Lifting the Voices of Adopted Teens and Emerging Adults in LGBTQ+ Families: A Narrative Inquiry

By

Larissa Brosinsky

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

Department of Educational Psychology

University of Alberta

Abstract

One in five Canadians are touched by adoption in their life, encompassing over 162,000 people in the city of Edmonton, and over seven million people across Canada (Adoption Council of Canada, n.d.). The "adopted family" has become very diverse over the past few decades, with many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ+) and other couples now successfully adopting children, with these adoption rates likely continuing to rise (Farr & Vázquez, 2020a, 2020b). The small body of research currently available on people who are adopted indicates that many youth and adolescent adoptees struggle disproportionately with depression, grief, identity crises, and suicide (Wiley, 2017). Interestingly, more recent research suggests that these concerns do not persist into adulthood, with adult adoptees becoming just as well-adjusted as their non-adopted peers despite experiences of early adversity and misbehaviour (Holmgren & Elovainio, 2019). Currently available research is limited in that it does not explore the lived experiences of adolescent and young adult adoptees from their own perspectives, a gap that this study aims to begin bridging.

This study explored the lived experiences of two adoptees, Sarah (age 21) and Dolores (age 13), with the goal of co-constructing a narrative of their experiences being adopted into LGBTQ+ families. Sarah's experiences highlighted the following strengths: LGBTQ+ parents, LGBTQ+ community, strong female role models, and cultural exploration. Dolores' lived experiences underscored the following as strengths in her life: humor and openness, supportive friendships, LGBTQ+ parents and their chosen family, and superhero role models. A discussion of how these narratives relate to the literature (a) explores adoptee challenges as external, (b) highlights the importance of adoptee resiliency and conducting flexible research, (c) acknowledges the importance of developmental levels, and (d) identifies LGBTQ+ families as assets. Limitations of the study and directions for future research are explored.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Larissa Brosinsky. The research project of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, “Lifting the Voices of Adopted Teens and Emerging Adults in LGBTQ+ Families: A Narrative Inquiry,” No. Pro00101819, 8/17/2020.

Acknowledgments

This study would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and encouragement of so many others. It feels strange to write my name alone at the bottom of my title page, as I truly feel that it took a village to complete this study. Though I am thanking only a handful of people here, please know that I could not have done this without the support I received from all of my family, friends, mentors, and inspirations. Thank you all, for everything.

To my primary supervisor, Dr. Noorfarah Merali, thank you for your unconditional support and guidance throughout this process. Especially in those moments where I stubbornly insisted that I complete this study as a narrative inquiry even though that was going to make things more complex. I sincerely appreciate your unyielding support in helping me to complete this study in a way that aligned with my own values and beliefs, as it would not have been the same otherwise. Thank you for your guidance throughout my entire graduate career, from the first year of my Masters to the final moments of my Doctorate – I could not have done this without you.

Thank you to the members of my supervisory committee, who provided their support and reflections throughout the development, implementation, and evaluation of this study. To Dr. Sophie Yohani, thank you for providing so many opportunities to hone my research skills, and for your thoughtful and kind feedback throughout my academic career. To Dr. Kristopher Wells, thank you for being so willing to share your resources and expertise to help me deepen my knowledge throughout this process, and for your encouragement when I felt like I was starting to stumble. To Dr. Sean Lessard, thank you so much for letting a last-minute doctoral student sit in on your narrative inquiry course and opening my eyes to the wonders of narrative inquiry as a

research methodology. Without all of your support this study could not have happened, and would not have ended up being as close to my heart as it has become over these past few years.

To my family, thank you for being by my side throughout this entire academic journey. Completing a milestone like this comes with its celebrations and excitement, but it also comes with many frustrations, self-doubts, and struggles. You have always been my biggest supporters, encouraging and believing in me even when I felt lost and was struggling to believe in myself. I am forever grateful to have a mother, father, brother, and others who face the world with such kindness, love, and strength.

Thank you to the members of my birth family. A special thank you to my birth mother. You were the person who carried me for nine months and brought me into this world, and I know that the choice to have an adoption was not an easy one. I am grateful for your kindness, love, and ongoing connection between our families. I would not be the person I am today, nor would this study have ever come to fruition if I had not been adopted, and I thank you for your role in my life.

To my partner, I will be forever grateful. Thank you for your relentless encouragement and love throughout this process. You journeyed with me through the thick and thin of life as it continued on during this study, and there were many milestones along the way. You were always there to listen with an open ear and an open heart as I went on my own journey alongside my participants, and you helped keep me grounded during this process. I am so grateful for your unconditional love and support.

Thank you to Sarah and Dolores. I cannot believe how lucky I was to get to know both of you, and I am so incredibly honoured to have been a part of your journeys. Thank you for your

willingness to share such personal experiences with me, and for allowing me into your lives. You have forever changed me as a person and I am forever grateful to you both.

Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

I was born into this world to a 17-year-old birthmother who was unable to care for me, in the throes of trying to develop her own independent life, all while being forced to make the difficult decision of whether to keep me or give me up for adoption. In the end, she found a compromise and settled on an open adoption with my adoptive parents, where she would be able to maintain contact with me as I grew up. My adoptive parents did all the right things – they researched adoption and the best ways to raise an adopted child. I was given children's books from infancy outlining adoption, had annual visits with my birthmother, was connected with my birthfather and his family, and grew up believing that adoption was not an unusual way to become part of a family.

Unfortunately, it sometimes doesn't matter how much effort is put into providing a careful and positive experience for a child – the world will often take the reins and pull them crashing back down to the reality of other's opinions, thoughts, and words. *"Your real mother didn't love you." "Were you beat up at your foster home?" "Adopted kids are all screwed up."* As a young child who had unwittingly announced that she is adopted to a playground full of children, I was unprepared for these hurtful and confusing questions – Did my birth mother actually not love me? Was I not adopted properly because I had never been in a foster home? Was I all screwed up? These questions were too big for a small child to answer, so I held them close to my heart, hoping that one day I would be old enough and wise enough to know the answers.

As I continued to grow into a teenager, these questions began to feel more heavy, burning from the inside out. Even school assignments and routine paperwork began to plague my thoughts: *"Write your family's timeline." "Please list your medical history".* I began to feel angry with myself – I had access to this information as part of my open adoption, why wasn't I asking these questions? Why was I so afraid to reach out to my birth mother and ask? Things came to a head after a very fun and positive visit with my birth mother and adoptive family – I had sat in the car, and as we drove away from my birth mother's farm, I began to cry. I couldn't articulate why at the time, but I now know that I was struggling with the development of my own identity as an adopted person. Who was I? What were my roots? Did it even matter? These questions would take years to answer – indeed, I am not sure they will ever be fully answered. And I wondered to myself, do other adopted people feel the same way?

Adoption is a phenomenon with a very long history, with the first documented occurrence being traced to the family of the religious figure Moses (Krueger & Hanna, 1997). Statistics suggest that 58% to 64% of all Americans have personal experience with adoption (Fisher, 2003; Henderson, 2002; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Post, 2000). More recent information suggests that one in five Canadians are touched by adoption in their lives, encompassing over 162,000 people in the city of Edmonton alone, and over 7 million people in Canada (Adoption Council of Canada, n.d., *Frequently asked questions about adoption*). Unfortunately, statistics on adoption in Canada are extremely limited, as the Canadian census combines biological and adoptive parents, does not gather statistics on adopted as opposed to biological children, and only records

the number of children currently in foster care (Statistics Canada, 2019a). At the provincial level, the few provinces that do report adoption-specific statistics usually only report the number of adoptions that occurred, with very few providing further detail. For example, British Columbia only reports the number of children that were registered for adoption and how many of them were adopted each year but does not provide any other information on the adoptions or children (Adoptive Families Association of BC, 2020). While the province of Alberta provides a bit more detail in terms of the types of adoptions that occurred over the previous year (e.g., public, private, international), it does not provide any further information on the children, birth, or adoptive families (Government of Alberta, 2019).

It is important to recognize that every single adoption affects approximately 33 other people (Sass & Henderson, 2000), and impacts two thirds of Americans (Koh, Kim, & McRoy, 2017). These impacts include, but are not limited to, the person who was adopted (or adoptee), the biological parents, or *birth family*, and the parent(s) who adopted the child and any other children their family already includes, as well as their own parents and relatives, which are collectively referred to as the *adoptive family*. Taken together, the adoptee, birth family, and adoptive family are known as the *adoption triad* (Baden & Wiley, 2007; Wiley, 2017; Wrobel & Grotevant, 2019). Since twice as many adoptees access counselling and mental health services than non-adoptees (Borders, Penny, & Portnoy, 2000; Miller, Fan, Christensen, Grotevant, & von Dulmen, 2000), it is critical for mental health professionals to develop a solid understanding of the experiences and needs of this group, along with appropriate counselling strategies for facilitating their well-being.

Terminology

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of adolescents and emerging adults who were adopted as infants into lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ+) and other sexual/gender minority families from their own perspectives. Given that the focus of this dissertation was on LGBTQ+ families, it is important for the reader to have a good grasp of the concepts and terminology that will be used. The acronym LGBTQ+ is often used to describe a population of people who identify as having a non-heteronormative sexual orientation/identity or gender identity. *Heteronormativity* refers to the belief that opposite-sex attraction is normal or natural, and that people should comply with the gender role they were assigned at birth (Habarth, 2014). *Cisnormativity* is a term used to highlight the assumption or belief that being *cisgender* (having a gender identity that corresponds to the one assigned at birth) is the norm and valued more highly as a result (LGBTQIA Resource Center, 2020). The term *sex* refers to a person's biologically based status as male, female, or intersex based on indicators such as sex chromosomes, gonads, and reproductive organs (APA, 2006, 2012, n.d.). *Gender* refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviours that have come to be attributed to each sex through socially constructed beliefs and consequent pressures about what behaviours and attitudes are considered to be appropriate for men as opposed to women (APA, 2006, 2012, n.d.). In contrast, a person's *gender identity* indicates their internal sense of being male or female, which may or may not match their birth sex, as in the case of transgender individuals (APA, 2006, 2012, n.d.). *Sexual orientation* refers to the sex of the person or people to whom a person is romantically or sexually attracted, for example, having desires for someone of the opposite sex (heterosexual), same sex (lesbian or gay men), both (bisexual) or neither (asexual) (APA, 2009, 2012, n.d.; Riggle & Rostosky, 2012). *Sexual identity* is defined as the label a person chooses to

describe the emotional and cognitive understandings they have about their own sexuality, which is in contrast to their sexual orientation, which is tied to psychological and biological drives and is not something that a person chooses (APA, 2009; Riggle & Rostosky, 2012). It is important to note that gender identity and sexual orientation are independent from each other, as a person's internal sense of being male or female (gender identity) is not related to the sex of the person or people that they are romantically attracted to (sexual orientation).

The initials in LGBTQ+ stand for the following terms: *lesbian* (female attracted to members of the same sex), *gay* (includes males and females who are attracted to members of the same sex), *bisexual* (sexual attraction to both men and women, regardless of one's own gender identity), *transgender* (gender identity or expression that does not conform to the sex assigned at birth), *queer* (relating to LGBTQ+ identity), and *questioning* (in the exploration process of their sexual and gender identity) (APA, 2006, 2009, 2012, n.d.; Egale, n.d.; Hulshof-Schmidt, 2012; Riggle & Rostosky, 2012). *Transgender* is an umbrella term that has been used to represent a large spectrum of gender identities and manner of expression, and is intended to indicate that a person does not identify with their birth sex, for example, when a person is born with female genitalia but they internally identify as a man (gender identity) (APA, 2006; Egale, n.d.; Riggle & Rostosky, 2012). *Queer* is a more recent and reclaimed term used by some people in the LGBTQ+ community to indicate their status as an LGBTQ+ person, and used by others in the LGBTQ+ community to indicate that their personal identity does not necessary fall into a categorical distinction and is more inter-related than these categories allow for (APA, n.d.; Egale, n.d.; Riggle & Rostosky, 2012). It is important to note that not all members of the LGBTQ+ community will use the term *queer*, as this word has historically been used with negative connotations against this community. However, some members of the community have

taken ownership of this label and now use it with a sense of pride and self-respect (APA, n.d.). It is important to keep in mind that members of the LGBTQ+ community may not identify with the term "sexual minority", as sexuality may not actually be a factor in their personal identity, although they still belong to the LGBTQ+ population (Hulshof-Schmidt, 2012). The addition symbol at the end of the acronym indicates that this acronym is a shortened form of the ever-evolving full acronym, LGBTQQIP2sAA+, which adds the following terms to the list: *intersex* (people with two sets of genitalia or other chromosomal differences), *pansexual* (attraction to anyone, regardless of gender or sexual identities), *two-spirit* (used by some Indigenous communities to recognize traditional teachings and honour individuals with both male and female spirits), *asexual* (a person who does not experience sexual attraction), and *allies* (supporters of the LGBTQ+ community) (Hulshof-Schmidt, 2012). The addition (+) sign at the end of this longer initialism is also intended to be inclusive of all other non-heteronormative identities that may not have been included in this list (Egale, n.d.; Hulshof-Schmidt, 2012). The term LGBTQ+ is one of the more commonly used terms, and as such, it will be used throughout this paper as a representation of the sexual and gender minority community. A glossary of these aforementioned terms has been provided for reference in Appendix A.

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of adolescents and emerging adults who were adopted as infants into LGBTQ+ families from their own perspectives. Despite the prevalence of adoption and the growing number of people that are influenced by it, there is a lack of education for mental health professionals on this topic (Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Koh et al., 2020; Ross et al., 2009; Sass & Henderson, 2000; Wiley, 2017). Considering the overrepresentation of adoption triad members in healthcare and mental health settings (Goldberg et al., 2019; Jones, 1997; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Sass

& Henderson, 2000; Wiley, 2017), this lack of mental health education on adoption is alarming. Many mental health professionals do not have any undergraduate or graduate training relevant to adoption-related issues, illustrating a serious deficit in covering this topic in post-secondary training programs (Goldberg et al., 2019; Koh et al., 2020; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Sass & Henderson, 2000; Wiley, 2017). Due to the lack of information available to mental health professionals about adoption in their training process (Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Goldberg et al., 2019; Koh et al., 2020; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Sass & Henderson, 2000; Wiley, 2017), the next section will provide an overview of the history of adoption followed by a general introduction to birth and adoptive families and the process of adoption. The literature review that follows describes research on adoption in LGBTQ+ families, reviews research on adoptee experiences, highlights the missing voices of adoptees in these families in existing studies, and concludes with a statement of the problem and research puzzle addressed in this dissertation. The final section provides an outline of the dissertation methodology, including the methodological framework, participant recruitment strategies, data collection and analysis processes, ethical issues, and dissemination plan.

History of Adoption

Adoption in Canada has a dark and unfortunate history plagued by racism, discrimination, and cultural genocide (Assembly of First Nations, 2004; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). In the early 1870's, French and British colonizers came to North America and, in an attempt to remove Indigenous culture and heritage from the local people, Indigenous children aged 4-16 were forcibly removed from their families and placed into the residential school system (Sellinger, 2016; Sinclair, 2016; Union of Ontario Indians, 2013). Residential schools were designed to enforce European culture and values, and

children were punished for speaking their own language and adhering to their cultural traditions, with many of them being subjected to severe physical, sexual, and psychological abuse (Assembly of First Nations, 2004; Sellinger, 2016; Sinclair, 2016; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; Union of Ontario Indians, 2013). Over 150,000 Indigenous children attended residential schools in Canada and were subjected to this cultural genocide (Union of Ontario Indians, 2013).

During the 1960's the residential school system began to deteriorate, and instead of returning the children to their cultures and families, each province took over responsibility for the Indigenous children that had initially been in the schools (Union of Ontario Indians, 2013). Referred to as the "60's scoop", these children were "scooped" out of their cultural heritage and homes and placed into the foster system, before being adopted into usually non-Indigenous homes in a further attempt to eradicate Indigenous culture (Gibson, 2014; Sellinger, 2016; Sinclair, 2016; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; Union of Ontario Indians, 2013). While the exact number of children that were affected by the residential schooling system and 60's scoop is unknown, it is estimated that in the 1970's one in three Indigenous children were separated from their families (Sinclair, 2016).

The history of residential schooling and 60's scoop in Canada led to an over-representation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system that is still present to this day (Gibson, 2014; Sellinger, 2016; Sinclair, 2016; Union of Ontario Indians, 2013). Indeed, close to 50% of all foster children in Canada are Indigenous – an extremely high statistic, given that Indigenous children make up less than 10% of the overall child population in Canada (Sinclair, 2016). Unfortunately, despite all the research indicating the importance of Indigenous children being raised within families that share their heritage and culture, most Indigenous children within

the foster system are still being placed with non-Indigenous families as opposed to Indigenous families (Sellinger, 2016; Sinclair, 2016). Consequently, it has been suggested that the current over-representation of Indigenous children in the foster and adoption systems and the likelihood of them being placed with non-Indigenous families is an ongoing extension of the 60's scoop (Gibson, 2014; Sellinger, 2016; Sinclair, 2016). It is vitally important to acknowledge this underlying historical Canadian context surrounding adoption and the foster system. As will become evident in the remainder of this proposal, discrimination in the adoption system continues and encompasses many other target groups as well, including LGBTQ+ couples and families.

Psychological research on the LGBTQ+ community has a long history, dating back to the early Gay Rights Movement in the 1950's and 1960's, followed by the emergence of the Gay Affirmative psychology approach in the 1970's, and intentionally dedicated research on lesbian and gay psychology in the 1980's (APA, 2009; Brown, 2017). Homosexuality was removed as a disorder from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders and the International Classification of Diseases in 1987 and 1993, respectively, which was a huge step forward for LGBTQ+ rights (Brown, 2017; Horne et al., 2014). Over the past few decades, the Canadian government has passed laws legalizing same-sex marriage, permitting adoption by same-sex couples, and forbidding discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodations (Addison & Coolhart, 2015; Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre, n.d.; Gibson, 2014; Mallon, 2007; Ross et al., 2009).

While these have been important steps for LGBTQ+ rights, there are still significant incidences of discrimination and hate directed towards LGBTQ+ people today, illustrating that society still has a long way to go before LGBTQ+ people are treated equally (Addison &

Coolhart, 2015; APA, 2009; Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Brodzinsky & Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2003; Brodzinsky, Green, & Katuzny, 2012; Ross et al., 2008, 2009; Russett, 2012; Statistics Canada 2019b). Indeed, in Canada's close neighbor, the United States, same-sex marriage was only legalized a few years ago in 2015, there was an adoption ban against sexual minority parents from 1977-2010, and many states still do not have protective laws for LGBTQ+ people who are experiencing discrimination (Addison & Coolhart, 2015; Farr & Goldberg, 2018; Garanzini et al., 2017; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Levitt et al., 2020; Mallon, 2007; Patterson & Wainright, 2012). Even within Canada, conversion therapy, which attempts to change a person's sexual orientation/identity or gender identity, was still legal until January 2022 despite being discredited through research showing that it is ineffective and extremely harmful to LGBTQ+ people (APA, 2009; Brown, 2017; Canadian Psychological Association, 2015; College of Alberta Psychologists, 2019; Library of Congress, 2022). Indeed, it was not until 2019 that the College of Alberta Psychologists (2019) deemed conversion therapy unethical and banned its practice in the province, highlighting the need for psychologists to respect and support people's identities and orientations. During the completion of this study, the Canadian government passed bill C-4, which amends the Criminal Code to include the following as punishable offences:

- "Knowingly causing another person to undergo conversion therapy or providing such therapy, which is punishable by up to five years' imprisonment.
- Knowingly promoting or advertising conversion therapy, which is punishable by up to two years' imprisonment.

- Receiving a financial or other material benefit, knowing that it is obtained or derived directly or indirectly from the provision of conversion therapy, which is punishable by up to two years' imprisonment." (Library of Congress, 2022)

While this is an encouraging step forwards, there is still a long way to go before unethical and extremely harmful practices towards LGBTQ+ people such as this are no longer being practiced in the world.

Simultaneous to these other developments regarding the treatment of Indigenous and LGBTQ+ people in Canada, changes were also happening with regards to how adoptions were generally dealt with between the 1950's and 1960's. Prior to the 1950's, adoptions were to be kept a secret in western countries to protect the adoptees from the discrimination they would face as a result of being an "illegitimate child", as these children were viewed as second-class citizens (Farr, Grant-Marsney, Musante, Garber, 2020; Grotevant, & Wrobel, 2014; Henderson, 2002; Oke, Groza, Park, Kalyanvala, & Shetty, 2015; Wolfgram, 2008). *Closed adoptions*, which include zero contact with the birth family, were mandated to shelter adoptees from stigma and promote attachment to their adoptive families (Farr et al., 2014; Garber, 2020; Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Esau, 2000; Henze-Pedersen, 2019). Adoptive parents were instructed not to tell the adopted child about their adoption status (Krueger & Hanna, 1997). This was even reflected in the ancient Babylonian legal text, the Code of Hammurabi, which stated that adoptees who claimed not to be the biological children of their adoptive family would have their tongue cut out, and that adoptees who searched for their biological family would be blinded (Krueger & Hanna, 1997). A slight shift occurred in the 1950's, particularly in western countries, where it was suggested that if parents did want to tell their child they were adopted, it was prudent to tell them the "Chosen Baby" story (Krueger & Hanna, 1997; Nelson, 2018). This

story explains that the reason the child was given up is because the birthmother knew that the child would have a better, happier life with a different family. Therefore, the birthmother's extreme love for the child and desire for the child to have the best life possible is the reason they were given up for adoption.

The 1960's encompassed a growing human rights movement, which empowered birth mothers and adoptees to actively search for each other (Grotevant et al., 2000). The late 1960's also saw an adoptee movement to combat sealed records, as this was violating their constitutional right to access their biological information (Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Krueger & Hanna, 1997). In the 1970's birth mothers challenged the stigma and secrecy surrounding adoption, and in the 1980's adoptions were no longer mandated to be closed (Nelson, 2018; Wolfgram, 2008). The Access to Adoption Records Act (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2007) allowed Canadian adoptees over the age of 18 to request access to their adoption records, which is an important step towards making the adoption process transparent and providing more rights for adoptees. It is important to note that this act also provides birth parents with the right to veto the adoptee's request for information, further highlighting the barriers many adoptees face in trying to access information about their birth family (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2007).

Increasingly, modern birth families are now opting for *open adoptions* (Brodzinsky & Goldberg, 2016; Farr et al., 2014; Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Garber, 2020; Henze-Pedersen, 2019; Russett, 2012; Wolfgram, 2008), which refers to adoptions where there is contact between all members of the adoption triad. Likewise, overall levels of international and same-sex couple adoptions are also on the rise (Brodzinsky & Goldberg, 2016; Costa et al., 2021; Goldberg & Garcia, 2020; Goldberg et al., 2016; Golombok et al., 2014; Lavner et al., 2012; McConnachie et al., 2021; Porch, 2007; Ross et al., 2008; Russett, 2012; Wiley, 2017). Adoption, as a whole, is

becoming more accepted across western societies (Garber, 2020; Nelson, 2018; Porch, 2007). However, although more people are reporting favourable attitudes towards adoption, they often are not personally open to engaging in it (Morton & Shelton, 2019; ter Meulen et al., 2019; Weistra & Luke, 2017). Potential contributing factors for not wanting to personally become involved with the adoption process include concerns and fears about adoption due to misinformation, as well as the media sensationalizing dramatic and negative cases of adoption (Fisher, 2003; Kline, Karel, & Chatterjee, 2006; Morton & Shelton, 2019; ter Meulen et al., 2019; Weistra & Luke, 2017). Indeed, one study found that nearly a quarter of news stories depict adoptees in solely negative ways, with 14% of them containing overtly stigmatizing claims about adoption, and 52% specifically depicting adoptees with emotional problems and identity issues (Kline et al., 2006).

In addition, due to modern birth control reducing the number of teen pregnancies, the child adoptee population has changed from primarily healthy newborn babies to older children who are already in the foster care system, or children with special needs (Grotevant et al., 2000; Russett, 2012). As a result, many potential adoptive families are engaging in international adoptions with the intention of receiving a healthy baby, as opposed to a child from a local foster care system (Grotevant et al., 2000; Russett, 2012). Regardless of the type of adoption, overall, adoptions have been found to be extremely successful for all members of the adoption triad when appropriate supports are put in place for them (Brodzinsky, 1987).

The Birth and Adoptive Families

> "How old are you in this picture?" I glance at the picture on my fridge, recognizing the brown eyes, freckles, and long wavy hair. "That's not me," I reply, with an edge of pride. My 13-year-old half-sister, daughter of my birthmother, is once again mistaken for a younger version of me. "I'm adopted", I explain. This is always met with one version or another of the same response "Wow, I didn't know. You look so much like

> your half-sister!" And I can't help myself: "You should see how much I look like my birth mom."
>
> I have always been fascinated with comparing pictures of myself to those of my birth mother. As a young child, I would stare at pictures of my birthmother and wonder if I would look like her when I grew up. As a glasses-wearing adolescent with a mouth full of braces, I often found myself holding her picture in front of a mirror, glancing between what I hoped I could one day look like and my own reflection. Over the years I eventually grew into the photo I held in my hands so often, and as I got to know my birthmother in person, I realized the similarities went further than what could be seen in a simple photograph. We both had a slight tilt to the way we held our heads, had the same way of crinkling up our eyes when we smiled, the same shy manner. My birthmother became my mirror.
>
> My half-sister is the same – I see the flash of pride in her eyes when she gets told how much we look alike, and catch her staring, comparing us during our visits. And I cannot say that I don't do the same. It's fascinating every time. It's new and exciting every time I recognize myself in someone else at this biological level, and I can't help but stare. It feels like a deeper level of connection defying explanation – it's organic. I can't help but want to show off this connection to people who visit my house and ask about the picture of my half-sister. And I wonder, what would it have been like to have actually grown up seeing these similarities every day? It feels like a privilege. A very different life.

This desire to know about one's birth family is extremely common for adoptees, and can be motivated by many factors, which will be described in more detail in the section on universal adoptee concerns. Indeed, 30%-65% of adoptees desire to, or actually search for, their birthparents, often to fulfill these kinds of desires to see what it would look like to share biological roots (Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Nelson, 2018; Wolfgram, 2008; Wrobel & Grotevant, 2019). Unfortunately, not a lot of research has been conducted on birth families, likely due to the historical secrecy surrounding this group. The small amount of research that has been conducted has focused primarily on birth mothers and the experiences of short-term trauma and long-term anguish they may have after the adoption (Fisher, 2003; Henney, Ayers-Lopez, McRoy, & Grotevant, 2007; Lewis & Brady, 2018). Almost no research has been conducted on birth fathers despite their integral role as the father of the adoptee, highlighting a gap in the current research literature (Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Feast, Kyle, & Triseliotis, 2011; Hughes, 2015; Passmore & Chipuer, 2019).

Somewhat more research has been conducted on the adoptive family, although this is still an area lacking in research depth. Some research highlights how adoptive families tend to differ depending on whether or not the child is related, for example, a stepchild, or unrelated to the adoptive family, or whether there are other children (adopted or biological) present in the family (Balenzano, Coppola, Cassibba, & Moro, 2018; Fisher, 2003; Wrobel & Grotevant, 2019). Demographic information and statistics on adoptive parents represents an area that appears to be neglected in both the academic literature and general census information, making it difficult to identify what an adoptive family typically looks like. However, some research does show that adoptive parents are much more likely to be more involved in human services fields and to allocate more resources to their children than non-adoptive parents (Barth & Miller, 2000; Brown, Waters, & Shelton, 2019; Weistra & Luke, 2017). In addition, more single women and same-sex couples are now adopting children, and these groups have been found to be more likely to adopt children with special needs (Cody, Farr, McRoy, Ayers-Lopez, & Ledesma, 2017; Costa et al., 2021; Downing, Richardson, Kinkler, & Goldberg, 2009; Farr, Crain, Oakley, Cashen, & Garber, 2016; Farr & Goldberg, 2018; Fisher, 2003; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Lev, 2010; Manning et al., 2014; McConnachie et al., 2021; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022; Ross et al., 2008). Overall, the most commonly cited reason for adoption is infertility, with humanitarian reasons being the second most common, although it is important to recognize that there are always multiple factors influencing a person's decision to adopt (Downing et al., 2009; Farr & Patterson, 2009; Fisher, 2003; Young, 2012).

Process of Adoption

One of the least understood aspects of adoption is what the actual adoption process looks like, with many people forming their views based on exposure to movies or media (Kline et al.,

2006; Morton & Shelton, 2019). In Canada, the process of adoption can vary, as adoption qualifications and the specific steps in the process are provincially or territorially regulated (Adoption Council of Canada, n.d., *Frequently asked questions about adoption*). Regardless of province or territory, a home study is usually performed, which involves a social worker conducting interviews, home visits, and reference checks to assess the suitability and stability of the individual or couple/family for caring for an adopted child before the adoption can proceed (Adoption Council of Canada, n.d., *Myths and realities;* Canada Adopts, 2014; Crea, Barth, & Chintapalli, 2007; Mallon, 2007). The factors being assessed in a home study include the prospective parents' character, religion, and income, as well as their relationship as a couple, and the nature of their home environment (Canada Adopts, 2014; Crea, Barth, & Chintapalli, 2007; Henderson, 2002; Mallon, 2007; Whitton & Weaver, 2010). Concerning findings in any of these areas will result in them being seen as less than ideal adoptive parents, and greatly damage their chances of being approved for the adoption. The entire adoption process can take anywhere from nine months to nine years, and the adoption itself can cost from $0-$30,000 or more, with a tax credit being available for adoptive parents in the year the adoption is finalized (Adoption Council of Canada, n.d., *Myths and Realities*).

