be used I future academic presentations and publications.

What are the benefits of taking part?

There will be no direct benefits for you. However, taking part will give you an opportunity to reflect on your work with adopted children in your setting and how you can support them in relation to their sense of identity. This may be helpful for how you carry out your future work. You will also be contributing to increasing the understanding of working with this group of children.

Are there any risks?

There are no direct risks. However, thinking about topics such as adoption and identity can be challenging. You may wish to discuss the impact of taking part with a supervisor or Care First, an independent organisation where you can get free practical and emotional professional advice. Details of this will be included in the debrief letter.

Contact details

I am the main contact for the study. If you have any questions about the project or would like to discuss this further please don't hesitate to contact me. My contact details are:

Maria Sheen
Email: ███████████████████
Telephone: ████████████
Address: ██ 33 Daleham Gardens, London NW3 5BU

Alternatively, any concerns or further questions can be directed to my supervisor:
Dr Jocelyn Catty
Email: ███████████████████

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, the researcher or any other aspect of this research project please contact Simon Carrington, Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance (███████████████████████████).

Thank you for considering taking part in this study and taking the time to read this information. If you are willing to take part in the research please complete the consent form provided

APPENDIX E-CONSENT FORM

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Email:

16th September 2020
Project Title: How do staff in a therapeutic school setting help adopted children make sense of their identity?
Principle investigator: Maria Sheen

Please tick each box

I have read the information sheet, dated the 23rd of September, relating to the above research in which I have been asked to participate in. This details the nature and purposes of the research. I have been given a copy to keep and been given the opportunity to discuss this and ask details. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.	
I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed for the purposes of the study.	
I understand that my personal details will be anonymised and held securely by the researcher. I understand that there are limitations to the level of confidentiality that be guaranteed due to the size of the study. Confidentiality of the data is subject to legal limitations. There will be limitations to the confidentiality of information provided if it is deemed myself or someone else is at risk.	
I understand that my contribution to the research findings may be published as part of an academic submission and in other publications or books.	
I can confirm that I understand what is required of me and consent to participate in this study. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time and withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.	

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

…………………………………………………………………………………..

Participant's Signature

…………………………………………………………………………………………..

Investigator's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

………………………………………………………………………………….

Investigator's Signature.

…………………………………………………………………………………………

Date:

………

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APPENDIX F

Transcript	Code
I mean, I think obviously, in the work that we do, we're working with identity issues all the time anyway, even for non-adopted children, where people fit what they're made up of inside them. So that also, I don't just mean biological. I mean, the sort of versions of all the people that helped shape them, in our language that's object relations, but you know, in a sort of more layman's language, taking in experience from the world, and feeling it as part of themselves, and the muddles about that, how you separate from what's around you, how you become what feels like your own person, and how you also use what you've got from outside and family members, to feel you've got something inside that helps strengthen you. And I think with adopted children or children that have been separated from birth, parents, for whatever reason, it's really, really complicated. Because actually, ordinary development involves separating from parents, from feeling that you don't have to just be a carbon copy, you can be some version of yourself, while also feeling you can hold on to that relationship without ruining it. And so for adopted children, that process can be really, really complicated, because they've already lost the kind of first version of themselves, if you like, the first template. So so that's a sort of, sort of more, more complicated answer, exposing this internal reality of what happens and how it feels hard to feel that they can know themselves, let alone those around them to get what they need, and then separate and come back in a way that feels not too overwhelming and frightening. But then there's also the reality of a lot of adopted children having been through multiple carers, often having had really difficult experiences, even in the womb. So, so a sense of of, often it seems as if they've never felt held, they've never felt as if there was, you know, talking about identity, but you know, identity you can also think of a sense of home a sense of place, a sense of where you belong, and as if right from the start, that's been terribly disrupted. And then they're trying to make relationships with multiple carers and often, then losing them. So I think what can happen then, is that they are resistant and terrified of making new relationships. And allowing themselves or believing there can be a sense of belonging with anybody, because they feel it might be ripped apart at any point. For, the sort of, that side of it in terms of in consistencies, it's hard to even sometimes often sometimes often with the ones we meet to build up new relationships that help form identity. But then there's also the loss of all the ones before.	child psychotherapists work with identity -how children are made up inside themselves -how children take in experiences -muddle around separating -how to become your own person -how to use family and relationships to strengthen a sense of self -separation from birth parents makes identity process complicated -ordinary development involves separation -don't have to come exact replicas of parents -adopted children have lost first version of themselves -hard to know themselves - ordinary separation for adopted children can be overwhelming -adopted children have had multiple carers -adopted children have had difficult experiences -difficult prebirth experiences -sense of belonging disrupted from the start -difficulty in having to make relationships with multiple carers -fear of loss interrupts ability to build new relationships -resistant to making new relationships -resistance to allowing themselves to believe they can belong -hard to build relationships to help form identity -loss of previous relationships

APPENDIX G- Table of themes

theme	Disrupted Sense of belonging					
sub theme	feeling unwanted	making sense of link to birth family	struggle to belong to adopted family	caught between families	where we feel we belong	fragile sense of security/ permanency
codes	underlying other feeling	can believe they will end up like birth parents	how hard it is to feel connected to adoptive parents	loyalty conflict between families	help to build sense of belonging	feelings of rage that adoptive parents may not be able to keep them
	something underneath they are grappling with	some children seem to want to end up like birth parents	can I be part of adoptive family	hard to make sense of how child treats adopted and birth parents	who do they feel they belong to?	adoption break down
	feeling unwanted has an impact	identification with birth parents	rejection might be more painful for adoptive parents	big ask, no matter how well managed it is	who might they be?	feelings of terror linked to adoption difficulties