There are many different categories of adoption, which can impact both the length of the adoption process and the cost. *Public adoptions* refer to when an infant, child, or youth is adopted from the Canadian welfare system, whereas *private adoptions* refer to those that do not involve the welfare system (Adoption Council of Canada, n.d., *Myths and Realities;* Farr & Goldberg, 2018). *Domestic adoptions* refer to those in which the adoptee child and the adoptive parents are from the same country (Wiley, 2017). *International adoptions* refer to adopting children from another country (Wiley, 2017). *Kinship adoption* refers to adopting a birth relative,

like a grandparent adopting their grandchild, and a *stepchild adoption* involves legally adopting one's stepchild (Adoption Council of Canada, n.d., *Myths and Realities*).

Each year, about 78,000 children are adopted in America – 20,000 from public agencies, 44,000 from private agencies, and 14,000 overseas adoptions (Sass & Henderson, 2000).[1] In addition, some agencies and countries will not allow same-sex couples to adopt children (Adoption Council of Canada, n.d., *Myths and Realities;* Farr & Goldberg, 2018), and many adoptive parents are given scant information about the birth family at the time of the adoption and do not get any more follow-up information at a later date (Wiley, 2017). This leaves the adoptive family with very little information to work with as the adoptee grows older and begins to ask questions about their upbringing and past. These concerns are often mitigated in an open adoption, where there is contact with the birth family and the adoptee has a chance to get answers to their questions.

Adoptions are becoming increasingly complex as all the variables are taken into account, such as adoption type, cost, and whether it is open or closed. Additional complications arise when children are adopted from foster care, are separated from their siblings, are adopted at an older age, or have a history of trauma or abuse (Balenzano et al., 2018; Ferrari, Rosnati, Manzi, & Benet-Martinez, 2015; Lavner et al., 2012; Manning et al., 2014; Oke et al., 2015; Tasker & Bellamy, 2019; ter Meulen et al., 2019; Whitten & Weaver, 2010; Wood, 2012). The level of complexity adoptions entail makes it clear that no two adoptions are experienced in exactly the same way. Therefore, it becomes critical to consider the various factors influencing adoptees in order to better understand their mental health and general psychological and social needs.

[1] As aforementioned, details on general Canadian adoption statistics are very limited as they combine both adoptive and biological parents (Statistics Canada, 2019a), and as such, there is also a lack of information on the adoptive families, with Statistics Canada combining both adopted and biological children when reporting demographic statistics of LGBTQ+ families (Statistics Canada, 2019c).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adoption in LGBTQ+ Families

I took a slow sip of my latte, quietly watching the woman across from me peel off her various layers of winter clothing and settle into the chair opposite me in the quiet coffee shop I had chosen as our meeting place. I had originally reached out to her for some local resources on LGBTQ+ adoption in Alberta, and was surprised when she immediately responded, offering to meet and share her personal experiences with the Alberta adoption system as a lesbian woman. I felt a bit foolish, feeling that I didn't have enough information or questions to bring to the table for a meeting with such an accomplished woman, but as it turned out, she really just wanted an opportunity to share her story.

Dana[2] painted a picture of a life with her partner and young son, who she had conceived, carried, and birthed for herself and her partner. When their son was four years old, they decided that they would like to have another child, but felt it was not feasible for either of them to get pregnant this time around and turned to the foster system with the intention to foster-to-adopt. Dana and her partner were the ideal foster parents in the eyes of the social workers working in the foster system – they were both trained in working with children and trauma, wanted an older child (which are often more difficult to place), and wanted to raise a child who had a history of trauma or behavioural difficulties. It should have been easy to place a foster child with them, but unfortunately this wasn't the case.

They were deemed to be unfit as foster parents after their initial home study, with the scathing line that will burn in Dana's memory forever: "Placing an older child in an abnormal, dysfunctional (lesbian) home would be a detriment to the child". Horrified at this blatant discrimination and bias, they requested a second home study and, even though they were approved this time with no concerns, they were offered the advice, "Just pretend you're a single mom and that your partner is just your babysitter. It will be easier that way." Dana and her partner refused this advice, angered and concerned about what type of message this would be sending to their young son. Unfortunately, this decision began a 5-year-long process where they were subjected to multiple home studies from people increasingly significant in the foster system, including the Assistant Deputy Minister of Children's Services. Despite all of these home studies finding no issues, higher levels of the government appeared to be finding issue with the idea of Dana and her female partner as foster parents.

In the early 2000's, after over a decade of Dana and her partner trying to foster a child, the Minister of Children's Services issued a moratorium on allowing homosexual couples to be foster parents, stating that homosexual couples will not be considered as foster parents until every other potential heterosexual foster parent in the entire province has been ruled out as a possibility. This decision was made and carried out very quietly so as to not become public news, and the only reason Dana was made aware of the moratorium was at the urging of a sympathetic social worker to use the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to gain access to her file and read the notes contained within it. After uncovering the true reason behind their seeming inability to be

[2] Pseudonym used to protect the identity of this individual.

considered as foster parents, Dana and her partner carefully considered their options and made the difficult decision to stop their fight and give up on their dream of fostering and adopting a child for the well-being of their son.

In 2006, Dana and her partner were forced to relive this painful experience as they chatted with two other homosexual couples who were having similar difficulties with the foster and adoption system in Alberta, and who had both just been turned down as foster parents after making it to the final stage of the process. After being informed about the moratorium, these two couples sought out lawyers and informed Alberta Children's Services that they were going to go public. They received an immediate response stating that Children's Services had already been in the process of removing this moratorium, and that very same day both couples were informed that their initially denied foster request had been suddenly approved.

Dana seemed tired as she recounted her long story of struggle that began in the early 1990's and stretched across nearly 20 years. We raised our glasses to celebrate the success of the other couples, and shared hopes for the future LGBTQ+ foster and adoptive parents. We also spent some time in silence, mourning Dana and her partner's losses as well as the loss of the over 70 foster children that were considered for placement with Dana and her partner, but had the opportunity stolen from them through the discriminatory actions of the Alberta government. As we gathered our coffee cups and made our way out of the coffee shop, I thanked Dana for sharing her deeply personal story with me. She told me that she hopes her story can help others, and I assured her that it will. As we parted ways outside the front door of that little coffee shop, she turned back and gave me one last message: "We've come a long way, but there's still a long way to go."

I slowly walked down the sidewalk, Dana's parting words ringing in my ears: "There's still a long way to go". I couldn't help but wonder about my own LGBTQ+ friends and family members, all young and taking their first exciting steps towards building lives together with their partners. Did they know? Did they know they'd be fighting an uphill battle if they wanted to expand their family to include children? Did they know that they might be met with an unfair choice between standing up for their rights and exposing themselves and their families to public scrutiny, or staying silently marginalized to protect their own privacy, and perhaps safety? I felt worried. I felt helpless. How were we still fighting these same battles, decades later? How was I going to be able to help my friends and family, with the cards stacked so unfairly against them? Dana's words couldn't have been more true: We *have* come a long way, but we still have so, so far to go.

In 1996, the Alberta government put forth the idea that foster children should only be allowed to be fostered by what they deemed to be "natural families", a decision that removed the right of non-heterosexual couples to foster children (Filax, 2006; Torrance, 1997). In January 1997, Ms. T, a woman with a female partner who had successfully fostered over 70 children over the previous 17 years, was told that her application to foster a new child had been denied as a

consequence of her not being part of a natural family (Filax, 2006; Torrance, 1997). Ms. T appealed the decision on the grounds that the Alberta government was discriminating against non-heteronormative people, and this appeal laid the groundwork for the next few years of public discourse over the rights of non-heteronormative people (Filax, 2006; Torrance, 1997). Throughout these years, a conservative provincial news magazine, the Alberta Report, published several widely read articles perpetuating harmful myths and discriminatory beliefs against LGBTQ+ people through insinuations that LGBTQ+ people are dangerous and unnatural (Filax, 2006). In addition, in April 1998, the Alberta Report, alongside other media, publicly outed Ms. T by providing her name and hometown information, an action that opened her up to more personal discrimination and repercussions for taking a stand against the Alberta government (Filax, 2006). This case provides yet another vivid example of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people within the foster system, and while there are now more laws in place to prevent these types of discrimination from happening, discrimination still exists within Canada and beyond, as was evident from Dana's story at the beginning of this section.

LGBTQ+ people still deal with various types of homophobia and transphobia-based prejudice, discrimination, and injustice today in the form of social stigmatization, violence, harassment, and, more covertly, microaggressions, which are subtle or direct insults and invalidations of their personal identities (Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Baruth & Manning, 2003; Cody et al., 2017; Brown, 2017; Green & Mitchell, 2015; Morris, Lindley, & Galupo, 2020; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011). Consequently, LGBTQ+ people may struggle with various aspects of their identity development process given that they are living in the midst of a homo/bi/transphobic society possessing hetero- and cisnormative attitudes and beliefs (Allan & Johnson, 2017; Brown, 2017; Morris et al., 2020). This struggle may be particularly evident

during the coming out process, which refers to whether and when they choose to disclose their sexual or gender identity to others, which can have serious consequences for their family lives and career opportunities, depending on how supportive or unsupportive their significant others, employers and others in their social and cultural contexts may be (APA, 2012; Baruth & Manning, 2003; Brown, 2017; Horne et al., 2014; Morris et al., 2020; Munro, Travers, & Woodford, 2019). In addition, LGBTQ+ individuals may experience a struggle between their sexual orientation, gender identity, and their cultural or religious upbringing, sometimes forcing a choice between one identity over the other (Addison & Coolhart, 2015; Baruth & Manning, 2003; Horne et al., 2014; Oke et al., 2015).

The struggles that LGBTQ+ people may experience as a result of their identity, such as discriminatory experiences and a difficult identity development process, have the potential to lead to a variety of mental health concerns, such as depression, suicidality, negative self-image, and substance abuse, among others (Allan & Johnson, 2017; Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Baruth & Manning, 2003; Horne et al., 2014; Munro et al., 2019). Minority stress theory indicates that minority populations that experience stigma and discrimination, such as the LGBTQ+ population, are more likely to have poor mental and physical health outcomes as a result of these specific stressors (Allan & Johnson, 2017; Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Farr & Vázquez, 2020a, 2020b; Green & Mitchell, 2015; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019; Ross et al., 2008). Multiple minority stress theory takes this concept further by acknowledging the layered and exacerbated impact of belonging to multiple different minority groups that experience discrimination (Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Farr & Vázquez, 2020a; Garber, 2020; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019; Ross et al., 2008). However, the risk for negative mental health outcomes from minority stress can be mitigated by the multiple strengths and sources of resilience that

LGBTQ+ people have been able to draw on, such as personal coping ability and hardiness, support of significant others and LGBTQ+ allies, strong attachments to their identities, receipt of gay affirmative therapy, and the creation of families of choice (Allan & Johnson, 2017; Brodzinsky et al., 2012; Costa & Tasker, 2018; Farr et al., 2016; Farr & Patterson, 2009; Farr & Vázquez, 2020a, 2020b; Garanzini et al., 2017; Gartrell, Peyser, & Bos, 2012; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Green & Mitchell, 2015; ; LaSala, 2007; Patterson & Wainright, 2012; Ross et al., 2008, 2009; Russett, 2012; Ryan & Brown, 2012; Wiley, 2017). Families of choice will be further described in the next section.

Role of Adoption in Family Formation

Over the past few decades, the Canadian government has tried to remedy the historical discrimination experienced by the LGBTQ+ population, both at the individual and systemic levels, by: (a) passing laws legalizing same-sex marriage, (b) permitting adoption by same-sex couples, and (c) forbidding discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodations (Addison & Coolhart, 2015; Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre, n.d.; Brodzinsky & Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2003; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022). However, discrimination and hate directed towards LGBTQ+ people and their families continue to persist, affecting their family formation processes and experiences (Addison & Coolhart, 2015; Brodzinsky & Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2003; Brodzinsky et al., 2012; Brown, Smalling, Groza, & Ryan, 2009; Cody et al., 2017; Costa & Tasker, 2018; Farr et al., 2016; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022; Russett, 2012; Statistics Canada 2019b). For example, in Canada, hate crimes against people due to their sexual orientation or gender expression/identity are still the third highest reported type of hate crime, peaking in 2019 with 265 reported hate crimes due to sexual

orientation and 56 reported hate crimes due to gender expression (Statistics Canada, 2022). While there has been a very slight decrease in the number of overall hate crimes against these groups between 2019 and 2020, hate crimes against gender diverse individuals in particular are noted to be more violent in nature, illustrating the ongoing issues occurring in Canada surrounding these individuals and their families (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Families of Choice

As a result of the historical and ongoing discrimination and hate crimes against LGBTQ+ individuals, as well as the negative reactions sometimes experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals when coming out to their biological family members, there has been a strong emphasis on developing families of choice among this population, as opposed to families only consisting of blood relatives (Costa & Tasker, 2018; Dewaele, Cox, Van den Berghe, & Vincke, 2011; Domínguez, Bobele, Coppock, & Peña, 2015; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Horne et al., 2014; Green & Mitchell, 2015; LaSala, 2007; Ross et al., 2008). The intentional identification and selection of one's psychological family members allows people to have a consistent and stable support network that can mitigate the effects of any loss of support or ostracization from blood relatives (Dewaele et al., 2011; Green & Mitchell, 2015; Horne et al., 2014; Ross et al., 2008).

There are many different sub-communities or cultures within the LGBTQ+ community, including advocacy-focused groups, like the Pink Pistols, performance-based ballroom culture, and rurally-focused Gay Rodeo culture, among others (Kuvalanka, 2012), which can provide members of the LGBTQ+ community with a variety of areas in which they can create their own family of choice. Many LGBTQ+ people will be informally adopted into one of these other LGBTQ+ sub-communities, through which they will develop a strong support network that is necessary for their survival and resiliency (Dewaele et al., 2011; Domínguez et al., 2015). For

example, 25-40% of homeless youth in Canada identify as LGBTQ+, many of whom report being “thrown out” of their homes or feeling the need to run away from home to protect themselves as a result of their LGBTQ+ identity (Dewaele et al., 2011; Gaetz, O’Grady, Buccieri, Karabanow, & Marsolais, 2013; Munro et al., 2019). For these LGBTQ+ youth, developing a family of choice is vital to their survival, as these families of choice help them to rebuild their lives and provide support for them to get back on their feet again (Dewaele et al., 2011; Domínguez et al., 2015).

Parenting and Adoption in LGBTQ+ Families

Once these support networks and families of choice are developed, some LGBTQ+ individuals will consider further expanding their family to include having children. Existing research suggests that many LGBTQ+ people will delay having children or decide to avoid having children altogether as a result of societal stigma about their ability to parent, and homo/bi/transphobia and myths that LGBTQ+ relationships are dysfunctional and unstable and result in poor parenting (Farr & Vázquez, 2020a, 2020b; Garanzini et al., 2017; Gartrell et al., 2012; Gibson, 2014; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Horne et al., 2014; Ryan & Brown, 2012; Zhang & Chen, 2020). In contrast, research findings on LGBTQ+ families highlight the fact that they have similar, if not higher levels of overall relationship quality and satisfaction levels as those observed in heteronormative families, and that their children have very similar reports of psychological adjustment and cognitive and social abilities compared to children raised in non-LGBTQ+ families (Brodzinsky et al., 2012; Bruun & Farr, 2021; Cody et al., 2017; Domínguez et al., 2015; Farr et al., 2016; Farr & Patterson, 2009, 2013; Farr & Vázquez, 2020a, 2020b; Garanzini et al., 2017; Gartrell et al., 2012; Gianino et al., 2009; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Golombok et al., 2014; Horne et al.,

2014; Lev, 2010; Lavner et al., 2012; Levitt et al., 2020; Mallon, 2007; Manning et al., 2014; McConnachie et al., 2021; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019; Patterson & Wainright, 2012; Ross et al., 2009; Russett, 2012; Ryan & Brown, 2012; Tasker & Bellamy, 2019; Wiley, 2017). Indeed, research trends indicate that it is the parent-child relationship that influences a child's overall well-being, not the make-up of the family or sexual orientation of the parents (Brodzinsky et al., 2012; Cody et al., 2017; Farr & Patterson, 2009; Gartrell et al., 2012; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Golombok et al., 2014; Patterson & Wainright, 2012; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022; Ryan & Brown, 2012; Tasker & Bellamy, 2019).

Around 40% of transgender people have children, however they have a bit of a different experience with parenting, as many of them became biological parents prior to their transition while in a different-sex relationship (Gates, 2013; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019). Research indicates that those who become parents after their transition are more likely than other members of the LGBTQ+ community to try to have a biological child, either through donor insemination or by saving their gametes prior to their physical transition, which has been partially attributed to a fear of discrimination in the adoption system (Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019). Unfortunately, not a lot of research has been conducted on the experiences of transgender parents, indicating a large gap in this research area that needs to be bridged (Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Gianino et al., 2009; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Marr, 2017). In addition, recent research is identifying differences in that gay men are not as easily able to adopt children as lesbian women due to discrimination against the idea of men acting as "leaders" of a family and the heteronormative belief that women are better suited to this position (Gibson, 2014; Golombok et al., 2014; Lavner et al., 2012; Mallon, 2007). More specifically, and particularly within western countries, men are often seen as the primary financial contributor to

the family and as being much less involved in the caregiving role, which is often reserved for women. As a result, recent research is noting a unique trend of discrimination against male same-sex parents that does not seem to be experienced by other gender or sexual minority parents (Gibson, 2014; Golombok et al., 2014; Lavner et al., 2012; Mallon, 2007).

For those who do decide to move forward with adding a child into their family, LGBTQ+ families often have to explore alternative methods to having a child, such as donor insemination, surrogacy, foster parenting, and adoption (Brodzinsky & Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2003; Brown et al., 2009; Costa & Tasker, 2018; Farr & Vázquez, 2020b; Gartrell et al., 2012; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Russett, 2012; Wiley, 2017). With regards to adoption, same-sex couples are four times more likely to pursue adoption than heterosexual couples, despite their concerns about the discrimination and stereotypes present within the adoption system (Brodzinsky & Goldberg, 2016; Brown et al., 2009; Cody et al., 2017; Costa & Tasker, 2018; Farr et al., 2016; Farr & Goldberg, 2018; Gates, 2013; Gianino et al., 2009; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019). Statistics from the United States indicate that around 2% of American children have an LGBTQ+ parent, and that 19% of same-sex couples have a child living with them (Gates, 2013), with one study reporting that approximately 12% of same-sex couple parented children are adopted (Cody et al., 2017). This is comparable to Canadian statistics, which indicate that approximately 9-12% of same-sex couples had children under the age of 18 living with them in 2016 (Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre, n.d.; Statistics Canada, 2019d). Unfortunately, Statistics Canada (2017) only distinguishes children who live with same-sex parents, a process that only began in 2011, and which does not provide any further details on these families (i.e., adoptive, stepfamilies, etc.), or

provide statistics on other members of the LGBTQ+ population that may be parents, such as transgender or bisexual parents.

LGBTQ+ adoptive parents have had to overcome many obstacles in pursuing adoption as a method of expanding their family. One of the biggest barriers for LGBTQ+ adoptive parents is the fact that the adoption and foster social systems were initially developed with religious roots that labelled homosexuality as immoral and sinful (Brodzinsky & Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2003; Farr & Goldberg, 2018; Farr & Vázquez, 2020b; Horne et al., 2014). As a result, prejudicial and discriminatory guiding principles existed within many adoption agencies that prevented LGBTQ+ people from adopting or fostering children, which is why so many LGBTQ+ adoptive parents strategically hid their sexuality so that they could adopt as a single parent (Brodzinsky & Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2003; Cody et al., 2017; Farr et al., 2016; Farr & Goldberg, 2018; Mallon, 2007; Ross et al., 2008). This pattern is exemplified in the aforementioned case of Ms. T versus Alberta where the Alberta government pushed the notion of only fostering children in "natural families" and further strengthened the dominant narrative at the time that Caucasian heterosexual families were better than others (Filax, 2006). While the Canadian government has put into place laws to prevent these types of discrimination, LGBTQ+ prospective parents still run into these types of barriers on both personal and systemic levels when navigating the adoption and foster systems (Brodzinsky & Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2003; Farr & Goldberg, 2018; Farr & Vázquez, 2020a; Gibson, 2014; Lavner et al., 2012; Levitt et al., 2020; Mallon, 2007; Zhang & Chen, 2020).

Despite these barriers, LGBTQ+ couples are still adopting at increasing rates, and more often than heterosexual couples (Brodzinsky & Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2003; Brodzinsky & Goldberg, 2016; Costa et al., 2021; Farr et al., 2016; Farr & Goldberg, 2018; Farr

& Vázquez, 2020a, 2020b; Gianino et al., 2009; Goldberg et al., 2016; Goldberg & Garcia, 2020; Golombok et al., 2014; Horne et al., 2014; Lavner et al., 2012; Lev, 2010; Manning et al., 2014; McConnachie et al., 2021; Ross et al., 2008). Same-sex couples have been noted to pursue public domestic adoptions primarily when they are bound by financial constraints, and to strive for an international adoption when financially feasible as a result of fearing that domestic adoption birth mothers will be less likely to choose them as potential parents due to their LGBTQ+ status (Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019). The multiple routes for adopting a child in combination with recent laws preventing adoption agencies from discriminating based on sexual orientation have resulted in increased levels of adoption within the LGBTQ+ community (Addison & Coolhart, 2015; Brodzinsky & Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2003; Brown et al., 2009; Costa et al., 2021; Farr & Vázquez, 2020a, 2020b; Goldberg & Garcia, 2020; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; McConnachie et al., 2021; Russett, 2012; Wiley, 2017). A recent survey in the United States indicates that approximately 10% of children being raised by LGBTQ+ couples are adopted, as compared with only 3% of children being raised by heterosexual couples (Gates, 2013). These findings highlight the prevalence and consequent importance of adoption in the development of LGBTQ+ families.

Unique Challenges for Adoptees in LGBTQ+ Families

Adoptees in LGBTQ+ families may struggle with some unique difficulties surrounding their parent's LGBTQ+ status, in addition to any challenges that emerge during their racial/cultural identity development process. This is due to the fact that individuals of LGBTQ+ status struggle disproportionately with harassment, discrimination, injustice in the form of social stigmatization, violence (i.e., hate crimes involving physical, emotional, and property destruction), and more covertly, microaggressions, which may directly or indirectly affect their

children (Baruth & Manning, 2003; Brown, 2017; Brown et al., 2009; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Green & Mitchell, 2015; Morris et al., 2020; Nadal et al., 2010; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011; Sue, 2010a, Sue et al., 2019; Zhang & Chen, 2020). More specifically, LGBTQ+ parents have reported experiencing challenges in dealing with their children's schools with regards to discriminatory behaviours by school staff members and heteronormative practices and policies (Brown et al., 2009; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022; Zhang & Chen, 2020). LGBTQ+ parents are often stigmatized by school staff members who ask inappropriate questions and lack understanding of LGBTQ+ family structure, which can result in both overt stigmatization as well as microaggressions (Brown et al., 2009; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Morris et al., 2020; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022; Zhang & Chen, 2020). These negative experiences at their children's schools may result in LGBTQ+ parents being less involved with their children's schooling, and consequently less likely to have positive relationships with their children's teachers, which is an important aspect of a child's positive school experience (Gartrell et al., 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019). In addition, school practices and policies are often biased towards heterosexual families, with curriculums dominated by heterosexist language and a lack of representation of LGBTQ+ people, history, or events, which marginalizes the children of LGBTQ+ people attending these schools (Brown et al., 2009; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022; Zhang & Chen, 2020). For example, schools that have mandatory participation in making mother's day cards may not be considering the child whose parents include two fathers, or school participation forms may indicate that they require the signature of both a "mother" and "father" (Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019).

LGBTQ+ parents are also more likely than heterosexual parents to report being mistreated by other parents, often resulting in other parents not allowing their children to play with the adopted children from LGBTQ+ families (Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019). Such behaviour can contribute to social isolation of children in LGBTQ+ families. In addition to the effects of the discrimination experienced by their parents in the school context, children of LGBTQ+ couples have been found to experience distinct bullying as a result of their parent's LGBTQ+ status and the myth that children of LGBTQ+ parents are more likely to be a sexual minority (Bruun & Farr, 2021; Gartrell et al., 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019). Research studies on the rates of bullying experienced by children from LGBTQ+ families have yielded inconsistent results, with some studies reporting that rates of bullying are higher for this group of children than children raised in non-LGBTQ+ families and others reporting equivalent rates (Bruun & Farr, 2021; Cody et al., 2017; Farr et al., 2016; Gartrell et al., 2012; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019; Patterson & Wainright, 2012). However, the fundamental difference in the nature of bullying incidents experienced by children in families of LGBTQ+ status is that the bullying has been found to be focused on the family make-up or the LGBTQ+ status of the children's parents (Cody et al., 2017; Gartrell et al., 2012; Gianino et al., 2009; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019). Bullying of children results in negative mental health outcomes and increased levels of absenteeism from school, affecting their overall level of health and safety (Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019). Further, despite the fact that research indicates otherwise (Gartrell et al., 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Patterson & Wainright, 2012), there is a widely-held belief that children of LGBTQ+ parents are more likely to identify as LGBTQ+ themselves than children raised in heteronormative families, which can make them targets of bullying,

discrimination, and stigma directed at anyone suspected to identify as LGBTQ+ (Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019; Patterson & Wainright, 2012). Finally, research shows that lesbian and gay families who felt unprepared for adopting a child, or who adopted an older child, were more likely to experience family dissolution, highlighting the importance of examining the unique struggles experienced by this population (Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019).

LGBTQ+-Specific Microaggressions

Microaggressions are conscious or unconscious actions stemming from personal biases and prejudices that serve to alienate, subjugate, or cause psychological harm towards members of marginalized groups (Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Lomash, Brown, & Galupo, 2019; Munro et al., 2019; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011; Sue et al., 2019; Vaccaro & Koob, 2019). People who identify as LGBTQ+, along with their families, experience many microaggressions as a result of the societal belief that being heterosexual and adhering to one's assigned gender at birth are "normal", and that any deviation from this normalcy is wrong in some way (Cody et al., 2017; Farr et al., 2016; Gianino et al., 2009; Morris et al., 2020; Munro et al., 2019; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022; Sue, 2010a). Indeed, Sue (2010a) noted that heterosexism has not decreased over the years and instead has become more ambiguous and covert, which lends itself to microaggressions. The most frequently occurring microaggressions experienced by LGBTQ+ people and their families involve: (a) endorsement of a gender- and hetero-normative culture, (b) the use of heterosexist, cissexist, and transphobic language that excludes or stigmatizes their experiences (such as using the terms husband or wife instead of partner, or only using "his" or "her" to refer to people without considering the use of other possible pronouns people may use to refer to themselves), (c) denial of societal and individual heterosexism, (d) making stereotypical assumptions about LGBTQ+ people, (e) exoticization, (f) discomfort with, and disapproval of

LGBTQ+ people, and (g) overpathologization (Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Farr et al., 2016; Gianino et al., 2009; Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Lomash et al., 2019; Morris et al., 2020; Munro et al., 2019; Nadal et al., 2010; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011; Sue, 2010a). These are further described in the following paragraphs.

Perhaps the most common microaggression experienced by LGBTQ+ people and their families is the endorsement of a gender- and hetero-normative culture, which is often perpetuated through a lack of LGBTQ+ representation in social systems and the media (Farr et al., 2016; Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Kline et al., 2006; Morris et al., 2020; Morton & Shelton, 2019; Munro et al., 2019; Nadal et al., 2010; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Ross et al., 2008; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011; Sue, 2010a). Some examples of this include limited to no positive representation of LGBTQ+ people in school curricula, school paperwork requiring a "mother" and "father" to sign, and school assignments to make one Mother's Day and one Father's Day card (Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022). In addition, heterosexist and transphobic language is commonly used both at the system and individual level, such as verbal assumptions of a "mom and a dad" and the common use of the phrase "that's so gay" to describe something considered uncool, which leads to further endorsement of the dominant gender- and hetero-normative culture (Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Farr & Vázquez, 2020b; Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Morris et al., 2020; Munro et al., 2019; Nadal et al., 2010; Ross et al., 2008; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022; Sue, 2010a). Many people will also deny the existence of heterosexism at both the societal and individual levels, potentially to protect themselves from having to acknowledge the problematic existence of these issues, which serves to further marginalize the experiences of the LGBTQ+ population (Munro et al., 2019; Nadal et al., 2010;

Sue, 2010a). This denial of the existence of homo- and trans-phobia may also show up as resistance to any type of LGBTQ+-supportive change, for example, intentionally misgendering transgender people, refusing to acknowledge the existence of a variety of LGBTQ+ identities, or resisting the idea of there being a difference between gender and sex. Upholding the dominant hetero-normative culture in this manner serves to stigmatize children in LGBTQ+ families, as it delivers the message that their family is immoral, unnatural, and inferior to others, which can have a negative impact on their self-image, which they have to try to cope with and react against to maintain their mental health (Nadal et al., 2010).

Another area in which LGBTQ+ people and their families often experience microaggressions relates to the stereotypical assumptions made about them based on their LGBTQ+ status, such as the assumption that gay men enjoy interior design or that LGBTQ+ people want to speak on behalf of all LGBTQ+ people, the over-sexualization of LGBTQ+ people, and the myth that children of LGBTQ+ couples will also be LGBTQ+, which insinuates that being LGBTQ+ is like an illness that can be caught from someone else (Gibson, 2014; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Morris et al., 2020; Munro et al., 2019; Nadal et al., 2010; Patterson & Wainright, 2012; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011). In addition, LGBTQ+ people and their families are often seen as exotic and treated differently as a result, which is a common microaggression experienced when people brag that they have an LGBTQ+ friend, or when children in LGBTQ+ families are told that it is “really cool” that they have LGBTQ+ parents (Nadal et al., 2010; Sue, 2010a; Sue et al., 2019).

A final area of microaggressions experienced by LGBTQ+ people and their families relates to the discomfort or disapproval other people show about their LGBTQ+ status, which often leads to overpathologization of them and their families (Lomash et al., 2019; Munro et al.,

2019; Nadal et al., 2010; Sue, 2010a). People's discomfort or disapproval of LGBTQ+ people often comes from a religious or more traditional point of view about the world and how it should function, which can lead to beliefs that these families are sinful or immoral and should be punished (Farr & Goldberg, 2018; Lomash et al., 2019; Morris et al., 2020; Munro et al., 2019; Sue, 2010a). These types of beliefs result in homo- and trans-phobic microaggressions against the LGBTQ+ family, such as staring at LGBTQ+ couples and families, and comments about the immorality of their families (Gibson, 2014; Lomash et al., 2019; Nadal et al., 2010; Sue, 2010a; Zhang & Chen, 2020). Furthermore, these beliefs often lead people to assume that any problems LGBTQ+ individuals and families experience are due to their LGBTQ+ status or the perceived abnormality associated with it, perhaps signaling mental illness or a problem within them, rather than acknowledging that many problems they face are due to living in a homophobic and transphobic society (Morris et al., 2020; Nadal et al., 2010; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011; Sue, 2010a). As aforementioned, all of the microaggressions that are directed at LGBTQ+ people and their families have an impact, either directly or indirectly, on the children in these families, as the message communicated by these microaggressions is that their families, and by extension, who they are as a person, is not normal and is instead immoral, bad, and something that should be hidden or changed (Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019).

Transracial Adoptions in LGBTQ+ Families

Since adoption is one of the family formation processes used among LGBTQ+ families, and the fact that international adoptions are often preferred over domestic adoptions, there is a high likelihood of ethnic minority children being adopted into LGBTQ+ families where their ethnic and racial identities do not match their parents' ethnic and racial backgrounds (Brodzinsky & Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2003; Brodzinsky et al., 2012; Farr & Patterson, 2009;

Goldberg, 2009; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Tasker & Bellamy, 2019). A review of adoption agencies in the United States indicated that in 2003, special needs and international adoption agencies were more likely to make placements with same-sex prospective parents, which highlights another potential reason that LGBTQ+ adoptive parents tend to adopt transracial and special needs children (Brodzinsky & Evan B. Donaldson, 2003; Tasker & Bellamy, 2019). A recent survey in the United States indicated that around 50% of children in same-sex families are not Caucasian, as compared with only 41% of children in heterosexual families (Gates, 2013). No relevant statistics are available for the Canadian context, but similar trends and patterns may be occurring. This increased likelihood of LGBTQ+ couples to adopt transracially may occur for a number of reasons, including (a) perception of getting a younger and "healthier" child who has not had experiences within the foster system, (b) more legal certainty in the adoption process, (c) faster adoption process, (d) alternative ideas of what constitutes family, (e) a desire to avoid heterosexism and discrimination in domestic adoptions, (f) lack of desire for biological children, (g) insecurity about open adoptions, and (h) empathetic feelings towards a child that has a minority status (Brodzinsky & Goldberg, 2016; Cody et al., 2017; Costa et al., 2021; Downing et al., 2009; Farr & Patterson, 2009; Gianino et al., 2009; Goldberg, 2009; Goldberg et al., 2016; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020). The fact that many transracial adoptees are likely to be raised in LGBTQ+ families emphasizes the importance of acknowledging adoptee experiences in both their adoptive families and the societies they grow up in. These experiences will inevitably be affected by their own racial/cultural identity development process, and the interaction between their identities and those of their parents (Baden, Gibbons, Wilson, & McGinnis, 2013; Baden & Steward, 2000; Cody et al., 2017; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Samuels, 2009).

It is important to note that transracial adoptions have a bit of a turbulent history within society and the research world. Transracial adoptions in western countries initially developed in response to World War II but were also extremely popular after the Korean and Vietnam wars, as these wars left many children without parents (Baden & Steward, 2000; Branco & Cloonan, 2022; Marr, 2017; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Russett, 2012; Wiley, 2017). In addition, there was a decline in adoptable Caucasian babies due to the rise of more effective contraception methods, legalization of abortion, and increased societal acceptability for single mothers to parent their child, which also contributed to the rise in transracial adoption popularity (Goldberg, 2009; Marr, 2017; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020). Indeed, international adoptions became so popular at this time that they have more recently been criticized for treating children as commodities (Wiley, 2017). Unfortunately, in some parts of the world these children have been very intentionally "sold" and treated as a commodity in a gross abuse of the adoption process (Branco & Cloonan, 2022). Initial research studies on transracial and international adoptions were focused on examining adoptee well-being as compared to local adoptees, as it was widely believed that transracial adoptees would have worse psychological outcomes than non-transracial adoptees (Baden, 2002; Baden & Steward, 2000). Years of research have shown that this is not the case, as transracial adoptees have similar patterns of psychological and behavioural functioning to their non-transracial counterparts (Baden, 2002; Baden & Steward, 2000; Farr & Patterson, 2009). International adoptions are increasingly popular today, despite their gloomy origins (Marr, 2017; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020). However specific statistics related to transracial and international adoptions are difficult to identify, with estimates of transracial adoptees ranging from 24%-40% of all adoptees (Baden & Steward, 2000; Samuels, 2009; Farr & Patterson, 2009; Marr, 2017; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Wiley, 2017).

The identity development process of transracial adoptees is especially complicated and is an area that has more recently become a strong focus within transracial adoption research (Baden & Steward, 2000; Baden et al., 2013; Baden, Treweeke, & Ahluwalia, 2012; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Sinclair, 2016; Tan & Nakkula, 2004; Wiley, 2017). A sense of social identity has been found to predict psychological well-being, and to have a strong positive social identity, it is important for transracial adoptees to have a strong ethnic or cultural identity (Baden, 2015; Basow, Lilley, Bookwala, & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2008; Lindgren & Nelson, 2014; Sinclair, 2016). To develop a cultural identity, it is vital to explore all aspects of one's identity, including the level of cultural socialization experiences transracial or international adoptees have had with their heritage and home cultures. Exposure to the customs, events, and food of their home culture helps to develop their cultural identity and has been found to be related to fewer behavioural and adjustment problems for adoptees in their adolescent years (Baden, 2015; Basow et al., 2008; Ferrari et al., 2015; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022; Whitten & Weaver, 2010). Having a strong cultural identity helps minorities develop positive self-esteem and protects against negative stereotypes about people of their cultural background, which transracial adoptees have reported struggling with (Basow et al., 2008; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022;).

Transracial or international adoptees have been found to struggle more than other adoptees with their identity and discrimination experiences (Baden et al., 2013; Fisher, 2003; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022; ter Meulen et al., 2019), and were noted to experience higher levels of insecure attachment to their adoptive parents than their non-adopted peers (Brodzinsky, 1987). A common reason for these struggles is that these adoptees are more visibly dissimilar to their adoptive families, often due to their ethnicity and skin colour

(Baden, 2016; Baden et al., 2013; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Hollingsworth, 1998). Indeed, transracial adoptees have been found to feel more satisfied with their adoptions when they physically look more similar to their adoptive families (Hollingsworth, 1998). One study reported that over half of transracial adoptees who expressed discomfort surrounding their appearance had moderate to serious adjustment problems when compared with transracial adoptees who did not have discomfort, illustrating the importance of the adoptee's attitudes towards their own appearance and dissimilarity from their adoptive family (Hollingsworth, 1998). To address this dissimilarity, transracial adoptees often search for their birth families, motivated to know what their parents physically look like so they may compare their image to someone else and be able to pick out similarities (Baden et al., 2013; Hollingsworth, 1998). In addition, transracial adoptees will often engage in searches to develop their sense of ethnic identity, either through searches for birth parents or searches for ways to engage with their culture and community of origin (Baden et al, 2013; Hollingsworth, 1998; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022;).

Racial and Cultural Identity Development

Racial Cultural Identity Development Theory posits that members of racial/ethnic minority groups move through five stages of relation to their heritage and the dominant culture: conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and integrative awareness (Sue & Sue, 2016). The first stage, *conformity*, refers to when ethnic minorities believe in the superiority of the dominant culture and reject their own heritage culture based on what they take in from their exposure to other people around them and their life situation (Sue & Sue, 2016). Entry into *Dissonance,* the second stage, occurs when they personally encounter an event or situation that challenges their understanding of the dominant group in society and their own

group membership. For example, a child or adolescent may encounter an instance of racism or a racial slur made about them by a peer from the dominant group, which leads them to question whether they can blend in or fit in with the dominant group, be accepted by them, and whether the dominant culture is really superior to their own heritage culture (Sue & Sue, 2016). It is during this stage that ethnic minorities may begin to struggle with mental health concerns and turn to psychotherapists for assistance.

The third stage, *resistance and immersion*, refers to when the dominant group is rejected and society's racism and oppression are blamed as the sole cause of psychological problems (Sue & Sue, 2016). Once people have moved to the fourth stage, *introspection*, ethnic minorities turn their focus inwards as they struggle between their need to identify with their heritage culture and their need to express their personal freedom to differ from it and carve out their own identity as an individual within a cultural milieu (Sue & Sue, 2016). In the final stage of cultural identity development, a point of *integrative awareness* may emerge, where minorities develop a sense of security in their personal, cultural, and ethnic identity that is based on a balance between pride in their heritage culture and selective engagement and appreciation of the dominant culture around them (Sue & Sue, 2016). While this Racial Cultural Identity Development model has been widely used to better understand the general process of identity development for ethnic minorities (Sue & Sue, 2016), it can be criticized for use with transracial adoptees because it assumes a homogeneity of race between the parents and the child within a family (Baden, 2002; Baden & Steward, 2000).

The Cultural-Racial Identity Model was specifically developed for use with transracial adoptees and takes into consideration the adoptee's degree of identification with both their own cultural and racial identities as well as their parents' cultural and racial identities (Baden, 2002;

Baden & Steward, 2000). This model describes an adoptee's degree of identification with a culture as their level of "knowledge, awareness, competence, and comfort with either or both the culture of their own racial group, their parents' racial group, or multiple racial groups" (Baden & Steward, 2000, pp. 16).

The Cultural-Racial Identity Model is broken into a Cultural-Identity Axis and a Racial-Identity Axis (Baden, 2002; Baden & Steward, 2000). These are further broken down into the adoptee's degree of identification with either their own, or their parent's, culture and race. Within both the cultural and racial axis, an adoptee's identity can be categorized as either (a) Bicultural, (b) Pro-Self, (c) Pro-Parent, or (d) Culturally Undifferentiated (Baden & Steward, 2000). Considering that adoptees can have any one of these four identities within their own race and culture, as well as their parents' race and culture, the Cultural-Racial Identity Model has a resulting 16 identity descriptions that can be used to describe transracial adoptee identities (Baden, 2002; Baden & Steward, 2000). Indeed, this model has been found to be successful at picking up subtle differences in transracial adoptees' ethnic identities, indicating that it is effective for use with this population (Baden, 2002). The list of possible identities that the Cultural-Racial Identity Model proposes is quite long due to its accommodation of the multiple factors at play in transracial adoptee identity development, further highlighting how complex this process is (see Table 1). One of the major drawbacks of this model is that it was only designed to categorize transracial adoptees into these identity quadrants and does not explore how they deal with these issues or overcome these identity challenges to move towards more positive identities.

Table 1.

	Pro-Self Racial Identity	**Racially Undifferentiated Identity**	**Biracial Identity**	**Pro-Parent Racial Identity**
Pro-Self Cultural Identity	Pro-Self Cultural – Pro-Self Racial Identity	Pro-Self Cultural – Racially Undifferentiated Identity	Pro-Self Cultural – Biracial Identity	Pro-Self Cultural – Pro-Parent Racial Identity
Culturally Undifferentiated Identity	Culturally Undifferentiated – Pro-Self Racial Identity	Culturally Undifferentiated – Racially Undifferentiated Identity	Culturally Undifferentiated – Biracial Identity	Culturally Undifferentiated – Pro-Parent Racial Identity
Bicultural Identity	Bicultural – Pro-Self Racial Identity	Bicultural – Racially Undifferentiated Identity	Bicultural – Biracial Identity	Bicultural – Pro-Parent Racial Identity
Pro-Parent Cultural Identity	Pro-Parent Cultural – Pro-Self Racial Identity	Pro-Parent Cultural – Racially Undifferentiated Identity	Pro-Parent Cultural – Biracial Identity	Pro-Parent Cultural – Pro-Parent Racial Identity

Transracial adoptees experience many unique challenges, both as ethnic minorities as well as adoptees, making it important to explore the interaction of these identities more closely. As described above, they have a very complicated identity development process due to having to navigate their own racial and cultural heritage as well as their parents' racial and cultural heritage, while being situated within the dominant North American culture (Baden & Steward, 2000; Ferrari et al., 2015; Higgins & Stoker, 2011; Samuels, 2009). Transracial adoptees may struggle with the fact that they identify with both their own and their parents' cultures but still feel detached from both of them (Baden et al., 2013). This struggle is often fueled by societal perceptions and confusion regarding their ethnic minority status within an often culturally privileged, Caucasian adoptive family (Baden, 2016; Baden et al., 2013). On top of these culture- and racially-based identity struggles, transracial adoptees have to navigate their status as an

adopted person and all the accompanying identity-related concerns associated with this identity (Baden, 2015; 2016; Baden et al., 2012; Baden et al., 2013)

In addition to having a complicated identity development process, transracial adoptees have to navigate stigma and discrimination directed at both their ethnic minority and their adoptee identities (Baden, 2016; Baden et al., 2013; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022;). Indeed, across a number of studies up to 80% of international adoptees report experiencing discrimination and racism regarding their physical appearance (Baden et al., 2013). Given that transracial adoptee families are often composed of Caucasian adoptive parents and non-Caucasian adoptees, these adoptees' statuses as both ethnic minorities and adopted persons are always visible, putting them at more risk for experiencing microaggressions than their racially homogenous adoptive family counterparts (Baden, 2016; Baden et al., 2013; Baden & Steward, 2000; Baden et al., 2012; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022; Young, 2012). This is in stark contrast to the experiences of other adopted people, who are often, though not always, able to hide their adopted status and choose when to disclose this information to others (Baden, 2016).

Ethnic Minority Adoptee Microaggressions

As aforementioned, people with a minority status of any kind may experience microaggressions. Microaggressions towards ethnic minorities may take any of three forms: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (Baden, 2016; Garber, 2020; Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Sue, 2010a, 2010b, 2019; Sue et al., 2019; Wiley, 2017). *Microassaults* are the only conscious forms of racial microaggressions and may include direct verbal or physical actions, such as name-calling or racial slurs, avoidance or social exclusion of a minority from a peer or social group, or overt discrimination in hiring or

promotion based on minority status (Sue, 2010a, 2010b, 2019; Sue et al., 2019). For example, an African female youth looking to work part-time in retail while finishing high school may be overlooked for a customer service position due to her appearance and “big hair”. Another form of microassault is environmental omission, or the exclusion of any representation of minority identities in the school, work, social, or community environments in which people are engaged (Sue, 2010a, 2019; Sue et al., 2019). For example, a transracial adoptee may be attending a school where all the pictures in the hallways are of former Caucasian principals of the school, and the artwork, toys, and other artifacts in the classroom may not reflect the cultural diversity of the child as a minority student. *Microinsults* are unconscious remarks or behaviours that are insensitive or convey stereotypes that demean a person’s identity. They include: (a) pathologizing cultural values or communication styles (e.g., assuming all Africans are too aggressive and all Asians are too passive, or that specific minority groups are too family-oriented versus independent); (b) assuming that members of specific groups, such as the Chinese, are especially smart, and constantly going to them for help, enacting the model minority stereotype; (c) making comments that suggest that members of minority groups represent the criminal element in society; and (d) treating minorities as second class citizens by serving them last in restaurants or other venues, or choosing them last for group work or teams (Docan-Morgan, 2010; Sue, 2010a, 2010b, 2019; Sue et al., 2019).

The third form of microaggressions, *microinvalidations*, are the most damaging form of microaggressions because in addition to happening unconsciously, they deny the lived experience of these marginalized groups by negating or nullifying their thoughts or feelings (Sue, 2010a, 2010b, 2019; Sue et al., 2019). Microinvalidations may include color blindness, assertions that a person’s minority status has little influence over their life successes, and denial

of the existence of prejudicial beliefs. Microinvalidations can also include making people feel like aliens in their own land, such as by asking racial minorities who are born in North America where they are from, suggesting that they cannot possibly be a real American or a real Canadian (Sue, 2010a, 2010b, 2019; Sue et al., 2019).

For transracial adoptees, their microaggression experiences often include both microaggressions based on their ethnic minority status and microaggressions based on their adoptee status, creating a multi-layered experience of discrimination and stigma (Baden, 2016; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Garber, 2020; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020). For example, someone telling a transracial adoptee that they are lucky to be adopted internationally because they will be better off in North America would be considered a microaggression (Baden, 2016; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020). In another example of a microaggression against transracial adoptees, someone may suggest that transracial birth parents were more likely to be poor or have drug-related issues than they would be if the adoptee was Caucasian, highlighting their internal prejudice against ethnic minorities (Docan-Morgan, 2010). Microaggressions against transracial adoptees have also been noted to come from people who share their ethnic and cultural heritage (Baden et al., 2013). Indeed, research indicates that transracial adoptees are often rejected by people who share their ethnic and cultural heritage as a result of being raised by families and parents that are usually part of the dominant, privileged culture (Baden et al., 2013; Higgins & Stoker, 2011;). All of these examples illustrate how transracial adoptees have to navigate multiple layers of discrimination and stigma.

Factors Impacting Adoptees

In addition to the minority-specific barriers and struggles facing LGBTQ+ adoptive families and those adopted into these families, adoptees in general have unique and often

complex experiences and developmental trajectories, which will now be reviewed in more detail. Many different aspects of adoptive families can have an effect on adoptees, including single versus couple parenting, whether there were previous children, having same-sex parents, having other adopted children, socioeconomic status, and willingness to discuss the adoption (Barth & Miller, 2000; Oke et al., 2015). Adoption disruptions occur when the adoption process ends after the child has been placed in a home but before the adoption is legalized, as the first few weeks of the child's placement in a home are treated as a trial to see how they will fit with their new family (Barth & Miller, 2000). Disruptions can occur either when parents decide to give the child back to the adoption organization, or when social workers decide to remove the child because they do not feel that there is a good fit between the adoptive parents and child (Barth & Miller, 2000). Disruptions are more likely to occur when adoptive families have no previous adoption or foster care experience and when parents, specifically mothers, have higher education, as these parents are suggested to be more likely to give the child back because they are not what the parents ideally wanted (Barth & Miller, 2000).

Adoptees who are adopted by stepparents have been found to have fewer identity-related struggles then adoptees who are not with any biological parents (Grotevant et al., 2000). Family factors that are related to more positive adoptee outcomes are lower levels of family stress, positive family functioning, open and honest communication about adoption, and a more equal ratio of parents to children (Wood, 2012). There are mixed findings in the research regarding the impact of parental age at the time of adoption, or whether younger or older parents have more well-adjusted adopted children (Barth & Miller, 2000). Similarly, there are mixed findings about the effects of the level of openness of the adoption and the amount of contact between adoptees and their birth families on the adoptees' adjustment and well-being in their adoptive families

(Simon & Farr, 2021, 2022; Wood, 2012), suggesting that either open or closed adoptions could yield well-adjusted children in a supportive environment.

Disruption rates in adoption are lower than the disruption rates of guardianship and long-term foster care placements, reflecting the relative stability of many adoption placements (Barth & Miller, 2000). However, some factors, such as special needs, can alter this level of stability, with 10%-16% of special needs adopted children having a disrupted adoption (Barth & Miller, 2000). Other factors that complicate the adoption and increase the likelihood of disruption are when two or three siblings are adopted together and adoptive families need to become accustomed to numerous new children at once, when adoptees had experienced previous physical or emotional abuse that may result in higher levels of misbehaviour and insecure attachment, and when adoptees are older - as with each year an adoptee ages, the likelihood of disruption increases by 6% (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2012). Despite the fact that only 66% of adoptive parents of children who experienced prenatal drug exposure felt satisfied with the adoption, over 90% of them said that if they were given the chance, they would go through with the adoption all over again (Barth & Miller, 2000). This suggests that despite the struggles the adoptive families had to go through to complete the adoption and bond with the child, these experiences were worth it to create the family they have today.

Adoptee Development

It is important to acknowledge that being an adoptee is an assigned identity, much like sexual orientation and ethnicity (Grotevant et al., 2000), where that aspect of the individual's identity was not their choice. This is in contrast to aspects such as gender presentation or pursued hobbies, which are actively chosen aspects of identity. Identity can be seen as an ongoing negotiation between one's core sense of self and their contexts (Grotevant et al., 2000), as

context often dictates which aspects of one's identity are safe to share and explore at any given time.

Grotevant et al. (2000) posited that there are three contexts in which adoptees develop their sense of identity: intrapsychic, relational contexts within families, and contexts beyond the family. *Intrapsychic* contexts refer to the individual's cognitions and emotions related to being adopted. *Relational contexts within families* refer to the interpersonal interactions within the adoptive family, such as their openness to discuss the birth family and adoption, willingness to acknowledge differences, and ability to have a respectful healthy relationship with the birth family, among others. *Contexts beyond the family* refer to interpersonal or social interactions in the family's neighborhood, wider community, or institutions with which they engage that can influence the adoptee's identity development, such as experiencing discrimination against adoptive families by community or church members. This last aspect of adoptee identity development becomes increasingly important in transracial adoptions, as cultural differences and others questioning the identity of the family become central concerns (Baden, 2016; Baden eta l., 2013; Baden & Steward, 2000; Fisher, 2003; Samuels, 2009). Within all three of these contexts, adoptees are continually striving to create and understand their own identity.

When discussing adoptee development, it is imperative to acknowledge the importance of the adoptee's increasing level of awareness and understanding about their adoption as they age (Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Dunbar, 2003; LeVine & Salle, 1990; McConnachie et al., 2021; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019; Neil, 2012; Oke et al., 2015). Adoptees begin in a state of pre-awareness, where they are not yet aware of their adoptee status, and move into a dim awareness of their special state, where they begin to talk about feeling different or expressing confusion about their past and present homes (Dunbar, 2003; LeVine & Salle, 1990; Messina &

Brodzinsky, 2019;). Adoptees then begin to cognitively explore their biological and social differences, which can be seen in activities such as increased questioning about one's birth family, or feelings of wanting to search for birthparents (Dunbar, 2003; Koh et al., 2017; Henze-Pedersen, 2019; LeVine & Salle, 1990; McConnachie et al., 2021; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019; Nelson, 2018; Wrobel & Grotevant, 2019). Throughout adolescence, this desire may turn into active searching for one's birth family, and adoptees at this stage often struggle with their sense of identity (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Koh et al., 2017; Krueger & Hanna, 1997; Henze-Pedersen, 2019; McConnachie et al., 2021; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019; Porch, 2007; Wrobel & Grotevant, 2019). Ideally, adoptees will be able to develop a sense of peace and acceptance of their adoptive and birth family situations and develop into healthy and happy adults. Unfortunately, some adoptees are unable to reconcile their feelings, and these lingering concerns may manifest as personal, social, and relationship challenges in adulthood (LeVine & Salle, 1990).

Psychological Concerns

There is a large body of research on the possible negative psychological impact of adoption on adoptees, and "adopted child pathology" and "adopted syndrome" were commonly cited terms in the 1970's (Hoksbergen et al., 2003). John Bowlby, known for his work in attachment theory, was the first to suggest that disruption of a child or baby's relationship with their initial caregivers would cause significant distress, leading to maladjustment (Brodzinsky, 1987; Sellinger, 2016), and this proposition was widely supported (DeLurgio, 2019; Fitzhardinge, 2008; Hawk & McCall, 2014; Sass & Henderson, 2000; Sinclair, 2016). Many early studies showed disproportionately high numbers of adoptees at or near the clinical range for behavioural disorders (Barth & Miller, 2000), psychiatric problems (Fisher, 2003; Jones,

1997), and in inpatient clinical populations (Jones, 1997; Sass & Henderson, 2000), as compared with their non-adopted peers, giving rise to extensive research on the "adopted child pathology".

Research has shown that adoptees seem to struggle disproportionately with a variety of externalizing disorders, such as Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, conduct disorders, and antisocial behaviours (Baden, 2015; Balenzano et al., 2018; Barth & Miller, 2000; Brown et al., 2019; McConnachie et al., 2021). Also, one study found that internationally adopted children meet criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder, related to traumatic separation from their birth mothers and the subsequent culture shock of migration to a foreign country and facing experiences of racism and discrimination (Hoksbergen et al., 2003). Adoptees have also been found to struggle with the following psychological issues: feelings of grief and loss (Atkinson, 2020; Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Baden & Wiley, 2007; Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Jones, 1997; McConnachie et al., 2021; Sass & Henderson, 2000; ter Meulen et al., 2019), separation/abandonment fears (Atkinson, 2020; Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Baden & Wiley, 2007; Jones, 1997; Sass & Henderson, 2000), difficulties with trust and associated fear of betrayal (Jones, 1997; Sass & Henderson, 2000), rejection sensitivity (Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Baden & Wiley, 2007; Jones, 1997; Jordan & Dempsey, 2013; Sass & Henderson, 2000), identity confusion (Atkinson, 2020; Baden & Wiley, 2007; Jones, 1997; Sass & Henderson, 2000; ter Meulen et al., 2019), interpersonal relationship challenges (Atkinson, 2020; Baden & Wiley, 2007; Sass & Henderson, 2000), suicidality (Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Jordan & Dempsey, 2013), and body image concerns (Baden & Wiley, 2007).

After identifying the psychological issues being reported in this population, researchers began to focus their attention on the possible factors that could be contributing to these issues. Commonly cited contributing factors are inheritance of genetic traits like bipolar disorder

(Fisher, 2003; LeVine & Salle, 1990; Towse et al., 2019), long-term or negative foster care experience, such as abuse (Fisher, 2003; Hoksbergen et al., 2003; ter Meulen et al., 2019; Towse et al., 2019; Whitten & Weaver, 2010), poor pre-natal care (Fisher, 2003; LeVine & Salle, 1990; Towse et al., 2019), and alcohol exposure (Fisher, 2003; LeVine & Salle, 1990; Towse et al., 2019), with mixed findings on whether open adoptions are better or worse for adoptee development (Balenzano et al., 2018; Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Farr et al., 2014; Feeney & Passmore, 2007; Wolfgram, 2008). Adoptive family dynamics can also have a large effect on an adoptee's level of negative adjustment, with adjustment difficulties occurring more often when adoptive parents are older, the adoptee is an only child, when the extended family does not support the adoption, or when there is general strife within the family (LeVine & Salle, 1990). It has even been proposed that some adoptive parents may be struggling to reconcile emotions about their infertility, which can translate into intimacy and attachment issues with their adopted child (Sass & Henderson, 2000). Therefore, it appears that any personal problems or challenges adoptees face may be directly related to a combination of their pre-adoption contexts in terms of their birth family characteristics, the characteristics of their adoptive families, and their own unique characteristics and positioning within the adoptive families.

One of the most important research findings in relation to characteristics of adoptees is that the age of the adoptee is significantly related to their post-adoption adjustment and identity formation process (Balenzano et al., 2018; Barth & Miller, 2000; Decker & Omori, 2009; Feigelman, 1997; Fisher, 2003; Oke et al., 2015; Tasker & Bellamy, 2019; Whitten & Weaver, 2010). In particular, all of the above stated adoption-related issues and concerns have been found to be most prominent during the identity formation stages of development in adolescence, and then tend to dissipate during adulthood (Balenzano et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2019; Fisher, 2003;

Fitzhardinge, 2008; Holmgren & Elovainio, 2019; Jordan & Dempsey, 2013; Oke et al., 2015; ter Meulen et al., 2019; Whitten & Weaver, 2010). This is echoed in LeVine and Salle's (1990) phases of adoption adjustment, which acknowledges that if adolescents do not come to a state of acceptance regarding their adoptive and birth families, their unreconciled feelings will manifest as personal, social, and relationship issues in adulthood. This becomes extremely important when addressing research supporting the "adopted syndrome", as much of this research may be over-generalizing their findings from adolescents to adoptees of all ages. Furthermore, the age-related findings just discussed suggest that many of the psychological, social, and personal challenges adoptees may experience may be transient, and if counsellors can provide the right supports and interventions, adoptees can grow into happy, healthy, and well-adjusted adults.

Overpathologization

Many of the studies conducted on adoptees have been done from the lens of psychopathology, failing to attend to signs of resilience among this group (Wiley, 2017). Much of the research that pathologizes adoptees is misleading, as it tends to focus on a select population of adoptees with clinical issues at a particular age and then generalizes findings to all adoptees of all ages (Gianino, Goldberg, & Lewis, 2009; Wegar, 1995). A number of methodological concerns with the studies pathologizing adoptees have also been identified, such as small or selective sample sizes, failing to differentiate between related and non-related adoptees, and failure to control for important factors like age of placement, pre-placement history, socio-economic status, and family composition (Brodzinsky, 1987; Manning et al., 2014; Miller et al., 2000). These concerns call into question both the validity and generalizability of many of the research studies cited in the previous section.

Adoptee over-representation in therapy was noted as early as 1943 (Post, 2000), but more recent research indicates that most adoptees are actually very well-adjusted (Borders et al., 2000; Brown et al., 2019; Feeney & Passmore, 2007; Whitten & Weaver, 2010). There is a greater amount of variability on psychosocial well-being measures within adopted as compared with non-adopted groups, so adoptees as a whole may be consequently categorized as experiencing disproportionate levels of poor well-being (Feeney & Passmore, 2007). Interestingly, adoptees at the tail end of distributions are more likely to receive therapy than those who have less extreme symptoms, which further skews the statistics in over-pathologizing the adoptee population (Miller et al., 2000).

Another important factor in why adoptees are being over-represented as experiencing psychopathology relates to their adoptive parents. Adoptive parents tend to have higher education, have higher than average income, and be more involved in human services and the care of their adopted children (Barth & Miller, 2000; Feigelman, 1997; Koh et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2000; Weistra & Luke, 2017). These characteristics may lead to an informant bias, where parents rate their children more negatively as a result of either their knowledge about the likelihood of behavioural issues or their extreme diligence about monitoring their child's adjustment on all domains (Barth & Miller, 2000). Indeed, adoptive parents have been found to rate their adopted children higher on Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder symptoms, Oppositional Defiant Disorder symptoms, and the Behaviour Problem Index than parents of non-adopted children, illustrating the effects of possible informant bias (Barth & Miller, 2000). This is an important factor to consider when examining studies where parents are rating their children's behaviours or symptoms, such as in Hoksbergen et al.'s (2003) study claiming that international adoptees experience symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Not only are

adoptive parents more willing and able to access social services than other parents, but they also tend to rate their children more extremely than parents of non-adopted children due to their increased levels of vigilance about being a good parent (Miller et al., 2000).

Three quarters of adopted children do not need clinical intervention for social, emotional, behavioural, or identity problems, as only a minority of them actually manifest clinically significant symptoms (Brodzinsky, 1987; Fisher, 2003). Most adoptees fall within normal ranges for socioemotional and behavioural adjustment, with those who do not showing extreme symptoms (Fisher, 2003). It has been suggested that adopted children may be more prone to developing externalizing disorders, but that other genetic, pre-natal, psychosocial, and societal factors contribute to whether or not adoptees actually develop these disorders (Baden, 2015; Brodzinsky, 1987; Miller et al., 2000; Wegar, 1995; Soares, Barbosa-Ducharne, Palacios, & Fonseca, 2017; Towse, Cooper, & John-Legere, 2019). Historically, adoptee pathology has been partially attributed to adoptive mothers treating their adopted children differently and thus influencing their development and behaviours. However, this narrow focus does not address how these issues may stem from societal pressures (Wegar, 1995). Societal factors such as stigma, disparaging attitudes, and discrimination are more important than biological factors in the development of adoptee psychopathology (Brodzinsky, 1987; Soares et al., 2017).

Recent research suggests that adoptee problems in childhood do not persist into adulthood, so it is important to examine studies that have looked at young adult adoptees, and such studies are relatively scarce in current academic literature (Brown et al., 2019; Borders et al., 2000; Holmgren & Elovainio, 2019; Oke et al., 2015; ter Meulen et al., 2019; Whitten & Weaver, 2010). In one such study that compared young adult adoptees with young adults from stepfamilies and biological families, Feigelman (1997) found that adoptees have overall lower

levels of life problems. He also found that when compared with young adults who grew up in stepfamilies or with single parents, adoptees had lower levels of recent drug use and depression, and higher levels of educational attainment, employment, earnings, and assets, a finding that continues to be supported in more recent research (Decker & Omori, 2009). Interestingly, another study has also reported that adoptees who grew up in two-parent homes showed no significant differences when compared with their non-adopted peers on levels of emotional distress, physical well-being, and engagement in negative behaviours like smoking and drinking (Miller et al., 2000). In a comparison of twins where one was adopted and the other remained with the biological parents, the adopted twin was found to achieve a higher level of education and to have lower frequencies of consuming alcohol or engaging in addictive behaviours, further supporting the assertion that adoptees do not always fare worse than non-adopted children (Borders et al., 2000).

Indeed, adoptees have been found to be more resilient than people who grew up in stepfamilies and single-parent families, as they are better able to bounce back and become well-adjusted adults after engaging in misbehaviours in their adolescence or experiencing early adversity (Brown et al., 2019; Feigelman, 1997; ter Meulen et al., 2019; Whitton & Weaver, 2017). Adolescent adoptees were found to have higher levels of delinquent behaviours and drug use than adolescents from intact nuclear families, however adult adoptees were found to have similar levels of adjustment as adults from intact nuclear families (Feigelman, 1997; Oke et al., 2015; ter Meulen et al., 2019; Whitten & Weaver, 2010). Reasons for this resiliency can only be speculated upon as current research has not examined this phenomenon in detail, although some research suggests that it is the experience of being in a supportive adoptive family and positive relationships with their adoptive siblings that contributes to this resiliency (Domínguez et al.,

2015; Farr, Flood, & Grotevant, 2016; Whitton & Weaver, 2017; Wiley, 2017). In addition, it has been suggested that adoptees are more resilient as a result of their parent's overall higher levels of education, access to social services, and experiences of having to prove they know how to be good parents during the adoption process (Brown et al., 2019; Feigelman, 1997; Fisher, 2003; Fitzhardinge, 2008; Whitten & Weaver, 2010).

While it is extremely important to acknowledge the resilience of adoptees, it is a mistake to conclude that adoptees do not have disproportionate struggles with certain issues. Examining studies that take into account the validity concerns of previous research, such as exclusively studying adolescent adoptees, is the key to unearthing the truths and biases buried within previous over-generalizing research. This will allow for the clarification of what is actually occurring within this population, such as in Feeney and Passmore's (2007) finding that adoptees do not disproportionately struggle in romantic relationships, but instead struggle generally with successfully connecting with others, and have a lack of confidence that others will not be hurtful. Another study showed that when comparing adult adoptees with their similarly aged friends, they had similar views of their lives, sensitivity to rejection, marriage satisfaction, and risk-taking behaviours (Borders et al., 2000). They differed in that adoptees had higher levels of depression, lower levels of self-esteem, and were less likely to have secure attachments, pointing to a few specific areas of interest (Borders et al., 2000). Feeney and Passmore (2007) reported a similar finding in that adoptees are less likely than their peers to have secure attachments, instead having higher rates of avoidance/anxiety and fearful attachments. By removing the pathologizing lens and being willing to acknowledge the validity concerns of previous research, it becomes possible for future research to more effectively identify and address the psychological struggles adoptees may be facing.

Universal Adoptee Concerns

I parked my car in a crowded parking lot at a high school across the city that I had never been to before and quietly watched as various families ushered their chatty pre-teen daughters into the school. I was here to watch my two half-sisters, with whom I shared a birth mother, play in their competitive basketball league. I didn't have much of a relationship with them when they were younger, so when they asked if I would come watch them at their basketball tournament over the weekend I was elated. I wanted nothing more than to get to know these girls and was excited to see that the sentiment went both ways.

I was about to get out of my vehicle when I saw the familiar over-large SUV rumbling down the parking lot in search of a place to park. I watched as my birth mother carefully selected a parking stall and worked to inch her vehicle in and out of the stall, turning it ever so slightly with each pass until she had expertly parked her massive vehicle in the small city car stall. I watched as my birth mother and two half-sisters got out of the vehicle, hauling duffel bags full of basketball uniforms and runners. They were all laughing at a joke, cracked by the youngest one, and all seemed to be talking at once without ever missing a beat with each other. I watched the three of them walk into the high school together, seeming every bit like a well-oiled machine, and couldn't help but wonder how my life might have looked, had by birth mother not given me up for adoption.

There are several universal adoptee concerns that may arise at different points in time for different adoptees, and that can occur without any associated behavioural problems or adjustment problems in the adopted family (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Wiley, 2017). The most salient concerns for adoptees include loss and grief, identity struggles, searching for birthparents and adoption-related microaggressions or insults. The remainder of this section will further describe research on each of these concerns, as it is very important for mental health professionals to understand them and be able to openly discuss them with adoptees who indicate they are struggling in these areas. As will become clear from the sections below, embedded among these concerns is a struggle to gain control over one's life, as well as repeated attempts to regulate one's emotions related to being adopted and respond to other peoples' perceptions of the adoption (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Wiley, 2017).

Loss and Grief

Most adoptees will experience feelings of loss and grief associated with their adoption if they are made aware of their adoptee status (Atkinson, 2020; Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Koh et al., 2017; Porch, 2007; ter Meulen et al., 2019). The feelings of loss are related to the birth family they may never know, the different life they may have had if they had remained with them, and the loss of their personal identity as a member of their family of origin. These feelings of loss give way to grief as the adoptee tries to reconcile these losses and work through them. The inability to reconcile these feelings is what some researchers point to as a potential source of maladjustment, which may be manifested in attachment challenges (Balenzano et al., 2018; Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; DeLurgio, 2019) and difficulty coping in adolescence and adulthood (Curtis & Pearson, 2010). It is important to acknowledge that grieving is a healthy and normal reaction to the experience of loss. However, adoptees who are struggling disproportionately with this process may benefit from receiving support to engage in the exploration and expression of emotions related to their adoption status and learn healthy coping strategies.

Identity Struggles

One of the most widely cited findings in the academic literature on adoption is that adoptees often experience difficulties in their identity development process, including identity confusion or identity crises (Atkinson, 2020; Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Krueger & Hanna, 1997; Henze-Pedersen, 2019; Oke et al., 2015; Porch, 2007; ter Meulen et al., 2019). Continuity in one's life has been found to be extremely important for the development of identity, and adoptees are confronted with discontinuities in their existence without any factor remaining constant from their pre-adoption status to their post-adoption status, with the exception of an

open adoption with consistent contact with one's birth parents (Krueger & Hanna, 1997). Adoptees who find out that they are adopted later in life experience a disruption in the foundation of the identity they currently hold for themselves, and adoptees that know they are adopted from a young age experience difficulty in constructing an identity for themselves due to knowing that an important part of who they are is missing. This difficulty of forming a personal identity among the latter group due to missing information is commonly referred to as "genealogical bewilderment" (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Leighton, 2012; Nelson, 2018). Some adoptees may construct a false sense of familial identity, for example, by rejecting the notion that they are adopted, simply to feel like they truly belong (Krueger & Hanna, 1997).

From a resilience perspective, the unique actions and behaviours any adoptee engages in to increase their sense of belonging in the adoptive family or to promote their own survival and coping within that setting can be perceived to be in the interest of completing their sense of identity (Kraus, 1982). The same can be said of behaviours such as searching for birthparents or misbehaving to test the love and strength of their adoptive family (Kraus, 1982). For example, if adoptive parents react with care and concern to an adoptee's test of their love, this can lead to positive outcomes, such as increasing the adoptee's sense of trust in their adoptive parents and stronger attachment bonds (Balenzano et al., 2018). In sum, viewing such behaviours as meaning-making activities for the purpose of developing an identity within the adoptive family may be much more useful than framing them as problem behaviours or adjustment challenges.

There are many factors that could potentially have an effect on adoptee identity development, such as race, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation/identity, and life transitions, among others (Dunbar, 2003; ter Meulen et al., 2019). Normative life transitions, such as becoming independent from one's parents and starting one's own family, are important

life events that may give rise to identity issues among adoptees. These events are pivotal moments that revolve around one's constructed sense of self, which is often under-developed or questioned among adoptees. Particularly, closed adoptions pose clear barriers to adoptees' identity formation, as adoptees have little to no information about their birthparents in these arrangements (Dunbar, 2003). In contrast, open adoptions provide adoptees with contact and information on their birthparents, which could assist them in becoming knowledgeable about their origins and will likely become more important to them as they go through key life transitions.

As aforementioned, adoptees often work through three different contexts of development – intrapsychic, relational contexts within families, and contexts beyond the family (Grotevant et al., 2000). Considering that identity is a negotiation between one's core self and their context, the identity development process is often at work in each of these contexts (Grotevant et al., 2000). In the intrapsychic context, adoptees are attempting to process all the cognitions and emotions associated with their adoption, while trying to construct their identity (Grotevant et al., 2000), and a lack of understanding of why one's birth parents gave them away can contribute to the development of low self-esteem (Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Curtis & Pearson, 2010). In the relational contexts within the family, adoptees are trying to make sense of their role as an adopted child in their current family, while simultaneously struggling with the unknown aspects of their identity that come from their birth family. Within the contexts beyond the family, adoptees are trying to construct their identity in terms of social expectations, stigma surrounding adoption and adoptees, and cultural differences (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010; Grotevant et al., 2000; Krueger & Hanna, 1997; Oke et al., 2015; Porch, 2007; ter Meulen et al., 2019). The influence of these social contexts is especially salient when it

comes to transracial adoptees, who experience additional discrimination and questioning of their place in their adoptive family of differing ethnicity (Baden, 2016; Baden et al., 2013; Fisher, 2003; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Hollingsworth, 1998).

It is important to remember that adoption is considered to be an assigned identity, meaning that the adoptee did not choose this aspect of themselves, but will still need to incorporate it into their own sense of personal identity (Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010; Grotevant et al., 2000). Adoptees are often expected to accept without question these decisions that were made on their behalf before they were capable of understanding what was occurring, and they are often expected to simply accept the stories and/or truths they are told about both the adoptive and birth families (Krueger & Hanna, 1997). These expectations put them in an understandably difficult position to develop their own sense of personal identity. Developing an identity is a complex process for anyone, as it involves integrating many aspects together, such as self-definition, coherence of personality, and sense of continuity over time (Grotevant et al., 2000). With an unsure sense of self-definition and a lack of sense of continuity, most, if not all, adoptees encounter unique struggles with the identity development process.

Search for Birth Families

At some point in their lives, many adoptees either desire to or actively search for their birth families (Koh et al., 2017; Henze-Pedersen, 2019; Nelson, 2018; Porch, 2007; Wrobel & Grotevant, 2019). It has been suggested that adoptees move from unconscious associations or fantasies about their birth family to conscious-level ideation about searching before beginning an active search aimed at reunion (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991). Interestingly, adoptees have been found to search primarily for their birth mothers, then their birth siblings, and then their birth fathers, who seem to be viewed as an “invisible parent” by both adoptees and the research

literature (Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Feast, Kyle, & Triseliotis, 2011; Hughes, 2015; Kraus, 1982; Passmore & Chipuer, 2019; Sorosky et al., 1974). The interest in primarily finding birth mothers may be due to the fact that this is the person who carried and gave birth to the adoptee, which could be a source of a major sense of connection with her above other members of the birth family. Alternatively, adoptees may assume that their mothers had some power over their reproductive rights and decision-making, and may therefore hold their mothers accountable in explaining why they were given up for adoption. Current research has done very little to explore the reasons behind why adoptees seem to be less interested in searching for their birth fathers, with only one study suggesting that birth fathers may be: (a) more difficult to locate, or (b) more likely to be stereotyped as either sexually exploiting the mother or as a "deadbeat dad" who was not there to fulfill his fatherly responsibilities (Passmore & Chipuer, 2019).

A common misconception about adoptees who search for their birth families is that they are engaging in this search solely because they are experiencing difficulties with their adoptive family (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991). Existing research has uncovered many other reasons an adoptee may choose to search for their birth family, an important one being medical necessity or practical concerns (Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Sorosky et al., 1974; Wrobel & Grotevant, 2019). For example, an adoptee may need to know their medical history to determine whether they are at high risk for certain medical conditions. Another common reason is genealogical curiosity, or curiosity about one's biological origins, and satisfying this curiosity can facilitate the identity development process for adoptees (Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Kraus, 1982; Leighton, 2012; Nelson, 2018; Sorosky et al., 1974; Wrobel & Grotevant, 2019). Some adoptees engage in this search simply because they desire a positive relationship with their birth family (Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Sorosky et al., 1974; Wrobel & Grotevant, 2019). Further

reasons for searching may include a late revelation of the adoption, causing bewilderment and confusion, an attempt to counter loneliness or depression, a desire to replace someone lost through illness or death, or just to feel more socially accepted (Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Sorosky et al., 1974). There are clearly numerous reasons an adoptee may search. It is important for mental health professionals to understand that at the core of these reasons, it can be argued that adoptees are attempting to gain control over their own lives (Curtis & Pearson, 2010), promote their overall psychological adjustment (Kraus, 1982), or resolve existential crises (Krueger & Hanna, 1997). Therefore, from a resilience-oriented view, the search for one's birth parents can be viewed as a critical form of self-help and should be supported.

Knowing that there are such varying reasons for engaging in searching behaviour, it is interesting that research can still point to specific characteristics of adoptees who are more likely to search for their birth families. In particular, Caucasian, middle-class, female adoptees between the ages of 24 and 35 tend to search more often than males and racial minority adoptees. This age bracket of searchers coincides with key life events and transitions like marriage, pregnancy, and childbirth (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Kraus, 1982; Krueger & Hanna, 1997; Wrobel & Grotevant, 2019), where one's own identity and family history would naturally become salient. Male searchers were found to search at a later age, de-emphasize the importance of physical similarities between themselves and their family members, and see little connection between their adoptive status and their present emotional state (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991). One study found that searchers tend to have higher levels of education, as well as more stable relationships with their adoptive family than individuals who do not engage in the search for their birth parents (Curtis & Pearson, 2010). This is in contrast to earlier literature that argued that searchers are less satisfied with their adoption experience and do not have good relations

with their adoptive families (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Kraus, 1982; Sorosky et al., 1974). However, searchers have been found to report lower self-esteem, a weaker sense of identity, and higher levels of anger and chronic stress than non-searchers, suggesting that finding one's birth parents could be an important emotion regulation and identity development mechanism in helping them deal with residual effects of the adoption in their daily lives (Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Kraus, 1982).

It appears that adoptees who are struggling with reconciling their adoptive status tend to search for their birthparents, and although most adoptees do not continue to have a relationship with their birth families after finding them, the reunion itself has been found to be overwhelmingly successful for all members of the adoptive triad from the early research that has investigated reunion outcomes (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Kraus, 1982; Sorosky et al., 1974). Interestingly, adoptees who do continue to have a relationship with their birth families tend to develop this relationship with their birth siblings as opposed to the birthparents, likely due to their closer proximity in age (Curtis & Pearson, 2010). Reunions have been considered to be psychologically helpful events, because even when they do not result in positive outcomes or any ongoing contact with the birth family, adoptees report feeling more satisfied with themselves and their present lives. They also report that they do not regret their decision to meet, with 82% of adoptees feeling they had benefitted regardless of the reunion outcome (Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Sorosky et al., 1974). The benefits of meeting typically include adoptees getting some of their burning questions answered, experiencing closure with regards to their adoptions, and achieving a better understanding of their identity as adoptees (Siegel & Smith, 2012). Curtis and Pearson (2010) found that adoptees who searched for and met their birth families reported improved self-esteem, emotional well-being, and ability to relate to others than those who had not searched for

or not found their birth families. They also found that the adoptees who searched for and found their birthparents did not report any adverse effects of their meetings with them on their marriage, sexuality, relationship with their children, or educational and career goals. In contrast, there may be some concerns or consequences that arise for the birth family after meeting with the adoptee, including differing desires among family members about the frequency and nature of contact they should have with the adoptee, boundary issues, and difficulty accepting the reality of the adoption (Siegel & Smith, 2012).

It is important to understand that not all adoptees need to search for their birthparents to successfully develop their identity, so this decision should always be left up to the adoptee themselves (Wrobel & Grotevant, 2019). The research cited above describes the characteristics of those who do engage in this search, and the potential outcomes of the search for the adoptees and the birth families. Those who search report the experience of anger and chronic stress in their lives, as well as low self-esteem paired with the experience of identity development challenges. As searching tends to occur most often among females around the time of key life transitions like marriage and childbearing, it may serve an important function for the development of these adoptees in resolving issues they are facing in their current lives and in moving forward in creating families of their own.

Adoption-Related Microaggressions

> We were hosting a housewarming party and waiting for our various guests to arrive. We each had our own guests who were largely strangers to our partner – old university friends and work friends – and were excited to develop deeper relationships with each other's closest friends. We also had invited several shared guests from our high school – my partner's friends who had stayed close over the years, and who I had had very little contact with in high school. I was nervous to see them – would they still see me as the shy, awkward, nervous girl who was bullied in high school? Or would they be able to see me as the confident and accomplished woman that I have become? I could feel my self-doubting high school self beginning to surface, but with a few encouraging words from my partner, I was able to ease my concerns and put these worries to rest before our guests began to arrive.

> We were well into the swing of our housewarming party when my partner's high school friends arrived. They hugged me like old friends and were very warm and inviting. They mixed with our other friends seamlessly, and my worries seemed to have been for naught. A few hours into the party one of these friends pointed out the picture of my half-sister on the fridge with a joking "Who keeps their childhood picture on the fridge?" I laughed and told him that I was adopted and that this was my half-sister, who looks just like me. I was proud in sharing this story and this part of myself. He seemed surprised for a moment, then, regaining his composure he said, "Man, I wish I knew about that in high school – I would have teased you about that for sure! You know, the whole 'your mom doesn't love you' and all that!" And with a chuckle, he walked away, back into the busy party.

Although the use of overt words and behaviours that communicate prejudice and discrimination against groups of people tends to be discouraged in society, covert methods of communicating these biases still persist (Garber & Grotevant, 2015). Microaggressions are brief, commonplace, and subtle attempts to alienate, subjugate, or cause psychological harm to people who belong to a marginalized group (Baden, 2016; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011; Sue, 2010a, 2010b; Sue et al., 2019; Vaccaro & Koob, 2019). They are often communicated very covertly, sometimes resulting from a well-intentioned comment, and the person communicating the prejudice may be unaware that they are actually doing so as a result of people's internalized beliefs existing on a continuum of levels of awareness (Baden, 2016; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011; Sue, 2010a, 2010b; Sue et al., 2019; Vaccaro & Koob, 2019; Wiley, 2017). Microaggressions often involve an invalidation of marginalized group members' unique experiences or lived realities, assault or insults related to their identities or circumstances, or environmental omissions where their specific family types or identities are not represented in the school, work, or other contexts in which they are engaged (Baden, 2016; Sue, 2019; Sue et al., 2019; Wiley, 2017).

Within the adoption literature, a unique category of microaggressions has been identified, referred to as microfictions (Baden, 2016; Garber, 2020; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Wiley, 2017). Microfictions refer to the stories that have been fabricated about a person's adoption

experience that misrepresent the truth, which nullifies or negates the pain, loss, and challenges that are experienced by the adoptee, adoptive family, and birth family (Baden, 2016; Garber, 2020; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020). Microfictions are often created purposefully, although sometimes accidently, to withhold information from the adoptees about their adoption status, process of adoption, circumstances of the birth family, or other adoption-related concerns (Baden, 2016; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020).

Society's initial exposure to adoption is often through fictional stories communicated through fairy tales or films, such as *Stuart Little* or *The Blind Side* (Baden, 2016), or comments made by others who may or may not be informed about adoption, which creates a culture of misinformation about the real experience of adoption (Baden, 2016; Garber, 2020; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Wiley, 2017). As a result, despite the sometimes invisible status of adoptive families where the adopted children are not noticeably different from their adoptive parents, adoptees, adoptive families, and even birth families experience microaggressions based on this identity (Baden, 2016; Garber, 2020; Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Goldberg, 2014; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Wiley, 2017). The range of microaggression experiences by people who are affected by adoption tend to focus on the concept of adoption, birth and adoptive family experiences, and adoptees and the adoptee experience. Overall, most of these microaggressions occur as a result of society's overarching belief in bio-normativity, or the idea that biologically-formed families are the superior, authentic, and normal way that families should be formed, which inevitably leads to the belief that families affected by or formed through the adoption process are illegitimate, sub-par, or wrong (Baden, 2016; Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Garber, 2020; Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Goldberg, 2014; Kline et al., 2006; Russett, 2012; Nelson, 2018; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Weistra & Luke, 2017; Wiley,

2017). This common societal belief is the foundational basis for many of the following forms of microaggressions against people who have been adopted.

Many of the microaggressions that occur regarding the overall concept of adoption are based on negative portrayals of adoption in the media, television shows, films, or books (Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Kline et al., 2006; Morton & Shelton, 2019; Nelson, 2018; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Weistra & Luke, 2017; Wiley, 2017). For example, adoption is often portrayed as commerce where adoptive parents are treated as consumers and adoptees as commerce to be traded, which is extremely problematic in influencing the way the general public views adoption, adoptive families, and the adoption process (Baden, 2016; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020). As a result of the misinformation that is communicated about adoption, the general public may commit microaggressions that could have otherwise been avoided, such as: (a) having recurring confusion about what constitutes adoption and what adoption really looks like (Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Goldberg, 2014; Weistra & Luke, 2017; Wiley, 2017), (b) asking overly intrusive questions about the adoption (Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Wiley, 2017), (c) being over- or in-sensitive to the adoption through actions like assuming the topic is taboo or using language such as “real parents” (Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Goldberg, 2014; Nelson, 2018; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Wiley, 2017), (d) refusing to acknowledge a person’s adoption status when known (Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Goldberg, 2014; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Wiley, 2017), and (e) lacking representation of both adoptive and birth families in curriculum, materials, artwork or other aspects of the environment in school, work or other contexts in which adoptive families and their children may be engaged (Goldberg, 2014; Nelson, 2018; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020). Microaggressions related to adoption can be based on positive stereotypes of adoptive families as well as negative stereotypes, such as in the case of assuming that adoption is a win-win-win

situation because the adoptee gets a family, the birth parents don't have to keep their child, and the adoptive parents get to have a child (Garber, 2020; Henderson, 2002; Nelson, 2018; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020). However, Baden (2016) postulated that this point of view fails to acknowledge and is dismissing of the pain, challenges, and losses inherent in the adoption process.

Microaggressions can also occur surrounding the experiences of both birth families and adoptive families (Baden, 2016; Garber, 2020; Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Wiley, 2017). With regards to birth parents, one of the most common microaggressions is to communicate negative stereotypes about the birth parents. For example, birth parents can be seen as shameful, inadequate, impoverished, immature, or defective for putting themselves in a circumstance where they had to give up their child for adoption (Baden, 2016; Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Kline et al., 2006; Nelson, 2018; Wiley, 2017). Another microaggression surrounding birth parents is the belief that the birth parents are irrelevant after the adoption has taken place, which is commonly communicated through actions like adoptive parents claiming adopted children as their own, or sealing birth records so that adoptees do not have access to any information about their birth families (Baden, 2016; Nelson, 2018; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020).

Microaggressions directed towards adoptive families focus on the adoptive parents' reasons for adopting and their parenting abilities. Adoptive parents are often assumed to be altruistic rescuers of the children they adopt, which is a microaggression because it communicates the message that the child needed to be rescued and dismisses other important, and sometimes painful reasons that adoptive parents decide to adopt, such as infertility (Baden, 2016; Gibson, 2014; Weistra & Luke, 2017). In addition, adoptive parents are sometimes considered to be pseudo-parents as a result of bio-normative beliefs, or are considered to be

inadequate because they have deficiencies that are preventing them from conceiving children in a biological manner (Baden, 2016; Garber, 2020; Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Weistra & Luke, 2017; Wiley, 2017). With regards to adoptive parents' parenting abilities, there is a belief that if adopted children are having struggles, it is because the adoptive parents are treating them differently than they would treat their biological children, which is extremely problematic because it places all of the blame for the adoptee's struggles on the adoptive parents and does not acknowledge the myriad of other factors that might be at play (Baden, 2016; Garber, 2020).

The final area of microaggressions that can occur regarding adoption relates to the adoptees, and often occurs as a result of misinformation about the concept of adoption. The types of microaggressions specifically directed at adoptees can include publicly outing the person as being adopted, instead of respecting their privacy and desire to decide with whom they wish to share this information (Garber, 2020; Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Wiley, 2017), assuming that all adoptees are orphans or have lived in orphanages (Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Wiley, 2017), and assuming or asserting that adoptees should be grateful to their adoptive family for taking them in (Baden, 2016; Garber, 2020; Goldberg, 2014; Nelson, 2018; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020). Another common microaggression that occurs, most often as a well-intentioned comment, is to reject or question the validity of the adoptee's adoptive status through skepticism that the adoption actually happened (Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Goldberg, 2014; Wiley, 2017). Additional microaggressions that may be directed towards an adoptee include assuming they can be a spokesperson for all adopted people (Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Wiley, 2017), assuming that adoptees are dysfunctional, troubled, or abnormal (Baden, 2016; Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Goldberg, 2014; Leighton, 2012; Nelson, 2018; Wiley, 2017), and intentionally using the adoptee's status in an attempt to either hurt them or as a means to an end (Garber &

Grotevant, 2015; Wiley, 2017). For example, an adoptee's status can be used to hurt them through an angry sibling saying things like "well your real parents didn't even love you – they gave you away and that's the only reason you're in this family" or, as one of Garber and Grotevant's (2015) adoptee participants stated, "he's the one who uses the adoption stuff against me and makes up nasty stuff about it" (p. 448).

Microaggressions can be difficult to disarm because of their tendency to be hidden in daily syntax and context and communicated so subtly (Baden, 2016; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011; Sue, 2010a; Sue et al., 2019). Indeed, it is often easier for targets of prejudice to respond to more overt forms of discrimination, as the hateful or stigmatizing message is much clearer with these forms of transgressions than it is with microaggressions (Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011; Sue, 2010a; Sue et al., 2019). Sue (2010a, 2010b, 2019) and Sue et al. (2019) identified the following reasons for difficulty responding to microaggressions, which occur in conjunction with the negative effects of the various microaggressions themselves: (a) ambiguity about whether it was, in fact, a microaggression, (b) indecision about how to respond, (c) the time-limited nature of responding, (d) denying the reality of the experience, (e) diffusion of responsibility to respond, (f) believing that responding will not have an impact, and (g) fearing the consequences of responding. Given that not responding to microaggressions serves to further marginalize the targets of the transgression and enforces a context of silence around the prejudice, it is important for both targets and bystanders to respond to these microaggressions. Some recommended strategies for responding include undermining or naming the underlying message being communicated, challenging or deflecting the microaggression, educating the offender, and seeking external intervention (Sue, 2019; Sue et al., 2019). It is important to read

the context of each situation before responding, as not all of these strategies are necessarily safe to use in all situations.

Microaggressions are sometimes perceived as having minimal impact on the target, as they are not as noticeably problematic and as blatantly harmful as more overt forms of prejudice and discrimination. However, this is not the case (Sue, 2010a, 2010b). Microaggressions have major impacts on the target's life because they occur constantly, are cumulative, and serve as continuous reminders that the target is part of a group of people who are perceived to be second-class citizens (Lui & Quezada, 2019; Sue, 2019; Sue et al., 2019). Microaggressions, while often subtle, can have a myriad of negative effects on the physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural well-being of the target. Physical effects include lower measures of overall health (Lui & Quezada, 2019; Sue, 2019; Sue et al., 2019), increased susceptibility to, and occurrence of, illness (Lui & Quezada, 2019; Sue, 2010a, 2010b; Sue et al., 2019), and an overall shortened life expectancy (Lui & Quezada, 2019; Sue, 2010a). In addition, the commonplace nature of microaggressions has been found to cause cumulative stress in the target that sometimes results in trauma (Lui & Quezada, 2019; Sue, 2010b, 2019). The wide array of emotional effects of microaggressions include having an overall negative impact on the target's emotional well-being (Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Lui & Quezada, 2019; Sue, 2010a, 2010b, 2019), resulting in increased levels of adjustment issues (Sue, 2010b), low self-esteem (Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Lui & Quezada, 2019; Sue, 2010a), fatigue and exhaustion (Lui & Quezada, 2019; Sue, 2010a, 2010b), and alienation (Sue, 2010b), as well as higher levels of frustration (Lui & Quezada, 2019; Sue, 2010a), hopelessness (Sue, 2010b), rage and anger (Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Sue, 2010a, 2010b), anxiety (Lui & Quezada, 2019; Sue, 2010b), and depression (Lui & Quezada, 2019; Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Sue, 2010b, 2019).

Further, microaggressions can impact the target's cognitive functioning by activating stereotype threat, or the concern that they are conforming to stereotypical expectations around their marginalized group, which results in decreased levels of productivity and impedes learning and problem-solving abilities (Sue, 2010b, 2019). Targets who experience microaggressions are also likely to be affected behaviorally by feeling a need to simply comply with the perpetrator (Sue, 2010b), or feeling unsafe, skeptical, or hyper-vigilant (Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Sue, 2010b). Finally, microaggressions will often have a community-level impact, as they are targeting a specific marginalized group, or community, of people (Sue, 2010a). These community-level impacts occur as a result of the microaggressions helping to enforce the marginalization of these groups, and may include contributing to an overall lower standard of living or quality of life, and decreasing the group's access to education, employment, and health care (Sue, 2010a). It is important to mention that more resilient members of the marginalized group will find strength through this adversity, however this does not offset the more common detrimental impacts that microaggressions have on their targets (Lui & Quezada, 2019; Sue, 2010b).

It is important to note that people who have multiple intersecting marginalized identities, such as through being minorities based on age, race, gender, or sexual orientation, gender identity, among other identities, may experience multiple forms of microaggressions based on these identities (Baruth & Manning, 2003; Farr & Vázquez, 2020; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019; Nadal, Rivera, & Corpus, 2010; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Ross et al., 2008, 2009). The experiences of overt discrimination as well as microaggressions varies both independently and when intersecting across different marginalized groups. For example, Nadal and authors (2010) found that it is more acceptable to overtly discriminate against

LGBTQ+ people in North America than people who are part of an ethnic minority group, which suggests that LGBTQ+ people may experience less subtle forms of discrimination and microaggressions, while people who belong to an ethnic minority group will experience more subtle forms of discrimination. In another example, LGBTQ+ parents who had adopted children found that while they experienced microaggressions and discrimination from schools as a result of both their LGBTQ+ status and their adoptive family status, it was more likely to occur as a result of their LGBTQ+ identity (Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019). Given the wide array of negative impacts microaggressions have on their targets, it is important to acknowledge the combined effects of multiple layers of microaggressions that may be experienced by people who have intersecting marginalized identities. The following section examines research directly investigating the perspectives and voices of adoptees on their own experiences and adjustment to their lives and adoptive families.

Research on Adoptees' Own Perspectives on their Well-being, Functioning and Life Experiences

Most of the studies cited earlier in this proposal that were focused on children's and adolescents' functioning drew on information gathered from the parents' point of view. To gather information about current academic literature on adoptee's own points of view, a literature search was conducted that only revealed 26 accessible studies directly and exclusively eliciting the perspectives of adoptees on their own experiences of adoption over the last decade. The majority of these studies (14 studies) were studies exclusively of adults who had been adopted as children, with the age ranges of the adults in the studies most frequently spanning from middle age to late adulthood (See Baden et al., 2019; Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Farr, Flood, & Grotevant, 2016; Farr, Grant-Marsney, Musante,

Grotevant, & Wrobel, 2014; Higgins & Stoker, 2011; Hughes, 2015; Jordan & Dempsey, 2013; Larson, 2019; Lindgren & Nelson, 2014; Passmore & Chipuer, 2009; Samuels, 2009; Wydra, O'Brien, & Merson, 2012). Three additional studies on adult adoptees also included either children adoptees (Hawk & McCall, 2014), or adolescent adoptees in their samples (See Balenzano, Coppola, Cassibba, & Moro, 2018; Ferrari et al., 2015). Six studies focused on children (See Crowley, 2019; Neil, 2012; Soares, Barbosa-Ducharne, & Fonseca, 2017; Soares, Ralha, Barbosa-Ducharne, & Palacios, 2019; Vashchenko, D'Aleo, & Pinderhughes, 2012; Watson, Latter, & Bellew, 2015), and only three studies focused on the adolescent experience (See Baden, 2015; Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Garber & Grotevant, 2015).

Eight of the 26 studies were quantitative studies that utilized questionnaires or established measures of identity development, attachment security, self-esteem, psychological adjustment (e.g., depression, anxiety, grief, social functioning, behaviour, addictions), educational performance and attainment, employment status, and home ownership status to assess adoptees' self-reported well-being and life success (See Baden, 2015; Baden et al., 2019 Balenzano et al., 2018; Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Farr et al., 2016; Ferrari et al., 2015; Hawk & McCall, 2014). The sample sizes of these quantitative studies ranged from between 75 to 254 adoptees of varying racial and cultural backgrounds. Eighteen of the studies were qualitative or mixed methods studies that involved interviewing adoptees about their adoption and overall life experiences (See Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010; Crowley, 2019; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Farr et al., 2014; Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Higgins & Stoker, 2011; Hughes, 2015; Jordan & Dempsey, 2013; Larson, 2019; Lindgren & Nelson, 2014; Neil, 2012; Passmore & Chipuer, 2009; Samuels, 2009; Soares et al., 2017; Soares et al., 2019; Vashchenko et al., 2012; Watson et al., 2015; Wydra et al., 2012). The main findings of these studies directly

focusing on adoptees will be described in this section, including a critique of the existing body of literature on the voices of adoptees, which highlights the missing voices of adoptees in LGBTQ+ families.

An extremely important finding in this research review is that the majority of adoptees feel affected by their adoption in all, or most, aspects of their lives, which highlights the importance of acknowledging and researching this vital part of their identity (Baden, 2015; Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010; Lindgren & Nelson, 2014; Soares et al., 2017; Soares et al., 2019). Indeed, many factors were unearthed that were found to be related to the positive functioning and overall well-being of the adoptees, such as having an open adoption (Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Farr et al., 2014; Grotevant et al., 2008), being given the opportunity to socialize with their ethnic culture if transracial (Baden 2015; Ferrari et al., 2015; Higgins & Stoker, 2011), and being placed with an adoptive family at a younger age (Baden et al., 2019). In addition, many adoptees reporting feeling close to their adoptive parents, viewing them as important sources of meaning and support in their lives (Balenzano et al., 2018; Ferrari et al., 2015; Neil, 2012; Watson et al., 2015).

Two other major findings surfaced when reviewing these 26 studies, namely the importance of developmental stages, and the different experiences of transracial adoptees. Multiple studies noted the importance of the adoptee's age and consequent developmental status in their interest in, understanding of, and consequent emotional reactions to, their adoption (Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Farr et al., 2014; Manning et al., 2014; Neil, 2012; Soares et al., 2017), making age an important factor in the design of this study. Another important finding in these studies was the acknowledgement that transracial adoptees have different experiences than non-transracial adoptees (Baden, 2015; Docan-Morgan, 2010;

Ferrari et al., 2015; Higgins & Stoker, 2011 Larson, 2019; Samuels, 2009). More specifically, transracial adoptees have additional struggles with the absence of racial resemblance to their adoptive parents and lack of parental understanding of the experiences of racism and discrimination, and often have to navigate negative societal perceptions of transracial adoptions (Docan-Morgan, 2010; Ferrari et al., 2015; Larson, 2019; Samuels, 2009), experiences that non-transracial adoptees would not have to navigate.

Many older studies have compared the functioning of adopted children with non-adopted children (See Borders et al., 2000; Feeney & Passmore, 2007; Feigelman, 1997; Miller et al., 2000). From the perspective of the writer of this dissertation, this research focus is problematic because it perpetuates the assumption of bio-normativity, or the idea that non-adopted children represent the "normal" standard to which adopted children should be compared. Comparative studies fail to take into account processes related to loss, grief, and bereavement related to one's family of origin that may be typical parts of the developmental trajectories of adopted children since they are separated from their birth parents, and may or may not ever come to know them or have contact with them (Baden & Wiley, 2007; Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Jones, 1997; Porch, 2007; Sass & Henderson, 2000). However, in order to provide an adequate account of the existing research findings, including the newer studies reviewed, the results of such studies will still be described here. Although some studies have reported higher levels of depression, anxiety, and social isolation problems among adoptees trying to adjust to their adoption situation compared to non-adopted peers (Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Feeney & Passmore, 2007; Fisher, 2003; Jones, 1997; Jordan & Dempsey, 2013; Miller et al., 2000), the research suggests that problems experienced may be transient, since in adulthood, adoptees tend to report positive mental health and life outcomes in terms of educational success, home

ownership, and relationship satisfaction (Balenzano et al., 2018; Borders et al., 2000; Feigelman, 1997; Fisher, 2003; Jordan & Dempsey, 2013; LeVine and Salle, 1990; Oke et al., 2015; ter Meulen et al., 2019; Whitten & Weaver, 2010).

The transience of these problems may be at least partially due to the fact that adoptees have a significantly higher rate of help-seeking and use of psychological services than non-adoptees (Baden et al., 2019; Borders et al., 2000; Feigelman, 1997; Miller et al., 2000). Counselling has been found to be effective for use in helping people work through psychological and emotional struggles (Wampold & Imel, 2015; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). While the counselling field cannot explain the exact process that makes therapy effective, the following common factors have been identified as contributing to this success: (a) creating a strong working alliance or helping relationship based on empathy and unconditional positive regard, (b) setting expectations and instilling hope for a better future, and (c) employing specific interventions and techniques to improve people's coping ability, mental health and problem-resolution, regardless of which theory or approach to practice these techniques originate from (Horvath & Symonds, 1991; Rogers, 1957; Wampold & Imel, 2015; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

Brosinsky (2017) identified and reviewed various counselling theories, systems and approaches that may be most appropriate for working with adoptees and their families, including attachment-based approaches, narrative therapy, and existential therapy. Attachment-based approaches share the foundational belief that the nature of a child's original attachment to their primary caregiver, often a birth mother, will serve as a template for how the adoptee forms relationships throughout their life (DeLurgio, 2019; Feeney & Passmore, 2007; Hawk & McCall, 2014; Research in Practice, 2014; Wallin, 2015). The severing of a relationship with a primary caregiver that can often happen in adoptions may lead to challenges with forming relationships,

separation and abandonment issues, and struggles processing emotions surrounding the adoption, for which adoptees may benefit from therapeutic support helping them to process these emotions and to establish a secure attachment bond with their adoptive family (DeLurgio, 2019; Feeney & Passmore, 2007; Fitzhardinge, 2008; Research in Practice, 2014; Sinclair, 2016; Wallin, 2015). Narrative therapy approaches function from the point of view that families need to be considered as a whole system together to reach true understanding and healing (Karakurt & Silver, 2014; Kottler & Shepard, 2011). By working with all members of the family to externalize family problems stemming from external pressures and issues and tackle them as a team, narrative approaches can be very useful for helping adoptees and their families deconstruct maladaptive beliefs and patterns of interaction, and work towards co-authoring a new family story (Kottler & Shepard, 2011; Stokes & Poulsen, 2014). Existential therapy is often focused on helping people create meaning out of their life circumstances, especially out of adverse experiences, as well as helping them to deal with feelings of isolation and threats to their livelihood or well-being, which are thematic undercurrents to many of the adoption-related issues outlined in this paper (Kottler & Shepard, 2011; Krueger & Hanna, 1997). By discussing adoptee's concerns in the context of their existential roots, this therapeutic modality allows for the deeper exploration, and mending of damages that have been done at this deeper level.

Besides counselling, it is possible that coping strategies used by adoptees to deal with the unique challenges associated with being adopted may assist them in resolving these challenges over time. However, since most studies of adoptees have been retrospective studies on adults who were adopted as children, there is very limited information available about adoptees' coping processes and strategies. Only two of the studies identified focused on exploring the coping strategies of adoptees (See Baden et al., 2019; Jordan & Dempsey, 2013). Research shows that

some of the most beneficial coping strategies used by adoptees include: (a) searching for connection with birth parents or other adoptees, (b) actively seeking out counselling services to help with identifying adoption-related concerns and maladaptive coping behaviors, (c) speaking openly with their adoptive family about the adoption, and (d) engaging in self-care activities such as day-dreaming and prayer (Baden et al., 2019; Jordan & Dempsey, 2013). Negative coping strategies used by this population primarily included masking or suppressing their feelings through denial, substance use, or self-isolation, and engaging in internalizing behaviours regarding self-blame, anger, and frustration (Baden et al., 2019; Jordan & Dempsey, 2013). Overall, adoptees appear to have more positive coping strategies than negative ones, although more research needs to be done in this area before any conclusions can be reached.

What becomes very clear is that although some studies have focused on identifying the unique problems of adoptees as compared to their non-adopted peers, a strengths-based and resilience-oriented picture of this group tends to emerge, with many positive family, ethnic identity, and overall life experiences (Wiley, 2017). However, the research has uncovered some unique challenges with microaggressions related to adoption, and sometimes related to treatment due to racial differences between the adoptee and the parents, although these challenges can be addressed and managed with appropriate help and support. Through qualitative interviews with 153 Caucasian adolescent adoptees adopted as newborns into same-race families, Garber and Grotevant (2015) identified 16 adoption-specific microaggression themes, which were described in the adoption-related microaggressions section of this paper, and which will now be revisited. Within the 26 identified studies that were conducted from the adoptee's perspective, the microaggression theme of asking overly intrusive or insensitive questions was present in three of the studies (Docan-Morgan, 2010; Neil, 2012; Vashchenko et al., 2012). Two of these studies on

the experiences of child and adolescent adoptees identified teasing and bullying as concerns, which, depending on the content of the teasing could be a number of adoption-related microaggressions, such as communicating negative stereotypes about birth parents, questioning the authenticity of the adoptee, or viewing the adoptee as non-normative (Crowley, 2019; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Neil, 2012). Further, several studies on the experiences of transracial adoptees highlighted the experience of having to navigate negative societal perceptions about transracial adoption, as well as how transracial adoptees may feel the need to be extremely private to avoid having to deal with being accidentally "outed" and the consequent microaggressions that would follow (Cody et al., 2017; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Gianino et al., 2009; Larson, 2019; Samuels, 2009).

In reviewing studies of adoptees, the researcher noticed a major trend, which represents a serious error of omission. In order to hone in on adoptee's experiences, researchers have attempted to simplify these experiences or exclude various diversity-related variables in their studies or analyses. For example, although the studies reviewed have included adoptees of various racial and cultural backgrounds, many have focused only on local adoptions by people of the same race as the adopted child, or have specifically identified inter-racial or transnational adoptions as an exclusionary criterion. Only eight of the 26 studies identified specifically focused on the perspectives and experiences of transracial or international adoptees (See Baden, 2015; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Ferrari et al., 2015; Hawk & McCall, 2014; Higgins & Stoker, 2011; Larson, 2019; Samuels, 2009; Vashchenko et al., 2012). Similarly, and more importantly, these studies did not provide significant information on the sociodemographic profiles of the adoptees' parents, a trend noted by Marr (2017). These studies did not seem to even consider, let alone report, the sexual orientations/gender identities of the adoptive parents, and did not relate

these variables to adoptee experiences and adjustment, as if these factors are somehow unimportant, insignificant, or may add too much additional complexity to the analysis of research results. Although this may be partly due to the assumption of heteronormativity (i.e., a belief that all adoptive families are heterosexual and follow the binary gender distinction), existing statistics on adoption presented in previous sections of this proposal dispute this belief. Although researchers may struggle with how to appropriately ask questions about families' LGBTQ+ status', the failure to ask about family characteristics and to invite children, adolescents, or emerging adults from LGBTQ+ families to share their voices and perspectives about their experiences is a very serious omission or exclusion. Furthermore, by trying to simplify adoption experiences for the purpose of making them easily researchable, existing research fails to take into account the lived reality of intersectionality among adoptees in LGBTQ+ families.

Intersectionality refers to the dynamic and fluid relationship between an individual's various identities (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, adoptee status, etc.) and the implications of these intersecting identities for their experiences of privilege and oppression (APA, 2017; Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989; Garber, 2020; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Ross et al., 2008, 2009; Vaccaro & Koob, 2019). In the context of adoptees in LGBTQ+ families, the main intersecting identities an adoptee may hold include being a member of an LGBTQ+ family, holding adoptee status, and potentially being a member of an ethnic minority or a gender minority. The concept of intersectionality posits that it is ineffective to look at various aspects of a person's identity separately, as people's identities are fluid and the people belonging to one specific category, such as adoptees, will never have the same exact experiences as each other given their other layered identities (APA, 2017; Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019;

Grzanka, 2014; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Vaccaro & Koob, 2019). Unfortunately, the separation of these identities is exactly what is happening in the adoption research, with many studies intentionally excluding important aspects of intersectionality, such as transracial adoptees. This is extremely problematic, as the fundamental tenet of intersectionality is that it is the unique combination of the identities adoptees hold that shape their experiences.

Statement of the Problem: The Missing Voices of Adoptee Teens and Emerging Adults in LGBTQ+-Led Families

Over half of Americans and one in five Canadians have personal experience with adoption, encompassing over 7 million people in Canada and 162,000 people in the city of Edmonton alone (Adoption Council of Canada, n.d., *Frequently asked questions about adoption;* Fisher, 2003; Henderson, 2002; Post, 2000). This is not surprising, given that every single adoption affects approximately 33 other people including the adoptee, their birth family and relatives, and the adoptive family and their relatives (Sass & Henderson, 2000). LGBTQ+ people, in particular, have been found to be especially likely to adopt a child, and are additionally more likely to adopt transracially (Brown et al., 2009; Costa & Tasker, 2018; Downing et al., 2009; Fisher, 2003 Gates, 2013; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020). The previous literature review outlined considerations unique to the adoption experience, as well as highlighted some of the challenges this population faces, including loss and grief, identity-related struggles, searching for birthparents, and the experience of adoption-related microaggressions (Baden, 2016; Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Garber, 2020; Krueger & Hanna, 1997; Porch, 2007; Wiley, 2017).

Given the increasing rates of adoption in society, it is especially important for research to be conducted on the unique experiences of those who are affected by adoption, and in particular, the adoptees (Clapton, 2018; Garber, 2020; Porch, 2007; Wiley, 2017). Unfortunately, there is relatively limited research on adoption, and most of the research conducted in this area has been focused on primarily studying adopted children through their parents' reports, or having adult adoptees retrospectively report on their adoption experience as opposed to focusing on the adoptee's own present lived experience (Hawk & McCall, 2014). Research shows that child adoptees sometimes tend to struggle with behavioural disorders (Baden, 2015; Balenzano et al., 2018; Barth & Miller, 2000; Towse et al., 2019) and psychiatric problems (Baden, 2015; Ferranti et al., 2015; Fisher, 2003; Goldberg et al., 2019; Jones, 1997; Towse et al., 2019), but that adult adoptees are generally just as well-adjusted as their non-adoptive peers (Balenzano et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2019; Fisher, 2003; Jordan & Dempsey, 2013; Whitten & Weaver, 2010; Wiley, 2017), raising the question of what factors initiate this change during the adolescent and young adult time-frame. Due to the very limited research on adoptees of this age, this extremely important question has not been answered. Taken together, there is an alarming paucity of research both on the adoptee's own perspective, as well as on the adolescent and emerging adult adoptee experience, highlighting an important gap in the research (Gianino et al., 2009; Holmgren & Elovainio, 2019; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019; Morton & Shelton, 2019; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019; Wrobel & Grotevant, 2019). The gap is particularly profound in our understanding of the experiences of youth and emerging adults growing up in LGBTQ+ families, who have many family and personal identity intersections that could potentially impact them, and that could lead them to be subjected to multiple different types of microaggressions.

In addition to this research gap being problematic for the academic field, it also becomes practically and professionally problematic in the area of counselling psychology. Given that adoptees are almost twice as likely to access counselling and psychological services, it is vital that those providing the support are armed with proper knowledge about working with this population (Borders et al., 2000; Miller et al., 2000; Wiley, 2017). Unfortunately, research shows that psychologists and mental health workers generally feel unprepared for working with adoption due to lack of training on, and exposure to, the various aspects of adoption, which will likely result in uninformed or inappropriate services being provided for this population (Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Goldberg et al., 2019; Henderson, 2002; Koh et al., 2020; Post, 2000; Sass & Henderson, 2000; Wiley, 2017). This lack of preparation is especially problematic when it comes to the additional complexity of working with adoptees from LGBTQ+ families.

Purpose of the Study and Research Puzzle

The purpose of this dissertation research was to explore the lived experiences of adolescent and emerging adults who were adopted before the age of one into LGBTQ+ families from their own perspectives. The guiding research questions that were used to explore this research puzzle were: (a) What are the experiences of adolescents and young adults who were adopted into LGBTQ+ families shortly after birth? (b) How do their personal characteristics, family characteristics, and adoption status intersect in shaping their identities? (c) What are the challenges they face? and (d) What strengths and coping strategies do they draw on to deal with these challenges?

METHOD

This section will explore the ontological, epistemological, and methodological principles underpinning the social constructivism framework through which this research was conducted. A

description of the Narrative Inquiry research method used in this study, participant recruitment strategy, data collection and analysis procedures, and study evaluation criteria will follow. The section concludes with ethical considerations and a discussion of the study's implications for research and practice.

Social Constructivism

Qualitative studies are usually guided by an interpretive framework through which the researcher views the world and the phenomena under study. An interpretive framework usually has underlying philosophical assumptions that are important to explicitly articulate to ensure that the lens through which the research is being conducted is fully understood. The present study and chosen research methodology falls within a social constructivism framework, as the goal of the study is to understand adopted youth and emerging adults' lived experiences in the world (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions of social constructivism will be described below in relation to the purpose and nature of this study.

Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

Ontological beliefs refer to the beliefs one holds regarding the nature of reality and how it is constructed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within the social constructivism perspective inherent in narrative inquiry there are considered to be multiple different realities, or truths, in the world that are constructed through interactions and experiences with other people (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Josselson, 2011). In particular, this study operated on the assumption that adoptees in LGBTQ+ families may have a different lived reality or truth in comparison to other members in the adoption triad, as well as a different reality than other adoptees who do not share their intersectional identities. Their realities and experiences are assumed to be constructed through

their lived experiences and connections with others, including members of their adoptive family, members of their birth families if they have an open adoption, and peers and individuals outside of their family system. Therefore, in this research study, adoptees have been given the opportunity to situate themselves in their own adoptive/birth families and in their surrounding ecologies to share how their contexts affect their identities, coping strategies, and well-being. Given that story and narrative are the ways in which people make meaning of their lived experiences, it was important for the adoptees in this study to be given the opportunity to situate themselves in their own context (Fitzhardinge, 2008). Since studies on adopted youth have not focused on or given a voice to youth or emerging adults in LGBTQ+ families, it cannot be assumed that what is presently known about adopted youth and young adults accurately reflects the reality of their lives, making the social constructivism paradigm a very appropriate fit for framing this research study.

Epistemological assumptions are slightly different from ontological assumptions in that they focus on how reality is known or understood (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The social constructivism paradigm asserts that reality is known through an individual person's experience, but that it is also further co-constructed when being shared with others (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Josselson, 2011; Polkinghorne, 1995). More specifically, in this study, it is assumed that an individual adoptee's experiences and perceptions of those experiences are a reflection of the individual's reality, and that by sharing these with the researcher in the process of this study, both parties have come to a better understanding and articulation of these experiences. This co-construction of reality is reflected in the narrative research methodology that was chosen for this study, which recognizes that reality is constructed by connecting events together in the form of a story (Clandinin, 2013; Josselson, 2011; Polkinghorne, 1995).

Axiological and Methodological Assumptions

Axiological beliefs refer to the importance the researcher has placed on the role of values within the study, which are understandably emphasized in the social constructivism paradigm, as the entire paradigm is rooted in the importance of individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Valuing ethical research practices in the pursuit of knowledge acquisition is incredibly important, as this ensures the safety of all participants and respect for the equality of all kinds of lifestyles. Indeed, the code of ethics for psychologists in Canada emphasizes the importance of promoting respect, beneficence, and cultural competency when working with people (Canadian Psychological Association, 2000; Truscott, 2010), all of which are important values in this research. Additionally, the axiological beliefs underpinning this study are closely tied to the methodological assumptions that operate in the social constructivism paradigm, namely the importance placed on taking an inductive approach that allows for ideas to emerge and be co-constructed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this research study, although the researcher had prepared some guiding questions, she invited adoptees in LGBTQ+ families to share their stories in the life contexts in which they are embedded, and followed their lead in trying to understand their experiences, rather than lead conversations based on any a priori assumptions about their lived realities, identities, or coping strategies. These ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions are reflected in the decision to use a narrative inquiry approach in this study, which is described in more detail below.

Narrative Inquiry

> I sat at my computer, staring for what seemed to be the thousandth time at a blank section in my candidacy paper titled “Why narrative inquiry?” Why narrative inquiry, indeed. In a feedback meeting with my candidacy committee members, I had been faced with the reality that pursuing narrative inquiry would require me taking an extra course in the area, effectively extending my doctoral program by another year. My candidacy committee members kindly suggested that I perhaps consider a thematic methodology

> instead in an effort to keep me on track with my timeline for graduation, but their well-intentioned suggestion only solidified my resolve to pursue narrative inquiry. I *knew* that I needed use narrative to explore and tell the stories of people's adoption experiences, but I was struggling to explain why. This question had been plaguing me for months: Why narrative inquiry?
>
> I finally found the answer to this question on my bookshelf. Not in any of my many narrative inquiry books, psychology textbooks, or fantasy novels. No, I found the answer in a small children's picture book hidden away in the bottom corner of my bookshelf, forgotten over the past few decades. I took in the pages of *How I Was Adopted* by Joanna Cole (1995), reveling in the story of little Sam and her adoption. As I admired the brightly colored pictures, I was transported back to when I was just a little girl who was learning about her own adoption. My story was so much like Sam's – we were both adopted as a baby, we both had curly hair, and she even had a freckle on her knee, just like the freckles that were plastered across my own body. This story was monumental in my own understanding of my adoption as a child, even if it was about a fictional little girl. This story gave me the tools to not only understand my own story, but also the skills to start talking about it and developing these parts of myself and my identity. As I read the final lines of this children's book, I was struck with the realization that this is exactly why I needed to pursue narrative inquiry:
>
> "I love to hear Mommy and Daddy tell how I was adopted.
> It's my very own story.
> Every girl who was adopted has her own story.
> Every boy who was adopted has his own story.
> Do you know the story of how *you* were adopted?" (Cole, 1995)

Throughout human history, storytelling has been used to pass on information, share learnings from one generation to another, and help to form social connections (Bamberg, 2012; Fitzhardinge, 2008; Polkinghorne, 1995). Forms of narrative moved from verbal storytelling to written stories, which further evolved into personal writings, such as memoirs and letters, which in turn evolved into the autobiographical writings that are common today (Bamberg, 2012). Given how intertwined human history is with various forms of narrative, it should come as no surprise that there is a narrative approach to conducting research.

Narrative inquiry has theoretical roots across various disciplines, including education (John Dewey), anthropology (Clifford Geertz and Mary Catherine Bateson), organizational theory (Barbara Czarniawska), psychiatry (Robert Coles), and psychology (Donald Polkinghorne) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber et al., 2011; Murphy, 2019). These

disciplines and influential thinkers helped to develop the key theoretical bases of narrative inquiry, including: (a) the continuity of experience (Dewey) and acknowledgement of the inquirer changing as a result of the research (Geertz and Bateson), (b) the need for a change in traditional research methodologies to accommodate experience (Czarniawska), (c) the importance of a close relationship between the participant and inquirer, (d) the importance of self-reflection on the part of the inquirer (Coles), and (e) differentiation between narrative inquiry goals of accurately describing experiences versus creating causal connections between events (Polkinghorne) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These influential thinkers have been vital to the development of the narrative inquiry approach that is used in research today.

Narrative inquiry is often challenged by more traditional research approaches for not being as theory-driven as other methods and for intentionally involving the inquirer's experiences as part of the research. Indeed, traditional formalist research tends to take a reductionist approach and tackles research problems by beginning with a theory from which they often hypothesize their research outcomes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry argues that the study of experience is ever-shifting as a result of the multitude of factors that are always at play during the experiencing, telling, and retelling processes of sharing one's story. As such, narrative inquiry research must begin with the participant and inquirer's experiences to allow for these lived experiences to come through, and being too theory-driven can unintentionally bound these experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Indeed, it is for this reason that narrative inquiry characteristically weaves the inquirer's experiences throughout the research, and refers to researchers as "inquirers" and to research questions as "research puzzles" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2016; Murphy, 2019).

There are two commonly cited methods of conducting narrative research: eliciting and analyzing narratives at the linguistic level or eliciting and examining narratives at a meaning-making level (Bamberg, 2012; Clandinin, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1995). This study employs the latter approach to narrative research, as its aim is to invite the research participants to share their personal stories and to use the produced narratives as guidance to answer the overarching research puzzle (Bamberg, 2012; Polkinghorne, 1995). It is through people's stories that they develop a sense of meaning about their world, and narrative inquiry is one method of tapping into the meaning that is created (Bamberg, 2012; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Josselson, 2011). Narrative inquiry focuses on the meaning developed in the story by honing in on key areas of salience or change, while simultaneously taking into consideration the potential influences of the cultural, social, and institutional contexts that are at play in the life of the participant (Bamberg, 2012; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Huber et al., 2018; Josselson, 2011; Polkinghorne, 1995). Indeed, the goal of narrative inquiry is not to generalize, but instead to link lived life experiences with literature to develop a chronological story of the participants' unique life experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Josselson, 2011; Polkinghorne, 1995).

Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space

Narrative inquiry requires the inquirer to constantly be considering experiences within a metaphoric three-dimensional space composed of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2016; Huber et al., 2011; Josselson, 2011; Murphy, 2019). *Temporality* refers to the inquirer's acknowledgement of the presence of a past, present, and future for every person, event, and place that is discussed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2016; Murphy, 2019; Murphy et al., 2012). Importantly, this requires the

inquirer to acknowledge their own past, present, and future, and how their experiences interact with their hearing and retelling of the participants' stories, which is why narrative inquiry involves autobiographical accounts of the inquirer(s). *Sociality*, on the other hand, acknowledges the importance of both personal and social conditions for both the inquirer and the participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2016; Huber et al., 2011; Murphy et al., 2012). Personal conditions may include things such as the characteristics and feelings of the participant and inquirer, whereas social conditions highlight the importance of social context, such as surrounding factors and forces or existential concerns. The information in this dissertation research related to the historical context of adoption in Canada and the provincial and local context of barriers faced by LGBTQ+ families in the adoption and fostering process in Alberta helps to situate this research in its social context. Finally, the aspect of *place* refers to the importance of the physical and concrete elements of the place in which the experience takes place, or in which the experience is being told or retold (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2016; Huber et al., 2011). This focus on the three-dimensional space surrounding participants' life experiences is very congruent with the quest to understand the intersectional identities, lived experiences, and coping strategies of youth and emerging adults who were adopted into LGBTQ+ families as children.

Role of Language

Language also holds great importance in narrative research, as the focus on participants' own experiences involves paying close attention to the specific words that they choose to describe these experiences. Language has been noted to have the power to shift people's thought processes, which can in turn impact their experiences, making it vital to pay close attention to language when engaging in narrative inquiry (Clapton, 2018). In narrative inquiry, the inquirer is

aiming to engage in a process of telling and retelling the participants' stories so that their experiences can be communicated to others, and an extremely important part of this process is ensuring that it is the participants' language and voice that is conveyed (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Clapton, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Huber et al., 2011; Josselson, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Murphy et al., 2012).

The population that this study worked with lives in a context characterized by a history of institutionalized racism and discrimination against both ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ people in adoption policies and placements, making them vulnerable to also encountering multiple forms of microaggressions, many of which are conveyed through language and labelling (Baden, 2016; Clapton, 2018; Sue & Sue, 2016; Wiley, 2017). The importance of the specific words that are used when discussing adoptions is widely documented both within adoptive families and at the policy level (Clapton, 2018; Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010). For example, within adoption policy and practice there has been considerable debate over which words are considered appropriate to use when describing the birth family, such as "natural", "first", and "birth", and many of these words have come into and fallen out of favor over the years (Clapton, 2018). A similar caution needed to be observed when considering how LGBTQ+ families identify themselves, as differences between subgroups may lead to the use of different ways of labelling or understanding their identities or sexual orientations. As such, special consideration was given to the use of language throughout this study, and the inquirer ensured that participants' language is used throughout the entire narrative inquiry process and is reflected in the retelling of their stories. More specifically, participants were given the opportunity to share their own identities and define their adoption experiences in their own words to avoid imposing assumptions of hetero- or bionormativity, which helped to ensure that any interpretations made would remain

true to the participants' experiences and intended meanings. For example, Dolores uses the titles of "mother", "spiritual mother", and "half-mother" to reference different females who have had various and different impacts on her life, which is described further in the section "Dolores' Story".

Inquirer's Positioning

One of the most important ideas within narrative inquiry lies in the co-construction of the story between the participant and the inquirer (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Huber et al., 2011; Mills et al., 2020; Murphy, 2019). Given that the inquirer's experience and interaction with the participants inevitably influenced the stories that were written, it is extremely important in narrative research to situate the inquirer and be upfront about their interests and personal connection with the topic of interest (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Huber et al., 2011, 2018; Murphy, 2019). Throughout this paper, the inquirer has shared some of her experiences through narratives of her own experiences. This section will provide a more detailed background on the inquirer and her position with regards to this study.

I am a 30-year-old heterosexual cisgender Caucasian female who was adopted into a Caucasian heterosexual family at birth. My parents adopted a son into their family when I was 5 years old. My brother was also adopted from birth, but from a different birth mother. As a young child, I did not question my own or my brother's adoptive status very much, as this was all I had ever known, and my parents' consistent open conversations about our adoptive status had normalized the experience for both of us. That being said, I still went through considerable struggle to reconcile the multiple parts of me: who I thought I was in my adoptive family, who I could have been if I had grown up in my birth family, and who I was as an independent adult.

In addition to the internal struggle, I had with my adoptive status, I also had to deal with both personal and systemic microaggressions based on my adoptee identity. As a child, adolescent, and teenager I was met with varying reactions from my peers regarding the disclosure of my adoption. While some reactions were positive, most were confused, and many were downright offensive. The following is a short list comprising just a few of the things that were said to me about my status as an adoptee: “So the woman I know isn’t your *real* mom, then!”, “You’re lying just to seem special”, and, several times, “Your real mom didn’t love you enough, so she gave you away”. Indeed, as evidenced in my previous story about a high school peer who said he would have teased me about my adopted status had he known in high school, it is clear that these types of reactions and microaggressions are pervasive across age and time. At the systemic level, I have also had to deal with adoption microaggressions, such as being asked to complete school assignments in elementary school with no room for alternate family types (e.g., timeline creation, giving a family history presentation, etc.), and doctors scolding me for not knowing my genetic history and potential pre-dispositions to disease. These types of experiences were what led me to want to study the area of adoption and the first-hand experiences of adoptees who have had to navigate this process. Indeed, Nelson (2018) posited that having adoptee researchers conducting research in the area of adoption is beneficial, as their in-depth and personal understanding of adoption can better inform their analysis procedures.

Throughout my life I have always been passionate about helping others, as evidenced by my choice to pursue a career path as a psychologist, and after having several experiences dealing with the aftermath of discrimination and hate speech that occurred against LGBTQ+ friends and family members of mine, I took a special interest in advocating for this vulnerable population. Throughout my experience working as a mental health worker and Registered Psychologist, I

have made efforts to reach out to and work with diverse populations, including people who identify as LGBTQ+, ethnic minorities, or those having special needs. My passion for working in the area of mental health, and advocating for LGBTQ+ people, in combination with my own personal experience as an adoptee started me down the path that led to this topic of study for my dissertation.

As I embarked upon a narrative approach to writing other people's experiences of their own adoption, it was vital that I remained reflective about my own positioning and experiences and how they were influencing the research study. This aim was achieved through the processes of reflexivity and journaling, which are described in more detail in subsequent sections.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the lived experiences of adolescent and emerging adults who were adopted as infants into LGBTQ+ families from their own perspectives. The guiding research questions used to help explore the overall research puzzle were: (a) What are the experiences of adolescents and young adults who were adopted into LGBTQ+ families shortly after birth? (b) How do their personal characteristics, family characteristics, and adoption status intersect in shaping their identities? (c) What are the challenges they face? and (d) What strengths and coping strategies do they draw on to deal with these challenges?

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This study aimed to recruit an ethnically mixed sample of: (a) adolescent and emerging adult adoptees between the ages of 13-21, (b) who knew that they are adopted, (c) who were adopted before the age of 1 into their current family through an open or closed adoption, (d) were adopted into a family with LGBTQ+ parents of any LGBTQ+ identity, and (e) who lived

anywhere in Canada (see Table 2). Every effort was made to recruit participants who represent the intersectional identities of LGBTQ+ families and the young adults and adolescents adopted into them.

Table 2. *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Study Participants*

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
(a) adolescent and emerging adult adoptees between ages 13-21	(a) adoptees younger than age 13 and adult adoptees older than age 21
(b) know that they are adopted	(b) adopted after the age of 1
(c) adopted before the age of 1 into their current family through an open or closed adoption	(c) do not know they are adopted
(d) adopted into a family with LGBTQ+ parents of any LGBTQ+ identity	(d) adopted by heterosexual parents
(e) currently residing in Canada	(e) adoptees who were adopted by extended family members or stepparents within the birth family
	(g) adoptees with special needs

Adoptees aged 13-21 were chosen for this study because there is a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of adolescent and young adult adoptees in this particular age range (Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019). In addition, this age range represents a critical developmental period for the identity exploration and formation process, an area of development that has been found to be heavily affected by the experience of adoption (Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Dunbar, 2003; Farr et al., 2016; Fitzhardinge, 2008; Gianino et al., 2009; Grotevant et al., 2000; Kraus, 1982; Krueger & Hanna, 1997; Oke et al., 2015; Porch, 2007). Another inclusion criterion for this study was that adoptees must know

that they were adopted, as the goal of the study was to understand their perspectives on being an adopted person in their specific family contexts.

Adoptee participants in this study were required to have been adopted before the age of 1 into their current family through either an open or closed adoption. Many studies specify that their participants must have been adopted before the age of 1 (for examples, see Baden et al., 2019 and Dunbar, 2003) because the initial separation from caregivers can be a much more traumatic experience if separated at a later age (Feeney & Passmore, 2007; Manning et al., 2016; Research in Practice, 2014). The complications of early attachment trauma have the potential to add a myriad of other considerations to the adoptees' experiences that may confound their experience of their adoption, such as the development of an insecure attachment style (Brodzinsky, 1987; Fitzhardinge, 2008; Hawk & McCall, 2014; Manning et al., 2016). To avoid these complications, adoptees were only included as participants if they were adopted before the age of 1. Given that the purpose of this study was to examine the broad experience of adoption, there was no need to exclude either open or closed adoptions, as both are still prevalent in the adoptee community today.

Another inclusion criterion for this study was that adoptees must have been adopted into a family with LGBTQ+ parents of any sexual orientation or gender identity. As aforementioned, there is a range of LGBTQ+ identities, many of which exist on a spectrum (APA, 2006, 2009, 2012, n.d.; Egale, n.d.; Hulshof-Schmidt, 2012; Riggle & Rostosky, 2012), and most of the research on parents who adopt in the LGBTQ+ population has focused on lesbian or gay parents (Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019). By including parents of any LGBTQ+ background, this study aimed to not only allow for a maximally variable sample, but also aimed to help bridge this gap in research by being open to the inclusion of other members within the LGBTQ+ population that

are not often represented in the research community, such as bisexual or transgender parents (Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019).

Consideration was also given to the fact that LGBTQ+ parents are much more likely to adopt transracially and internationally, and so it was very likely that some adoptee participants would identify as ethnic minorities (Brown et al., 2009; Costa & Tasker, 2018; Downing et al., 2009; Fisher, 2003 Gates, 2013; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019). Therefore, it was expected that there would be an ethnically mixed sample to some degree with some minority and some non-minority children in the study, without any intention to recruit for specific minority identities. Transracial or international adoptee status was not included as an inclusion criterion for this study, as the purpose of the study was to focus on the experiences of adoptees adopted by LGBTQ+ parents, regardless of the nature of their adoptions, since the voices of these adoptees have been totally neglected in past research. That being said, every opportunity was taken to recruit participants who represent the intersectional identities of these families and the young adults and adolescents adopted into them.

One final inclusion criterion for the study was that the adoptees must reside in Canada, as this is where the study was conducted. Given that this study began soon after the beginning of the world-wide 2020 COVID pandemic, it was necessary to complete all interviews and meetings virtually, making it feasible to include participants from across the country. That being said, both participants who took part in this research were located in western Canada.

Two participant exclusion criteria were unrelated to the inclusion criteria: (a) adoptees cannot have been adopted by extended family members or stepparents within their birth family, and (b) adoptees with special needs would not be considered for inclusion in this study. Adoptees who have been adopted by extended family members of their birth family or by step-parents

connected to the birth family were excluded from this study, as one of the major aspects of an adoptee's experience, which is not present in this population, is the impact of separation from their birth family (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Kraus, 1982; LeVine & Salle, 1990; Siegel & Smith, 2012; Sorosky et al., 1974). Finally, adoptees with special needs were not included as participants in this study, as these adoptees naturally have more complex needs that influence their adoption story in a way that may be more likely to represent the experience of someone with special needs as opposed to the experience of someone who is adopted. Of note, no potential participants reached out and were turned away due to either of these exclusion criteria.

Recruitment Strategies

Sample sizes in qualitative studies are usually quite small, given the depth of exploration that goes into each individual participant's experience, and those employing narrative inquiry research methods are no exception, usually only having a few participants, with many only having 1-2 participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Two participants were recruited who met the outlined research criteria described above.

Many qualitative researchers employ purposeful sampling strategies to gather participants, as their goal is usually to study a specific sub-group of people or phenomenon that would not be captured without intentionally targeting certain groups of people (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study employed both purposeful and snowball sampling strategies to gather participants. Purposeful sampling strategies included collaborating with community organizations and influence leaders within the LGBTQ+ and adoption communities, such as the Pride Centre of Edmonton, PFLAG, and Adoption Options. I developed a working relationship with key people in these agencies, who in turn shared the study advertisements within their

personal and professional networks. Two additional and unexpected opportunities to recruit participants occurred when different organizations reached out requesting a live interview on the topic and search for participants. CBC Radio reached out and asked if they could complete two 5-minute live interviews with two of their different sister stations, and Adoption Options reached out with a similar request for an approximate 10-minute interview. These two live radio interviews and one live Instagram interview were also completed as part of recruitment efforts.

In addition, after approval from my institutional ethics review board, study advertisements (Appendix B) were shared with these organizations to help gather potential research participants. As the participants were recruited during the COVID-19 global pandemic during the height of social distancing and virtual work, the research poster was shared by these organizations via their social media and email listservs as opposed to being physically posted within a location. The study advertisements included the following information: the purpose of the study, what participants will be required to do (e.g., attend an interview), an invitation to bring an item that represents their adoption experience, and the research inquirer's name, email address, and phone number. When participants reached out to the inquirer, they were firstly informed that no one will be told about the fact they have reached out, or about whether or not they choose to participate, and were then asked if they were being coerced or pressured into participating. When participants reported not being pressured to take part in the study, the inquirer arranged to meet with them online via Doxy.Me (see below).

Following the interview, participants were encouraged to share the inquirer's contact information with anyone else they felt might be a good fit for the study, and were also informed that they will receive a follow-up email within two months containing the initial narrative of the information they have shared for their review. This follow-up email asked the participant for a

good date and time for the inquirer to meet with them again via a secure videoconferencing platform to allow them to provide feedback on the narrative. This process was repeated, taking the participants' feedback into consideration each time, until each participant expressed that their narrative felt representative of their lived experience.

Videoconferencing Platform Use

Participant recruitment and data collection occurred during the height of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, which was when social distancing and working from home was recommended as the safest method of continuing to work. As a result, the interviews and feedback meetings that were completed for this study were done so over a secure videoconferencing platform. The primary investigator met with participants to conduct interviews via Doxy.Me, an online video platform that is compliant with Canada's privacy and security laws as outlined in The Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA). Doxy.Me does not store any information about the users using their video platform. In addition, Doxy.Me uses end-to-end encryption, which means that only the participant and primary investigator were able to see the video and hear the audio during their interviews and their IP addresses are protected as no apps need to be downloaded onto either of their computers to use this platform. In addition, the platform does not require that anybody accessing it enter their real name or email address. For all email correspondence, the primary investigator used an email address that has end-to-end encryption to further protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants.

Participant Profiles

The purpose of narrative inquiry is not to collect extensive demographic information. In fact, it is the opposite – the goal is to examine the lived experiences of participants and co-

construct their narratives, highlighting the individuality of their experiences. That being said, on a more practical level, it is important to describe the nature of the participants in a research study to help identify the people whose experiences are being addressed and the limitations of the research. As such, demographic profiles of the two participants who took part in this study are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Participant Demographics*

	"Sarah"	**"Dolores"**
Age	21	13
Gender	Female	Female
Sexual Orientation	Queer	Questioning
Ethnicity	Mainland Chinese	Canadian
Adoption Type	International; Closed	Domestic, Open
Siblings	Sister (19, also international adoption)	None
Parent 1: Demographics Education Employment	Female; Caucasian/Canadian; Lesbian College Degree/Diploma Self-Employed	Male; Canadian; Gay Bachelor's Degree Self-Employed
Parent 2: Demographics Education Employment	Female; Caucasian/Canadian; Bisexual Bachelor's Degree Retired	Male; Lao; Homosexual Master's Degree Full-Time Employment

Data Collection Process

Narrative inquiry is an emergent research approach, so this research design was flexible to allow for the inquirer to walk alongside the participants so that together they could co-construct the research process and deliverables in a way that best represented the lived experiences being shared. While there are many ways to collect and analyze data in narrative research, the most common data collection method, by far, is interviewing (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Josselson, 2011). In this study, participants were asked to be involved in one in-depth, semi-structured interview about their experiences, as well as a follow-

up meeting for obtaining further information and clarification about their initial interview disclosures and for member-checking purposes. Participants were invited to bring any item to the initial interview that represents their experience of adoption, as these items can facilitate the sharing of their story and may provide additional depth to the story, as they will be inherently imbued with meaning for the participant (Clandinin et al., 2016; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The inquirer took part in data collection and participant engagement in this research project over the course of a year.

Gathering Consent

Before the interview process began, I met separately with Sarah (age 21) and the parents of Dolores (age 13) to provide them with a verbal explanation of my background and interest in this study and the purpose and nature of the research. I gave Sarah a copy of the adult consent form (see Appendix C) to read and reviewed it with her, highlighting important aspects of consent, including the participant's rights within the interview and procedures for ensuring participants' confidentiality and anonymity. I followed the same process with Dolores using an adolescent consent form (see Appendix D), and had her parents sign a parental consent form (see Appendix E) for her participation in the study (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014). I reminded her parents that they will not have access to the details of what she has shared, and in a separate private meeting with Dolores, reviewed her consent form and ensured that she was not being pressured into taking part in the study. Both Sarah and Dolores were encouraged to ask any questions they may have both before and during the interview and were informed that they are free to choose to stop the interview at any time. As aforementioned, this research was completed during the height of the worldwide COVID-19

pandemic, so all interviews and meetings were conducted via a PIPEDA-compliant videoconferencing platform.

Meeting Sarah on The Narrative Journey

> I didn't know what to expect as I sat in front of my computer waiting to meet my first participant for the first time. It felt a bit peculiar waiting for her to log into our virtual interview, yet another screen. This wasn't at all how I had imagined it when I first dreamed up this study – we weren't in a coffee shop, and I hadn't been able to discuss with the participant where *she* would be most comfortable meeting, which had been an important element in the initial research design. I wondered what I would see when she signed in – her living room? A coffee shop? Perhaps she would chat with me from her bed, where so many people have joined virtual interviews and meetings in the past year.
>
> I didn't prepare for a kitchen. When she popped into the meeting she seemed to be wearing some kind of apron, and I was looking up at the top half and ceiling of a kitchen. While I introduced myself, she busied herself around the kitchen, taking me along with her while she automatically moved through the steps of some sort of baking recipe. Both multi-tasking and making this kitchen creation seemed second nature to her – she was clearly very comfortable and still very energetically engaged in our conversation.
>
> I don't know what I expected to come from our conversation – this wasn't the interview, no. I had arranged to have a quick chat with her to introduce myself, explain the study and her involvement in it, and provide her with an opportunity to ask me any questions she may have had. Sounded pretty boring and straightforward, indeed, that's how I described it to her. Yet as the conversation continued and she shared small bits and pieces of herself I felt myself getting excited. I actually had to make a conscious effort not to just delve into the interview and ask all of my questions right then and there, which I also shared with her. She told me that she shared my excitement and that she and her mothers have been discussing it since they heard about it on the radio. Any doubts I had about the importance of this study to myself and to its respective communities vanished – this *was* and *is* important.
>
> Even though we only chatted for 20-30 minutes, I felt a connection with this participant. I don't know what it was – the only thing we appeared to have in common was the fact that we were both adopted. We were of different ethnicities, different family make-ups, different and adoption types (hers being an international closed adoption, and mine being a domestic open adoption). Yet despite these differences we had shared experiences that very few others could have had. She mentioned having heard me say on my radio interview that I had been scolded by a doctor for not knowing my medical history, and she shared that while she wasn't scolded by a doctor, she had been unable to complete school assignments that were based on genetics. This reminded me of the confusion and anguish I went through when I had been asked to complete a family tree in junior high and wasn't sure which family to do it on, and didn't really feel connected to either.
>
> How incredible that we can be such different people on the outside, and in so many different ways, but because of our shared adoptee identity we can bond and connect over things that no one else can truly understand. My excitement was renewed, my passion rekindled, and my motivation re-ignited. I could not wait to connect with my participants, hear their stories, and walk alongside them in this process.

Sarah and Dolores were both informed that their initial meeting to share their story was expected to last between 1.5-3 hours, and that they would have additional shorter meetings to co-

construct their narratives over the following months. Sarah chose to have her first meeting virtually from her kitchen, and her following three meetings from her bedroom, and these meetings ran anywhere from half an hour in length to two hours. Dolores chose to have both her initial hour-and-a-half meeting and her one half-hour follow-up meeting from the upstairs study in her parent's home.

In a narrative research study, the interview typically begins with a broad opening prompt that is not a leading question and that takes into account the overall research puzzle to be explored (Josselson, 2007; Murphy, 2019). The underlying intention is for the answers to the research questions to naturally emerge from the telling of the stories, highlighting their developmental trajectories, the climax of their stories, and key factors that have the most salience in their lived realities (Josselson, 2007). Follow-up questions and prompts then directly follow participants' leads, although having a brief semi-structured interview protocol prepared in advance can help focus the dialogue if some of the information in the research puzzle does not naturally emerge in the interactions between the inquirer and each participant (Josselson, 2007; Murphy, 2019). The guiding research questions that were used to answer the overarching research puzzle in this story were: (a) What are the experiences of adolescents and young adults who were adopted into LGBTQ+ families shortly after birth? (b) How do their personal characteristics, family characteristics, and adoption status intersect in shaping their identities? (c) What are the challenges they face? And (d) What strengths and coping strategies do they draw on to deal with these challenges? In order to answer these questions, the following opening prompt and semi-structured interview questions were used to guide the interview process as needed:

- *Opening Prompt:*
    - Tell me about the item you brought to represent your adoption experience.
- *Follow-up Questions (if necessary):*
    - What are some of the positive memories and experiences you have growing up in your family?
    - What are some of the challenges you have experienced along the way? (e.g., feeling like you don't know who you are because you don't have any connection to your birth parents, how other people react to you or your family, or anything else)?
    - How did facing these challenges affect you?
    - How did you cope with these challenges?
    - What strengths do see in yourself and/or your family for helping you to get through these types of challenges?
    - What role have your characteristics, your family's characteristics, and the fact that you are adopted played in the creation of your own personal identity?

As aforementioned, the focus of this study was on understanding the lived experience of the participants through the story or stories they chose to share, however it is also important to acknowledge that previous research has failed to report demographic information on this population and their families. While the intention of this study was not to quantify or organize the participants and their experiences into boxes, it was still important to ensure that certain demographic information was gathered for the purposes of reporting the research accurately. To achieve this balance, participants were asked to complete a participant information sheet to share their unique family characteristics. The information sheet was completed upon the conclusion of

the initial interview, so the participants felt free to share any aspects that were salient for them about their adoption story during the interview, rather than being influenced by the types of questions asked in the information sheet about their family make-up (see Appendix F).

Participant Feedback Meetings

Member-checking is a type of credibility-check that ensures that participants feel confident that their story is being told accurately and that their voice is represented throughout the development of the research text (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Indeed, narrative inquiry highlights the importance of having other people (participants or otherwise) review these interim texts to ensure that the inquirer is accurately conveying the complexities of the stories that have been told (Clandinin et al., 2016). Member checking allows for the inquirer to obtain clarification and elaboration regarding the key ideas emerging in the story, as well as allows the participants to provide feedback on any changes or further thoughts they may have had since the initial interview (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The member checking meeting occurred within two months following the first interview with both participants, and Dolores' parents were excluded from this meeting to ensure that it was Dolores' voice represented as her narrative was being co-constructed.

After initially sharing their stories with me, I had written up a narrative of Sarah and Dolores' experiences as and then sent it back to them with an invitation to meet again and gather their feedback on how well the story represented their evolving experiences. I made sure to remind them that I want this story to best represent their experiences, and as such, I wanted to be very flexible in the details and writing style of the story as it felt best to them. I additionally came prepared with questions about anonymity, pseudonyms, and sensitivity of certain details

that were included in the stories, to ensure that I was also taking precautions to protect them against any potential risks of sharing their story in this way.

Sarah was very engaged in co-constructing her story, meeting three different times with a variety of feedback about her evolving experiences as she shared her story. She shifted through a few different pseudonyms before settling on “Sarah”, changed a few details of her story to help better disguise her identity, and clarified her emotional experiences during different aspects of her story. In re-reading her story she also remembered different experiences that she wanted to share and add to her evolving narrative. Early on in the process, she shared that she is an artsy person and was considering the idea of adding some of her art to the narrative, but later decided that she wanted to leave her narrative as a written account, as she felt this best suited her at this time in her life.

Dolores had one additional meeting, and expressed feeling very happy with her story, and that she felt it captured her experiences well. She did not want to add or change anything in her story, and when I asked if she was comfortable with the level of detail included about her mother’s passing, she explained that she feels happy with the level of detail I had provided. She noted that it was “cool” to see her story shared in this way, and expressed that she had been enjoying her time talking with me. Indeed, I had thoroughly enjoyed my time with both Dolores and Sarah, and felt connected to both of them in a way that I could not have ever predicted.

Recording and Transcription

All interviews were audiotaped on a digital recorder and transcribed verbatim, as the videoconferencing platform used does not retain any voice or video of interactions occurring on the platform. The transcripts were reviewed alongside the recordings to ensure accuracy. The recordings and transcripts are stored separately from each other at the inquirer’s home office in a

locked filing cabinet and on a password-protected computer. Pseudonyms were used in place of participant's real names on all transcripts for the data analysis process to protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality, as well as in planning future publications stemming from the study. In accordance with University of Alberta procedures, the study transcripts will be retained in a locked filing cabinet for five years after the conclusion of the research project.

Data Analysis Strategy

After completion of the interviews, the inquirer began the process of *restorying*, or re-telling the participant's story (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is well-known that when people tell stories they do not tell them in chronological order, even if asked to start from the beginning, so one very important aspect of re-storying is arranging the pieces of the participant's story coherently (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Polkinghorne, 1995). During the restorying process the overarching research puzzle and three-dimensional inquiry space were kept in mind, which assisted in identifying elements of the participant's stories that were most important in linking the story together (Josselson, 2011; Polkinghorne, 1995).

Once the initial restorying process was complete, the resulting narrative and interpretations, called an interim text, was sent to the participant whose story it represents for personal review (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008). As the narrative is co-constructed between the inquirer and the participant, it was important that the participant had the chance to review this text before moving on to more final stages of data analysis (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mills et al., 2011; Murphy, 2019). During this stage, participants were asked to specifically comment on the content of the interim text to ensure that it is as accurate as possible without compromising their identity (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Josselson, 2011). All participant feedback was

taking into consideration and used to revise the narrative until the participant felt that it most accurately represented their experience.

The final step in the data analysis process was to turn the interim text into a research text for publication purposes (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This document represents that text and includes the inquirer's interpretations that were developed in relation to the research puzzle (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All participants will be provided a copy of the final research text if they are interested in receiving one.

Memo Writing and Journaling

The importance of acknowledging the context in which the narrative is being constructed has been highlighted throughout this document (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Josselson, 2011; Mills et al., 2020). While efforts were intentionally made to ensure that the participant's context is reflected in the narrative during the data collection and analysis phases, it is important that the inquirer's context is not forgotten. As is common in qualitative research, I engaged in memo-writing and journaling about the process and progress of the research and personal reflections, to ensure that the final stories reflected the participants' lived realities and were not unduly influenced by my own frame of reference (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Given the co-constructed nature of the narrative, the importance of practicing reflexive research, and my own personal ties to this topic, it was important to engage in ongoing memo-writing and journaling activities as a form of "field text" throughout the course of this research study. Many of these writings have been included as indented single-spaced text at the beginning of sections throughout this document.

Member Checking

As aforementioned, this study had built in additional contact with participants for member-checking purposes. Given the co-constructed nature of the narratives, it was important for participants to be given the opportunity to review and edit their narrative as it was composed into its final form (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mills et al., 2020; Huber et al., 2011). A similar technique, triangulation, was considered for use in this project. Triangulation involves using multiple sources of information regarding the same topic or phenomenon to get as close as possible to the truth of the phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1995). However, given the sensitive nature of the topics and importance of protecting the identities of the participants, triangulation did not feel appropriate for use in this study. Instead, the concept of crystallization was used in this study, which transcends the focus of triangulation on finding the objective, one true story, and instead acknowledges the existence of many different forms of truth (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Ellingson, 2009; Vik & Bute, 2009). Crystallization lends itself well to a social constructivist framework, and involves the inclusion of thick descriptions, openness to including multiple forms of inquiry, attending to the complexity of interpretation, and researcher reflexivity (Ellingson, 2009; Vik & Bute, 2009). As these values are also built into the narrative inquiry research methodology, crystallization was a natural lens through which to approach co-constructing narratives with each individual participant.

Study Deliverables

While research is commonly thought of in the realm of academics, qualitative methodologies often underscore the importance of needing to give something back to the participants who take part in research (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Indeed, in narrative inquiry the goal is often to create texts reflecting real lived experiences from which readers can imagine their own uses and applications (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The present study developed a booklet (Appendix G) of the narratives provided by the adoptees that illustrates their lived experiences and highlights the strengths of these youth/emerging adults and their families. In addition to being provided to Sarah and Dolores, this booklet will be shared with relevant agencies (i.e., Adoption Options, Edmonton Pride Centre) to be available for the public to read. This follows the goal of narrative inquiry, as these resources will be publicly available and any readers will be able to use them for whatever applications they find suitable, such as informing their own notions about adoption, dispelling myths about adoption into LGBTQ+ families, or normalizing their own adoption experience.

Ethical Considerations

As with any research study, it is important to take the time to consider any possible ethical dilemmas that may arise. That being said, it was important to note that given the emergent nature of narrative research, it was never possible to predict exactly which ethical issues may become relevant within the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Josselson, 2007). This does not, however, mean that qualitative researchers are exempt from preparing for potential ethical dilemmas – as Josselson (2007) so poignantly stated, “ethics in narrative research requires commitment to certain ethical values rather than a priori behaviors” (pp. 17). Remaining attentive to the possible ethical tensions and responsibilities as an inquirer in this study in an ongoing manner was a vital part of conducting responsible research. The potential ethical concerns that were considered are broken into two categories – ethics of the relationship and ethics of report-writing.

Ethics of the Relationship

The essence of narrative research focuses on the participant's experience and the interaction between the participant and the researcher. Indeed, it can be argued that there are both explicit (i.e., informed consent) and implicit (i.e., personal relationship roles) relationship contracts between the participant and the researcher to be considered (Clandinin, 2013; Josselson, 2007). In particular, the importance of minimizing harm, ensuring ongoing informed consent, and safeguarding the participant-researcher relationship were contemplated.

Minimizing Harm

While research shows that most people find participating in research projects to be healing and helpful, we cannot guarantee that this is the experience of every participant and must be prepared to deal with any potential upsets that may occur, a concept known as minimizing harm (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Josselson, 2007). In the present study there was no risk to physical harm, as might be present in medical-testing research studies, but there was the possibility that participants might become upset during the discussion of their adoption experience, as this topic can be emotionally activating. The inquirer conducting the interviews for this study was a Registered Psychologist with training in working therapeutically with emotions and conducting in-the-moment risk assessments, which has been noted to be important knowledge for researchers to possess (Josselson, 2007). This training and knowledge would have been able to assist in the identification and addressing of any emotional upsets the participants may have had throughout this research process. In addition, participants were offered a list of free or low-cost counselling services they could access in their local community if they had any emotional concerns that arose after completion of the interview, which is a common practice in minimizing harm in qualitative research (Josselson, 2007). Of note, Sarah and Dolores reported that they did

not feel distressed, and both stated that they did not feel the need for counselling services or additional supports after taking part in this research.

Informed Consent

It was the inquirer's responsibility to ensure that the participants were aware of the potential benefits and risks of the research, their own rights within the research study, and what will be done with the information that they provided, a process known as gaining their *informed consent* (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Josselson, 2007). One of the biggest ethical dilemmas faced by researchers in the informed consent process is finding the balance between the need to state the purpose of the study to the participants, while needing to keep some information from them to prevent unintentionally altering what information they are choosing to share (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Josselson, 2007; Nestor & Schutt, 2012). For example, in the present study if participants were told that the researcher is interested specifically in their experiences of overcoming hardships related to their adoption, they may unnecessarily focus on difficult experiences or over-emphasize experiences of difficulty, which would affect the results of the study. To avoid this issue, while also ensuring that participants were informed about the purpose of the study for informed consent purposes, they were told that the general purpose of the study was to examine the experiences of adoptees adopted into LGBTQ+ families.

Another area of informed consent that may have led to ethical dilemmas was regarding who has the right to give consent for participation and the related concerns about coercion (Josselson, 2007; Nestor & Schutt, 2012). Research Ethics Boards in Canada indicate that adolescents aged 14 and above may have the decision-making capacity required to provide consent, as opposed to assent, to participate in the research, if they are: (a) provided full

information about the nature of study participation and the risks and benefits, (b) have the ability to reason through and ask questions to ensure they understand these risks and benefits, and (c) are not being pressured or threatened for accepting or refusing to participate (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2018). The inquirer believed that given the topic of study, inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants, full disclosure of risks and benefits of participation, and built-in checks about coercion to participate, adolescent participants in this study had the research decision-making capacity to provide their own consent. That being said, parental consent was still required for the adolescent participant, as she was 13 years old and could only provide her assent, and it was emphasized to the parents that they will not have access to the specific information their child provides in the interviews, only the final version of the stories in the booklet, and the final dissertation if they choose to read it. The inquirer also directly inquired with the adolescent participant about whether she was experiencing any parental pressure or coercion to take part in the study, and in the event that such pressure was disclosed, the interview would not proceed. The inquirer let the adolescent participant know that she will not communicate that they have not participated in the study to their parents if this is the case. Of note, the one adolescent participant reported that she did not feel coerced or pressured to participate. No youth or adult should ever be forced or pressured into taking part in research, and researchers must take every step to prevent and address any coercion (Josselson, 2007; Nestor & Schutt, 2012).

The researcher checked with all participants prior to beginning the interview that they still felt comfortable taking part in the research and that they have not been pressured to do so in an effort to maintain full informed consent. Youth participants were asked to affirm that they

have not been pressured to participate in the study on the informed consent form, and parents were also asked to acknowledge their child's own freedom to accept or decline study participation at any point in time on the consent form that they signed. Both adolescent participants and their parents were reminded that the parents will not have access to any information the adolescent has shared with the researcher, unless the adolescent voluntarily wants to share what was told to the researcher with the parents outside of the interview time. Parents were told that they will be given a copy of the final project stories that are de-identified if they would like these. In addition, participants were reminded that no one will be informed that they reached out, or about their decision to take part in the study, which includes parents, members of organizations they may have found out about the study through, and other participants.

Inquirer-Participant Relationship

One of the more complex aspects of narrative research is the inquirer-participant relationship (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Huber et al., 2011; Mills et al., 2020; Murphy, 2019). As aforementioned, the inquirer is engaged in both a professional and a more personal relationship with the participant, as they are conducting research on the participant's experience while also creating a sense of safety and connection that allows for them to feel comfortable sharing their stories (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Huber et al., 2011; Josselson, 2007). It was important for the inquirer to acknowledge the power-differential that may be at play and try to minimize this differential by being reflexive and aware of any actions they may take that might be felt as coercion by the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Josselson, 2007). Inquirers must also strive to make the participant feel comfortable participating in the interview by developing rapport and trust through showing compassion and

engaging in self-disclosure about their own backgrounds in relation to the study topic (Clandinin, 2013; Josselson, 2007). This was done in the present study through the inquirer sharing information about her own status as an adopted person, and expressing a willingness to answer any questions the participants may have about this.

It is also vital to consider the possibility of entering into a dual relationship with the participant, which refers to holding two different and potentially conflicting roles in the participant's life (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Josselson, 2007). For example, some participants may have wanted to continue having a relationship, or explicitly ask to engage in a dual role relationship, with the inquirer (Josselson, 2007), as this inquirer currently counsels members of the LGBTQ+ population and people who are adopted in a private practice setting. To navigate this issue, the inquirer in this research study decided not to engage in any dual roles with participants during the course of this research project. She planned to refer any participants wanting help for themselves or their families to other counsellors or psychologists who provide supportive services for this group. No dual roles relationships were engaged in or requested during this research project.

Ethics of Report-Writing

Another area important to address from an ethical perspective is the report-writing process. In relation to the above-mentioned importance of minimizing harm, it is important to take precautions to protect the identity of the participants in all write-ups of the findings, as it is not possible to predict the outcomes, positive or negative, of having their identities revealed (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Clandinin, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Josselson, 2007; Nestor & Schutt, 2012). That being said, no qualitative researcher can guarantee that the identities of their participants will not be figured out, especially in smaller communities, such as the subgroup of

adoptees who have LGBTQ+ parents (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Nestor & Schutt, 2012). Despite the fact that participant anonymity cannot be guaranteed, it is the inquirer's duty to make every effort to disguise their identity by using pseudonyms, changing names of locations, and altering other forms of identifying information that may be shared, all of which was done in conjunction with the participants of this study (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Clandinin, 2013; Nestor & Schutt, 2012). Several changes to potentially identifying information were made during the course of this research through ongoing discussions with Sarah and Dolores, and they were both made aware that people close to them may still be able to identify them despite these anonymization efforts. They both expressed understanding of this and indicated they felt the "final" versions of their story were de-identified well.

Another issue that arises in the process of report-writing in narrative research relates to participants' potential reactions to what the inquirer has written (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Josselson, 2007). While studies show that most participants do not read the final research product, and that those who do have generally not shared or reported any adverse reactions to what they have read, there is always a risk that a participant could disagree with or be upset by the inquirer's interpretations (Josselson, 2007). To help navigate this potential issue, member-checking was used in the construction of the field texts, which allowed participants the opportunity to add, remove, or clarify any areas of the narrative or interpretations that may feel problematic for them (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Clandinin, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Josselson, 2007). In addition, this study used a strengths-focused approach by trying to identify coping mechanisms that participants draw on to address any challenges or hardships experienced related to their adoption into LGBTQ+ families, so it is less likely that a participant was going to be upset by these findings than if the study were

problem-focused. Given the level of discrimination and negative profiling members of LGBTQ+ families face living in a homophobic and transphobic society, and the complete disregard for and marginalization of their voices in existing research studies on adoption, this study was very intentional in aiming to avoid problem-saturated or one-sided accounts of adoptees' experiences. Any challenges participants raised in relation to growing up in their families were situated in the contexts of the society they are living in and other people's reactions to them, and the inquirer collaborated with them in making sure they felt the story content accurately incorporated the story context, which is directly in line with the intention of narrative inquiry.

SARAH'S STORY

Sarah chose to share her story beginning with her account of her parents' perspectives prior to her adoption, as she felt as though this is when her story truly started. This was captured in the following narrative by initially writing from her disclosures about her parent's stance and experiences, however her parents were never directly spoken with about their own lived experiences. This is the way Sarah felt most authentically captured her lived experience as an adopted person in an LGBTQ+ family, and as such, this is how her story is initially represented. The story then turns to her own account of growing up in her unique family system.

"I didn't' even have consciousness when I was adopted, like, I literally did not have consciousness until I was already in Canada, I was already a Canadian citizen."

The two women toured around China for an entire week one crisp November, familiarizing themselves with the local cuisine, fashions, and customs. They appeared to be a couple of adventurous friends exploring China for the first time, taking photographs wherever they went, journaling about their experiences, and gathering little mementos as they moved along on their trip.

Little did anyone realize, these women were a couple, deeply in love and on the adventure of a lifetime together. Indeed, they had taken specific precautions to ensure that they were not seen as a couple and were simply assumed to be friends or sisters. They didn't do this out of shame, fear, or some other negative feeling they personally harbored towards their relationship. No, they hid their relationship so they would not be discriminated against, and so that they would be allowed to connect with another little soul who desperately needed them.

The two women met this little soul in the shape of an 11-month-old baby who they would come to name Sarah. She was just a tiny baby, swaddled in cloth to keep her warm, as she was fighting off a rough bout of bronchitis. While this was the first time they'd met, her mothers had been falling in love with little Sarah every day since they started the adoption process over a year earlier, even before they knew who she was. As they held her in that moment all the puzzle pieces seemed to fall into place, and they knew in their hearts that this had always been meant to be. The two mothers took turns holding their little girl in their arms and taking photographs of this monumental moment, all the while maintaining their façade of only being friends to protect their newly formed family. They were overjoyed and full of love as they held their daughter together that night in their hotel, safe from prying eyes, fully relishing the moment when their family of two grew to three.

"Their little China dolls, that's what we were."

Sarah's parents expanded their family a second time by adopting another little girl from China when Sarah was around four or five years old. Their mothers were excited to share the world with them, including their passions for travel and food. Sarah found it endlessly exciting to be taken on annual trips all around the world, reveling at the beauty she experienced worldwide. She was also exposed to a wide variety of foods from a young age, which sparked in her a sense of adventure and excitement for trying new cuisine. She felt very stable, supported, and fortunate growing up surrounded by these opportunities.

Lovers of photography and fashion, Sarah's mothers would regularly find her and her sister cute outfits when they were children and have family photoshoots together. Sarah loved these photoshoots, feeling warm and connected with her mothers, who fondly called the girls their "Little China Dolls".

Little did she know that these photos would give her smiles and laughter whenever she looked back over them over the years to come. To her, these photos were a well-documented story of her journey through life with her loving family, blossoming in her a deep sense of gratitude for the life she has been given.

"That's how [family] is supposed to be! They're all men and they're all together, and we're all women, so we're all together, that's just how it works. You don't mix them, you don't have multiple in one family!"

Sarah grew up within her parents' social circles, as many children do, and these people quickly became her points of reference for what constitutes a family. One of her closest friends as a young child was Mark, and she often had playdates with him. Mark had two fathers, and in connecting the dots in her own head about what families look like, young Sarah assumed that all families were one sex. In the budding mind of a four-year-old this simply made sense – her family was all girls, Mark's family was all boys, and all of the other couples she could remember meeting up to that point were same-sex relationships. To Sarah, to have a family was to have a loving group of people together who were the same sex.

Off to her first day of preschool, Sarah was shocked to discover not only that men and women often became couples and had children together, but also to discover that she was the only child in her preschool class of 15 with same-sex parents. She thought that it was so strange to have a man and a woman as your parents, as this simply didn't fit with her own experiences of family, and couldn't imagine what this dynamic might look like. In the blunt nature of conversation that is often attributed to young children, it wasn't long before another preschool child approached Sarah and told her that it was weird that she had two moms. The strong-minded and confident girl that she was, Sarah was quick with her retort, "What do you mean? You're weird because most people I know have two moms". And she wasn't wrong!

"Growing up without gender roles was a huge asset to my life. Nowadays we have the feminism movements and girls are told they can do anything a man can, but when you grow up just knowing it your entire life and it just being intrinsically there in you… It's different than having to learn it later in life."

Sarah's mothers were both very petite women, quite short and very thin, and yet there was never a task they wouldn't tackle. She grew up watching her mothers unplug drains that were clogged, climb counters to reach top shelves, change tires, cook, clean, and work full-time. Being surrounded by these models of independence and strength fostered in Sarah a hard-working can-do attitude as well as a deep sense of confidence in her ability to meet any challenge she could possibly be faced with. She grew up watching her mothers tackle every challenge head on without asking for assistance, and this is how she learned to function in life.

In Sarah's experience there was no such thing as gender roles or jobs allocated to certain genders – all work was just that: work. All members of her family engaged equally in all tasks and there was no division between any of the family members on what roles they played or which chores were theirs. As young Sarah started to learn more about traditional gender roles in school, she also quickly learned that these role divisions can often cause frustration in families. This was interesting to her, as this was something that she had never considered before given the equality of division of labour in her own home.

Sarah was, however, quite taken aback by the sudden shift she experienced in middle school where all of a sudden boys and girls were being treated drastically differently. She thought it was strange that girls and boys were separated and given separate sex talks in school when she felt that it was equally important for both groups to understand sex and pregnancy. She felt confused and frustrated that she was suddenly being labelled "weird" and "gay" for being willing to change into her gym clothes in the women's changeroom while most of the other girls waited in lines to get changed in one of the private

bathroom stalls. Even despite being called these names, Sarah felt a quiet sadness for the girls in this line-up, as they were so clearly ashamed of their bodies, and she didn't know how to help them realize what she was raised to inherently understand – "bodies are just bodies".

As she continued to grow into a young woman, Sarah noticed social trends towards empowering women and breaking down traditional gender roles, and while she was glad to see this shift happening, it also felt a bit strange to her. She was watching other women struggle with this shift and struggle to become more self-confident and independent, which was in such contrast to her own strong sense of independence. She was struck with the realization that she had been raised from the beginning of her life in a way that allowed her to have an intrinsic sense of worth, value, strength, and independence, and that this was something that many other young girls had not been given.

"I kind of had to go back into the closet about my family when I was there… I had to put on the sleuthing goggles and make sure I got a good idea of what people were like and their opinions before I really revealed my family to anyone."

An adventurous teen, Sarah was thrilled at the opportunity to move to the United States of America to live with a relative and attend a year at one of the local schools. Recognizing both the benefits and risks to taking this step of independence, her mothers sat her down and had a long conversation with her about how in different areas of the world people may be less supportive of two men or two women having a child together. This idea was so far from the reality that her life had been up until this point that Sarah had a hard time believing that things could really get that bad, yet she took her mothers' words to heart as she travelled to the United States.

Sarah began her junior high school year in a large city in the United States at a private Catholic school, and she quickly became aware of being surrounded by belief systems that did not necessarily support her mothers' love or her mothers' decision to have a family together. Having spent most of her life up until this point in a community and school system that supported her family, this was a new experience for her. Instead of chatting candidly and openly about her family and life, she felt like she had to keep this part of herself hidden from others and put the story of her family "back in the closet" to keep herself and her family safe. For the first few days in this new environment, Sarah was uncomfortable and quite unhappy.

On the third or fourth day in this new school, Sarah heard that a young devout Catholic student had confidently argued in her debate class for women to have the right to be priests. She sought out this person and a quick friendship blossomed between them. Feeling comfortable in knowing this person's values, Sarah finally shared the story of her family, which was received with warmth. She quickly learned that while religion is often equated with tradition, this is not always the case, and that there are very devout religious people who also hold progressive values. While she still had to be more aware of who she was choosing to share her family story with, Sarah began to open up more with other friends who were all accepting of her and her family. She was told that the fundamental principle of their religion was to love others, and that this was of utmost importance in how they viewed and treated others. Sarah developed deep friendships that semester, and despite only having planned to attend this school for one semester, she felt so incredibly welcomed by her newfound friends that she opted to stay for the entire school year.

"People outwardly see, like, oh you're Chinese. I'm like, I don't know anything [about Chinese culture]. People tell you a lot of things that are yours, but you don't understand them. So that's something that's a struggle, especially as an adopted kid."

Sarah grew up with a special little notebook from her mothers from as early as she can remember. This notebook was the one they took with them on their trip to adopt her, filled with their photos, memories, and personal writings about the experience and the unconditional love they felt for her from the very start. She was also given so many items and trinkets that her mothers had gathered on their

trip that she needed a small box to hold them all. She grew up with these cultural connections at arms reach, yet never really felt truly connected to her culture.

As a younger child she always felt like something was missing, but struggled to put her finger on exactly what this missing thing was. She felt incredibly loved and supported by her mothers and didn't have any other concerns in her life that felt connected to this missing piece of herself. It wasn't until she was an older teenager that she realized this missing piece was a personal connection to her Asian culture.

Sarah sometimes wondered what her day-to-day life would have looked like if she had grown up in China where she was born, as she would have been raised in such a different culture. As she grew up in Canada, others would often assume that she is connected to and aware of Chinese culture, as she visually looked Asian, but this was not the case. She was also frequently told that she doesn't look entirely Chinese and therefore she must only be half Chinese, or "mixed". These conflicting messages left Sarah feeling confused and a bit concerned that making efforts to connect to Chinese culture may actually be misplaced, as she does not know for certain the ethnicity of her biological parents.

Having grown up with such supportive parents who valued and modelled open communication in the family, Sarah felt comfortable opening up to her parents about this sense of a missing cultural component of her identity. Her mothers were immediately supportive of her desire to reconnect with this part of herself and expressed their remorse for not having made Chinese culture more of an active component of her life. Sarah was surprised at her mothers' apologies, as she truly believed that they had done nothing wrong. When she had been adopted, adoption agencies were not focusing on the cultural impact of cross-cultural adoptions, and it was not yet understood that an adopted child's heritage culture is important to include in their daily home life. It made her sad to think that her mothers blamed themselves for her sense of a missing cultural connection, and she reassured them that this was not the case. Together as a family they began to reconnect Sarah with her culture, and she loved that her entire family was now learning alongside her with equal excitement.

"It's a common joke in a lot of ethnic communities, and I like to joke with my parents that white people don't know spice. If you're going to eat with me, you're going to eat seeds and spices you've never seen before!"

Raised by Caucasian mothers, Sarah had not had much exposure to Chinese people or Chinese culture as a child, with the exception of a Chinese family friend she fondly referred to as Uncle Steve. Near the end of her high school career, she switched to a new school that was locally known as the "Asian high school", made up of a variety of students from different Asian cultural backgrounds. She loved her experience at this school, as she was able to see herself in many of her new friends, who themselves had varying levels of connection to their heritage cultures. It was through these relationships that she started to develop some initial connections with her cultural roots, attending festivals with her friends, engaging in new cultural celebrations, and trying new traditional foods. Sarah even pursued additional schooling after high school and used this opportunity to learn even more about her cultural background, taking classes in Mandarin and a course on the history of imperial China.

An unexpected silver lining arrived in Sarah's life with the arrival of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Like many families, Sarah found herself cooped up at home with her parents and sister with few things to do. As her family had instilled in her a love for food, Sarah decided to devote some of her time at home to learning how to cook different meals, and quickly found herself drawn to a variety of Asian foods. Not only did she learn about different ingredients and spices than she had grown up eating, but she also began to learn about the history of the food and why it had become such a staple in certain cultures.

As Sarah delved into cooking these new meals, she could feel her family coming together over the dinner table and reconnecting with each other, which was an incredible experience to have during the height of social distancing and disconnection brought on by the pandemic. She was excited to share the history of these new foods with her family, and her family was excited to learn about it as they shared the

meal together. Sarah learned to cook a variety of more traditional Asian foods from an array of different cultures, including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indonesian, and Malaysian cultures, and she continued to be inspired to learn more recipes throughout her life. Not only did she love the experience of cooking, but she also loved the sense of reconnection with her cultural roots and the fact that her entire family was joining her on this journey.

"I started to think about our family as a unit, and I was like, you know, people aren't actually used to that. It was like one night it just popped into my head after we'd gone for dinner and I was like, you know, I bet that people with a mom and a dad don't get this."

As an adult, Sarah realized that some of her other experiences growing up were also a bit unusual compared to her friends who had heterosexual parents. Always the inquisitive mind, she surveyed her friends about some of their experiences and compared these with her own. During her reflections she realized that throughout her life there have been several instances where her family was assumed to not be a family at all.

One particularly poignant example that stuck out in her mind were several instances of her and her sister as children being taken to a restaurant with their mothers. After enjoying their meals together the server would ask this family of two parents and two children, without fail, "Do you want the bill separate?" While she didn't think too much of this as a child, Sarah's recent survey of her friends confirmed her suspicion that those with heterosexual parents were assumed to be a family and given the bill together without question. Upon further conversation with her friends, she learned that when the bill was delivered to her friend's families it was often placed in front of the father figure, whereas in her own family, once it was clarified that the bill was indeed together, the bill would be placed in the canter of the table.

Curiosity peaked, Sarah speculated that these assumptions are likely happening on a subconscious level without any malicious intent. She understood that the physical differences in skin tone between herself and her sister as compared with her mothers was likely a factor, and that as adults it makes sense that people would assume they're friends as opposed to relatives. Yet despite these understandings, it still felt strange and didn't sit well with her that the world outside of her own home and upbringing assumes that she and her mothers are not a family.

In her own experience, her mothers had fought for their right to become a family with her and had devoted themselves entirely to their family. Her mothers had pretended to be simple friends and adopted her as a "single parent adoption" to ensure no discrimination would prevent their family from being whole. They worked incredibly hard to make sure their children had access to as many experiences as possible growing up, taking them on many family vacations and exploring new foods and cultures together. They diligently strove to provide their children with every possible opportunity growing up, and showered them with love, care, and compassion. In many ways it felt absurd that her family could ever be considered anything less than just that: a family.

"I don't want to discount anyone's experiences. There is equal ability and instinct in parents from both male and female sexes."

Reflecting on all the reactions she has had to her family throughout her life had Sarah contemplating the different reactions people had to men and women as parents. She had often heard single mothers applauded as strong, independent women, while the absent father figure was immediately labelled a "deadbeat dad" who the child was better off not knowing. Interestingly, when it came to her own family and having two mothers, people would often label her as missing an important and necessary father figure in her life. She felt as though the message was being delivered that two mothers raising a child together was somehow wrong because there was no male presence, but that a single mother raising a child alone was not wrong, despite the similar absence of a male presence. She had never once in her

life felt as though she wanted or needed a father figure, and it was frustrating to her that she was assumed to be in need of something more and that having two mothers was somehow not enough.

And yet Sarah wanted to be very clear that she in no way discounts men as parents, and fully believes that all people regardless of their sex or gender can be incredible parents. She loved to reference the many examples in the animal kingdom of the sex of an offspring's parent not being an important factor in the roles they play, which is something that has become so emphasized with humans. She learned that both male and female pigeons make breastmilk for their young, that male seahorses carry their babies, and that male penguins take care of their eggs while the females go hunt. Sarah wanted to be clear in her belief that there is equal parenting ability between males and females, and that the best parents are not based on their sex or gender identity. She knew how hard her own parents had fought to adopt her, and how much harder they had to fight as a result of systemic discrimination. Sarah grew up feeling endlessly loved and supported, knowing that her parents fought harder than she could have ever imagined to create their family together.

"It doesn't matter what you look like or who you love, and it doesn't matter what your child looks like and who they love. That willingness to see the adoption process through to the end and face discrimination at the same time proves your commitment to loving that child openly and generously for the rest of their life."

Walking Alongside Sarah

I thoroughly enjoyed all of time I was able to spend speaking with Sarah, and always left our conversations feeling like I was reflecting in a new way on my own and other's lived experiences. Sarah was 21 at the time of our conversations today, and loved to have deep, reflective discussions about things that were important or interesting to her. She was a naturally inquisitive person who enjoyed examining and exploring her own shifting experiences, and I tried to capture these characteristics by bringing to life what she identified as salient in her narrative. Sarah and I had many conversations throughout our time together and I will forever be grateful to her for how these conversations have impacted me in my own personal reflections.

The Power and Struggle of Quotations

Something that I did not expect when beginning to speak with Sarah was how important messaging would end up being, especially when co-constructing her story. I did not have a plan regarding how Sarah or Dolores' narratives would look, and simply trusted the process of working with them to help identify this as we got to know one another. Sarah was a very

eloquent, well-spoken individual, and I fell into the habit of scribbling down direct quotes throughout our conversations together, as she had a knack for succinctly and powerfully stating her point. When it came to writing her story, I realized that these quotes felt like anchors for her experiences, and I decided to use them as headers to illustrate this.

When I sent Sarah the first draft of her story, I was very nervous about how she would feel about not only how I had worded the stories I had written up, but also about the way I had structured her narrative. This was not a "story" told in the traditional way, from start to finish, but instead ended up being snapshots of the shifting experiences in her life, grounded in her own words. When we next met to discuss this first draft, she shared that she enjoyed the way the story was written up, and acknowledged that while it was not the traditional way a story or narrative might be told, it felt representative of her lived experience. In addition to sharing new experiences that had come to mind after reading my representation of her own narrative, she asked if it would be possible to slightly change a few of her direct quotes. I reminded her that this is her story and her words and that if she wanted to make changes so that it better represented her experience we would do so.

As Sarah and I worked together to co-construct her narrative, I learned the importance that words and phrasings held for her. She shared that she felt like taking part in this research was a way that she could share her story and the messages that she wanted to convey to the world about what her experiences have been like. One area that felt particularly important to her was the final quote of her narrative. She wanted to capture everything that felt important to her about her experience, while also making a statement about what is important in making an adopted child feel loved, and what made her personally feel unconditionally loved. She struggled

for several weeks with figuring out the “ending” to her story, and the message that she wanted it to deliver, and she eventually identified a quote that she felt comfortable with.

I think this is incredibly reflective of how there is no “ending” to a person’s lived experience, and what feels most important today may have shifted by tomorrow. There is no ending to the experience, and as such, a narrative is never truly finished. These narratives are meant to be an attempt at capturing a person’s lived experience in the midst of their ongoing experiences, while also recognizing that their story is always evolving and never be able to be fully captured and “finished”. Even though Sarah identified a quote she felt happy placing at the end of her narrative for the purposes of this research, I suspect that when she looks back on this narrative in the future that quote will continue to shift and change for her, never being able to fully capture her experience.

Sarah’s Identity: What Is Salient?

One of the reasons I chose to examine the experiences of people adopted into LGBTQ+ families was because of the innate multi-levelled aspects of identity that are built into this experience. Sarah identified herself as a 21-year-old, “Mainland Chinese”, queer female in her discussions with me as well as on her demographics form, illustrating the various aspects of her identity that may be intersecting in her experiences. However, just because someone possesses certain characteristics does not mean that it feels salient for them with regards to how they identify, making it important to reflect on what each individual person identifies as salient in their own experience.

LGBTQ+ Parents

Sarah felt very passionately about the fact that her parents identify as LGBTQ+, and viewed this to be vital to her experience of her life and adoption. Even in telling her story, she

felt that her story had to begin with her account of her parents' experience of adopting her, a story that had been told to her many times through them. For Sarah, what really stood out was the fact that her mothers had to fight discrimination and lie about their LGBTQ+ identity and relationship to ensure they would be able to unite with her. This fight is a very unique experience that many LGBTQ+ prospective parents face as they continue to battle societal discrimination and myths about LGBTQ+ parents being somehow less capable to parent than heterosexual parents.

To Sarah, the fact that her mothers had to fight to become her parents highlighted the love that they felt for her. She expressed that knowing her parents fought to get her and had to put themselves through such an emotionally difficult struggle deepened her sense of their unconditional love for her. In one of our conversations together, I asked her if she feels like she would have felt this same depth of unconditional love if her parents did not have to fight discrimination to have adopted her. She acknowledged that all adoptive parents have to fight to some extent to adopt a child, but then highlighted that there is an additional level to the fight that LGBTQ+ parents have to face in adoption that deepens this experience for her. In fact, this aspect of her experience was so important to her that she struggled with how to word this experience as a final quote to her story. I believe that in addition to the final quote she chose to use for her narrative, the others she shared with me underscore just how important her mothers' experiences as LGBTQ+ adoptive parents were for her:

- "It doesn't matter what you look like or who you love, being discriminated against and still going through with all of the adoption processes… *Those* people will make the best parents."

- “It doesn’t matter what you look like or who you love, if you remain determined despite facing discrimination within the adoption process, there’s no doubt in the world that you will care for and love another human being.”
- “If you have the willpower to go through the lengthy adoption process as well as face the additional roadblocks of discrimination… This shows the enormous depth of your parental love.”

Female Identity

Sarah highlighted her experience as a female as being a large part of who she is, as she was raised in an all-female home. In our conversations she would laugh at some of the widely held beliefs that a female needs a “strong man” in their lives to ensure they can do all their necessary activities of daily life, in particular, to do any heavy lifting, plumbing or yard work. She expressed that these beliefs were absurd to her, as she was raised with two petite female mothers who did every single required activity around the home. To Sarah, females are strong and independent, and she could not understand the idea that some people believe these are things females cannot do. In her own words, “why couldn’t I change my own tire? If you have a tire that needs to be changed you just do it. Or why couldn’t I unplug my own drain? You just look it up and you do it.”

Growing up in a female-only household both provided Sarah with several role models of strong women and provided her with a body-positive environment. She shared that it was not until she was in a gym change room in junior high school that she realized that many young females struggle with body image issues. Having been raised to unconditionally love herself and her body she was not afraid to change in the main changing area, which was very different than the majority of her classmates, who lined up at the bathroom stall to change in private. Sarah

noted that she was even called “weird” for being so open and comfortable with her body, but that this ultimately made her feel sad for the other girls who were clearly struggling to feel confident in their own bodies. She expressed that she was raised to “intrinsically” value herself as a female and see females as strong and independent, which is different from much of the dominant messaging experienced in society.

> *“And you know what, to be fair there might be some families with a single mother and female children where they’re still all the same gender, but they might not experience that same openness, so I kind of attribute that to my parents being LGBTQ [as well] … There is a certain heightened level of openness with same-sex parents… you have to be open because they’ve had to explain a lot of their lives to other people before and they’ve had to share a lot. So just be open and life is better.”*

Mainland Chinese Ethnicity

Sarah shared that her identity as a “Mainland Chinese” person has impacted her throughout much of her life. She shared that she did not have much exposure to Chinese culture when she was younger, with the exception of her connection with family friend Uncle Steve, who was also Chinese. It was when she started attending the high school that locals refer to as the “Asian high school” that she began to learn more about her heritage culture through newfound friends. One of the most exciting aspects of this high school for her was that all of the other Asian students had varying levels of connection to their own heritage cultures. While some students were very well-connected to their cultural roots, celebrations, food, and language, others were hardly connected to these aspects of their life at all. As a result, Sarah found that she was able to relate to and see herself and her own experiences within the other students at this high school. This was where she started learning about her cultural roots and engaging in activities

that were deeply rooted in Chinese culture, including attending festivals, trying traditional foods, and engaging in cultural celebrations.

Sarah expressed that after high school, and particularly in the last few years, her ethnic identity as a "Mainland Chinese" person has become even more salient. As a result, she sought out opportunities to further connect with her culture, including taking Chinese language and history classes. With the arrival of the pandemic, she unexpectedly found herself stuck at home and ended up discovering a passion for learning how to cook a variety of Asian foods. She thoroughly enjoyed this newfound activity, as she also took the time to learn about the history of the foods she was cooking and then shared this information with her family. She painted a picture of her serving dinner to her family at the table and sharing the history of the food, the history of her culture, with her family, who was excited to learn about it. She noted that traditionally people bonded and told stories while sharing meals, so this way of exploring her cultural roots felt "very natural and fulfilling" for her, allowing her family to deepen their relationships, expand their knowledge, and grow together.

Transracial Adoption

Sarah expressed that she does not think her parents were ever told about the importance of connecting one's adopted child to their heritage culture, which is why she feels she did not get much exposure to Chinese culture as a child. She was very quick to note that she does not blame her mothers for this lack of cultural exposure, but instead thinks that this is a reflection of the zeitgeist of the time. She stated that she thinks prospective adoptive parents are now having discussions about how to navigate transracial adoptions in a cross-culturally sensitive way, but that she believes this was not a conversation that was ever had with her mothers. Interestingly, research on transracial adoptions has only recently become a focus in the adoption literature,

which suggests that there has indeed been a shift in focus in the adoption world to exploring transracial or cross-cultural adoptions.

In discussing how her family approaches their experiences as a transracial adoptive family, Sarah highlighted how open her family is with one another. She regularly expressed that she felt very comfortable talking with her entire family and that she was raised in an environment that supported, encouraged, and valued openness. As a result, when she began to be feel a desire to start exploring her cultural roots, she was able to be open about this need with her entire family, who in turn provided their unconditional support. I had wondered if perhaps these conversations were difficult to have, but Sarah was adamant that even if she needed to have an uncomfortable or difficult conversation with her mothers, she would still do so without hesitation. Her family's focus on valuing and fostering openness and honesty helped to create an environment in which Sarah felt comfortable moving through and exploring the salient aspects of her experience as they became important to her. Indeed, it allowed her to not only explore her identity as a transracially adopted person, but also allowed her to bring her family along with her on her journey to learn more about and embrace her Chinese heritage.

Being "Outed" By A Transracial Adoption

I immediately recognized how ethnicity and adoption interact in my very first interaction with Sarah. I was excited for her to share the photos of the day her mothers first met her, and when I saw the photo one of the first things my brain registered was that this was a photo of two Caucasian people holding an Asian baby. There was no way to hide the fact that Sarah was not biologically conceived by her parents because at first glance anyone would be able to tell that this was genetically improbable. To borrow some terminology from the LGBTQ+ population, Sarah was immediately "outed" as an adopted person because of her different ethnicity.

Interestingly, Sarah described having multiple experiences of people becoming extremely confused when trying to figure out how she could have two Caucasian parents. She said that people would stare and become very curious and determined, “like they were trying to solve a problem”, but very few people came up with the solution that I was adopted”. I had a long conversation with Sarah about how this seems so funny to us because adoption is a concept we have grown up knowing about for our entire lives, so we would almost immediately guess that someone was adopted in this situation. However, for people who are not immediately touched by adoption this may not be the case, which, in Sarah’s case, led to a lot of confusion and sometimes insensitive and invasive questions about how she could possibly have Caucasian parents as a Chinese woman.

Challenges

Being Seen as A Puzzle to Solve

Sarah expressed that there is a compounding effect of having LGBTQ+ parents on “outing” them as not being likely to be biologically related to their children. If someone has two mothers or two fathers, people tend to wonder how their child was conceived, and if the child is also of a different ethnicity than the parents, this question seems to come to the forefront of their minds. As Sarah noted, it was “like a puzzle” for people to figure out, as these were two non-traditional family aspects that many people may not often consider in their daily life.

In Sarah’s experience, people would become unusually fixated on how she came to be in her family upon noticing that she has two Caucasian mothers. Even though this level of detail about a person’s life are quite private, in Sarah’s experience people sometimes felt the need to try to “figure out” how she came to be in her family and ask her “a lot of personal questions about it”. This is a unique experience that people in heteronormative families would likely never

experience. This also seems to be something that is likely only experienced by transracial adoptees or adoptees with LGBTQ+ parents, as people who were adopted into heterosexual families of a similar culture would appear to be no different than a heteronormative family. It is when the adoptive family looks different than a traditional family, either by having LGBTQ+ parents or parents of a different ethnic background, that the family "becomes a puzzle to solve" from outsiders' perspectives.

Questioning of Familial Status

The questions that usually followed this desire of outsiders to "solve the puzzle" often lie in the realm of microaggressions. Examples of questions Sarah shared include: "How can *they* be your parents?" "How can they be *your* parents?" "Why didn't they adopt a child who looks the same?" These types of questions insinuate that this group of people, two parents and a child, simply cannot be a family because they have differences. They also put the adopted person in a position where they may feel like they need to defend themselves or defend their family's status as a "real" family. This can be an especially difficult position to be put in as an adopted person, as many adopted people are already on their own personal journey of developing their sense a self, which is often tied up with their membership in an adoptive family. To then have the legitimacy of their family questioned can exacerbate or cause a sense of instability and confusion that will make this personal journey even more difficult.

The experience of having the legitimacy of one's family questioned is something that is often experienced by all adopted people. There are still many people out there who believe that a "natural born" child of two heterosexual parents is somehow more legitimate than an adopted child or a child with LGBTQ+ parents. With the drastically shifting context of what the typical family looks like in the 21st century, I hope that these types of questions will be less common

moving forwards, and that families can be accepted as such without being put through vigorous questioning. However, in Sarah's experience this has continued to be an ongoing issue.

Going "Back into The Closet"

Sarah expressed that throughout the majority of her life she felt incredibly well-supported by her mothers, family friends, and her local LGBTQ+ community, so she personally experienced very few moments of discrimination towards her mothers. That being said, she did have the experience of feeling like she needed to hide the fact that her parents are LGBTQ+ when she traveled to a very different, more traditional community to attend a few semesters of schooling. Sarah described what felt like a very strange experience at the time where her mothers sat her down to discuss the fact that other people in different communities may not be as supportive of LGBTQ+ parenting as their local community has been. When she went to this different community she expressed that she had to "put on the sleuthing goggles" to get a sense of her new friends' values before she would feel comfortable opening up about her family make-up to them. While she noted that she found really great, supportive friendships during this experience, she also stated that this experience made her have to "go back in the closet" about her family to protect them and herself from potential discrimination.

The concept of being "in the closet" in the LGBTQ+ community refers to the idea that one is hiding their true LGBTQ + identity, a step that is often taken to protect oneself from potential discrimination or microaggressions. LGBTQ+ families who adopt may experience the need to hide their identity for a variety of additional reasons outside of the individually-based discrimination concerns. Additional reasons that LGBTQ+ adoptive parents may choose to hide this part of their identity include, but are not limited to, avoiding discrimination within the adoption system and process, protecting their adopted child from LGBTQ+-related

discrimination experiences, and preventing their family form being impacted by the commonly held incorrect myth that LGBTQ+ parents are somehow "less than" heterosexual parents. In Sarah's experience, her mothers hid their LGBTQ+ identities in order to adopt her, and then many years later she hid their identities to avoid potential discrimination in a new community. This is an experience with unique depths and considerations that likely only people adopted into LGBTQ+ families could experience.

Strengths and Coping

LGBTQ+ Parents

In Sarah's experience, the fact that she has LGBTQ+ parents is a huge part of why she feels so incredibly loved by her parents and knows that she "truly belongs" in her family. She described her mothers' struggle to adopt as an LGBTQ+ couple, and how they had to hide their sexual identities in order to ensure they would not be discriminated against in the adoption process. We discussed the complexity of adopting as an LGBTQ+ couple, including the historical discrimination in the adoption system, ongoing prejudice, and the fears of being discriminated against part-way through the process as an LGBTQ+ person. Sarah knew her mothers' story of their journey to adopt both herself and her sister very deeply, and expressed that no other potential adoptive parent would have had to fight as hard to adopt as an LGBTQ+ couple would. To her, this was a clear demonstration of their love and devotion to her as their child, even before they had ever met her. This knowledge of her parent's struggle to adopt as an LGBTQ+ couple deepened her sense of belonging in her family, which is an experience that someone who was adopted by a heterosexual would not have.

LGBTQ+ Community

An extension of this sense of love and support that was so vital to her sense of inner strength and stability came from the greater LGBTQ+ community that Sarah was raised in. She

noted that her mothers were “well-connected in the LGBTQ+ community” and that she was raised in an environment where she was surrounded by members of the community who not only supported her family structure, but was also given the consistent messaging that she is welcome to be herself. She returned on several occasions in our conversations together to the fact that she was raised to be honest, respectful, and open with her experiences, and the fact that she was raised within the greater LGBTQ+ community was something she highlighted as an important factor in this experience. Being surrounded by a supportive and loving community was an aspect of Sarah’s experience that allowed her to grow and develop into the reflective and resilient person that she is today.

Strong Female Role Models

Something that Sarah consistently returned to when discussing her lived experience was the fact that she was raised in an all-female household. She reflected in our conversations together that a unique aspect of her experience was the fact that she was raised to “innately understand” that females are strong and independent, and it never occurred to her that she may be “missing” a male figure in her life, as some have commented to her in the past. She expressed that being raised with this understanding helped her to feel strong, independent, and confident, which she feels is different from a lot of experiences she has noticed young females having when growing up. As aforementioned, she feels like the fact that her mothers were also lesbian women contributed to this experience, as they specifically created an equal partnership where roles were all shared. As Sarah noted, “it wasn’t like this one packed lunch for me every day, [and] this one made dinner for me every day… It would be either of them.” Growing up with such strong female role models is a large part of why Sarah feels so confident in her own sense of self, which in turn has helped her to differently experience and navigate various challenges in her life.

Joining in Cultural Exploration

One of the most powerful experiences Sarah shared during our time together was regarding her navigation of her relatively new desire to seek out and connect with her heritage culture. While this can sometimes be a difficult experience to navigate within transracial adoptive families, this did not appear to be the case for Sarah and her family. Sarah described going through the processes of sharing her desires to explore her cultural heritage with her mothers, exploring their differential emotional reactions to this desire together, being unconditionally supported in her cultural journey, and learning and sharing her new knowledge with her entire family. This process highlights the ongoing sense of openness, safety, and vulnerability that has been fostered in Sarah's family, qualities that have encouraged her to explore and grow as a person as different things become salient in her life.

> "I get to learn these things and then come home and tell my moms and they're so excited to hear about it and know that I'm kind of delving into this [cultural exploration], which is exciting… It's okay because now it's something that we get to pick up together."

An Inquirer's Lived Experience

It is impossible to inquire into another person's experience and not be impacted by it in one way or another. One of my roles as an inquirer was to be reflective about the ways in which my interactions with Sarah and Dolores impacted me throughout this process. Throughout my time with Sarah, I did a lot of reflecting on myself, my experiences, my research, and the level of weight each person places on different aspects of their experience. It is important to capture and continue to reflect on these musings, as one's lived experience is ever-evolving, and I have chosen to share some of these reflections and learnings here.

Realizing that I "Pass" as a Member of my Family

I have always known that I "pass" as a member of my adoptive family, meaning that I physically look like I could be the genetic offspring of my parents. Interestingly, my birthmother and adoptive mother look very similar, and when I was younger, could have been mistaken as sisters. I have heard that some birthparents specifically try to choose adoptive families that look like them and sometimes wonder if this was part of my own birthmother's thought process in choosing my parents, whether intentional or subconsciously.

It was interesting to hear Sarah's description of her adoption as having so many experiences of being "outed" as adopted. Not only did she have two mothers, which made people quickly wonder how she was conceived, but she was also a different ethnicity than her mothers, which led to many instances of her being questioned about her role in the family. Sarah expressed that people would assume that she does not belong to that family, and assume that she was just a family friend, or perhaps a more distantly related cousin. She indicated that after identifying her mothers *as* her mothers, most people would become very confused and unable to figure out how these two Caucasian women could have her, an Asian woman, as their child.

This was interesting to both Sarah and myself, as it seemed fairly obvious to us that the two mothers in a situation like this must have adopted their child, however this had not been Sarah's experience. I wondered if perhaps the concept of adoption was less known than I had assumed, despite its growing prevalence. My life and my brother's life had been surrounded by the concept of adoption, as we had open adoptions and open discussions in our immediate and extended families about it, and this was very similar to Sarah and her sister's experience growing up. The major difference in our experiences was that I "pass" as a member of my family, as no one could tell from looking at us that I was not genetically related. I had not really reflected

deeply on this idea until after my conversations with Sarah, and now realize that my ability to "pass" in my family is a privileged experience, as I have almost always been able to choose when and with whom I share my adoptive status. This was not the case for Sarah.

How Sarah's Baby Box Led to my Own

Sarah shared the contents of her baby box with me at the very beginning of our journey together, and I distinctly remember her beaming and laughing as she flipped through the pages of her mothers' journal of their journey towards meeting Sarah and building their family together. This book and documentation of her mothers' journey was incredibly special to her, as it was a permanent reminder of how much they loved her, and how hard they fought to create their family. I thought this was an incredibly powerful memento to have and wondered how many other prospective adoptive parents created something like this for their children.

A few months later my Nana passed away, and we were going through old photo albums as a family to help pull together a story of her life. About an hour into this process my mother passed me a large, frilly photo album that was very clearly from the late eighties or early nineties, and I opened it to the front page expecting to see younger pictures of my parents and grandparents only to find an old letter carefully preserved in the plastic pages. Looking a little closer I saw the beginning of the letter addressed to my parents and noted some loopy handwriting that I did not recognize. I flipped to the next page to look at the back page of the letter and was shocked to see the small handwritten signature of my birthmother. I glanced at the next few pages of this album – there were letters back and forth between my parents and my birthmother, my parents and my birthmother's family, and my parents and my birthfather's family.

A quick conversation with my mother confirmed that she had indeed documented her and my father's adoption journey as soon as they found out that my then-pregnant teenaged birthmother had chosen them as the parents to give me to upon my birth. She had somehow known the significance of what she was doing, and even hand-wrote copies of her own letters back to my birthmother to ensure she documented the entire journey for me to look back on one day. She explained that she had given me access to this album throughout my childhood, but I had expressed disinterest in it and she did not realize that I had forgotten it existed.

I couldn't believe that I had forgotten something as important as this, especially given my area of research and professional interest in adoption. That being said, I also recognize that there were many times in my life where my adoption did not feel as important to me as it does now, or it felt so important that I did not feel ready to dive any deeper into my own story and needed some separation from it. I read a few of the letters throughout that photo album that day – letters from before I was born, and letters from after I was born. Letters from my parents expressing their joy in journeying through life with me and desire to keep visiting regularly, and letters from my birthmother expressing her happiness for the life I had been given while also expressing her heartbreak at giving me up. I learned that the middle name I had always felt disconnected with because it felt too "girly" is what she wanted to call me. This photo album became my own baby box, much like Sarah's, and this experience has only deepened my sense of gratitude and honor that Sarah was willing to share this part of herself with me and allowed me to walk alongside her during our time together.

The Power of Language: Mothers, Birthmothers, and Sperm Donors

As aforementioned in the literature review, the role of language is incredibly important in narrative inquiry as a research methodology (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2008;

Clapton, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Josselson, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is also an important aspect of the adoption community and LGBTQ+ community, as the terms used to identify oneself and one's family members are integral to the experiences of these populations (Clapton, 2018). As such, care was taken to reflect the specific language used by both Sarah and Dolores as well as to reflect on my own use of language throughout this journey.

I had always referred to my birthmother as just that: "birthmother". This was the language I was raised to use, and as I delved into academic literature on this topic, this was the most commonly used phrase to describe the biological mother of an adopted person. The importance and power of language and labels was somewhat shockingly pointed out to me in one of my first conversations with Sarah when she referred to the women who gave birth to her as her "sperm donor". Intrigued, I asked her if she would be comfortable commenting on why she chose this language, and she explained that the word "mother" to her implies that there is a relationship established, and she does not have a relationship with the person who gave birth to her. For Sarah, it was more comfortable and reflective of her experience to refer to the two people who conceived her as "sperm donors".

In my conversations with Dolores, I noted that she chose to refer to the woman who gave birth to her as her "mother", which was different than Sarah's "sperm donor" as well as different from my own term of "birthmother". While Dolores explained that she and her fathers did have a short relationship with her mother, she also noted that her mother passed away several years ago and that she "did not know her very well". Interestingly, Dolores had two other important maternal figures in her life who she had grown up referring to as her "half-mother" and her "spirit mother", and these terms seemed to hold important distinguishing meaning to her and well as her fathers. It was important to her in describing her own experiences to use the labels of

“mother”, “half-mother”, and “spirit mother” to identify and differentiate these three important figures in her life.

As an inquirer, I am always also actively reflecting on my own experiences, and my conversations with Sarah and Dolores had me reflecting on my personal preference for the term “birthmother”. I would not be comfortable referring to the woman who birthed me as a “sperm donor”, as this felt too distanced for my own experience, having had a relationship my entire life with this woman. However, I would also not feel comfortable referring to her as my “mother” either, as she did not raise me, and it is my own experience that the word “mother” is used for the woman who raised you. In all my reading of adoption literature, I have not come across a better term than “birthmother”, although in doing this active reflection on the meaning in language, I wonder if this term is even a bit too formal for my liking. Interestingly, in an interview I did with Adoption Options on this research, I spontaneously stated that my birthmother feels more like an aunt to me. I now wonder if the feeling I associate with the word “aunt” is perhaps closer to a more reflective term of my relationship with my birthmother, though even this still does not quite feel right.

The importance of language is also reflected in the terms that Sarah, Dolores, and Dolores’ parents personally chose to refer to themselves as. I had excellent conversations with each of them about different people’s comfort levels with a variety of LGBTQ+ terms, and highlighted the importance of being open and flexible to whichever terms each person felt most accurately represented themselves. Sarah sparked an interesting discussion on whether my family demographics form was looking for the gender or sex of the involved parents. Dolores clarified whether or not she was allowed to identify her ethnicity as “Canadian”, as this is how she identified but was not sure if the term “ethnicity” meant she had to focus on identifying the

colour of her skin. Given the importance of capturing the unique, individual experiences of each of my participants, I encouraged them to use the terms and identification labels that they felt most comfortable with, which has been reflected throughout this study.

Naming as a Challenge and Opportunity

As both an inquirer and a mental health practitioner, it can be difficult to navigate the use of language, especially when participants or clients are using language that is unfamiliar or evokes a response in the professional. In both roles it is key to pay attention to the language being used and to model that language in the work being done, as ignoring someone's preferred terminology could be harmful to them or to their relationship and rapport with the professional (Clapton, 2018; Josselson, 2011). For example, in this research if Sarah's preferred term of "sperm donor" was replaced with words like "birthfather" or "father", this would have not only been an incorrect representation of the relationship she feels she has with this person, but she would likely have also felt unheard or disrespected by the inquirer, potentially causing her for feel bad or damaging this relationship. A similar situation could occur in a therapeutic setting if, for example, a mental health professional was refusing to use a client's preferred identity term of "queer" and was instead using a term such as "gay" or "lesbian". In this example, ignoring the preferred language may harm the client or damage their relationship with the professional, as this would be mis-identifying the client, may be experienced as brushing an important aspect of their personal identity to the side, and could also be considered a microinvalidation (Sue, 2010a, 2010b, 2019; Sue et al., 2019). Indeed, ignoring a client's preferred language or substituting for one's own preferred term would be imposing the professional's personal lens onto the participant or client, which is something that most professionals in research and clinical work actively strive not to do.

While the prior examples serve to illustrate the importance of recognizing and modelling the language used by one's participant or client, it is often not this straight-forward. For example, this inquirer once witnessed a friend who identifies as a lesbian refer to herself as a "dyke", and then heard a mutual male friend who knows very little about the LGBTQ+ community call this female a "dyke". In this situation the female friend ended up explaining to the male friend that some terminology comes with negative connotations if said in the wrong context or by the wrong person, and that she does not give him permission to call her by this term. Sometimes language with a historically negative connotation may be used by members of a certain demographic in an effort for that group to reclaim the word, and may not be appropriate to model back to the client. Indeed, a person's choice of terminology often has a meaningful purpose or represents something important to them, highlighting how vital it is to be reflective and intentional about using preferred terms and having conversations about terminology where appropriate (Sue, 2010a, 2010b, 2019). In most circumstances as an inquirer or mental health professional it will be important to have a respectful and open conversation with the participant or client about their preferred terminology as a way to ensure they do not unintentionally cause harm to this person or their relationship.

In yet another perspective shift, it is vital to realize that both language and individuals' preferences will shift and change over time. As aforementioned, certain terminology regarding how to identify the people who birthed the adopted child has fallen in and out of favour throughout the years, including "natural", "first", and "birth" (Clapton, 2018). In a similar way, individuals will shift and change as they grow and move into different phases of their identities. For example, while Dolores currently refers to the woman who birthed her as her "mother", this preferred term may shift or change as she moves through various stages of her own identity

development. In Sarah's lived experience, she currently looks back at being called a "China doll" by her mothers as very endearing, however as she continues on her own path of developing her sense of racial identity she may view this language differently down the road. And in either of these examples, these preferred terms and sense of meaning gained from this language may not change at all. As professionals, whether in research or clinical settings, it is important to pay attention to the language used, check in about preferred terminology, model this preferred language, and be willing to shift alongside the participant or client as their preferences or views shift and change.

DOLORES' STORY

Newborn: The First Few Days

Dolores was only two days old when her life changed forever. She was lifted out of the hospital bassinet and hugged in the arms of a man she would come to call her father. He was accompanied by his friend, a woman Dolores would later call her half-mother. Her father took her home that evening into his cozy bungalow home that he and his partner had lovingly re-organized to prepare for her arrival. It had everything she could ever have wanted as a baby – a warm crib, soft clothes, colourful toys, and fuzzy stuffed animals. As her father kissed her goodnight that first evening, he told her how much he loved her, and said that he had a surprise to share with her – she had another father who was rushing home to meet her as soon as possible!

A few days later, Dolores was busy grabbing fistfuls of teddy bear fur and marveling at the feeling, when suddenly someone burst through the doors. It was her other father, who had rushed home from his international work meeting the second he heard that Dolores had been born. He tossed his briefcase on the table and knelt down beside the little Dolores, who was staring at him with wide, wondering eyes. He told her how excited he was to meet her and that he loved her very much, and then he lifted her into his arms for a great big hug. Her other father joined in the hug, and together both fathers promised to love and care for Dolores until the end of time.

Baby: The First Few Years

Dolores felt very loved as a baby. Not only did she have two loving fathers who made sure she had everything she could ever want, but she also had two special women in her life – her half-mother and her spiritual mother. She enjoyed spending time at her spiritual mother's home, which was always very well-kept and tidy, and she loved to watch her spiritual mother's dog run around the house with tiny socks on his little feet. Dolores also enjoyed the many sleepovers she had at her half-mother's house, which usually included watching her favorite tv show, Blues Clues, and having her half mother read her multiple bedtime stories.

For the first five years of her life, Dolores also had another woman in her life – the woman who gave birth to her. Dolores' fathers felt it was important for her to have a connection with the woman who gave birth to her, and made sure to arrange visits with her birth mother as often as they could. As she was

so young, Dolores was not able to remember most of these visits, however one visit in particular stood out in her mind. As an energetic five-year-old, she had enjoyed munching on a sub sandwich for lunch with her fathers and her birthmother, and was excited to spend some time playing at the park afterwards. She remembers having a lot of fun that day, and this became a special memory for her, as this was the last time she saw her birth mother. Shortly after this visit, Dolores' birth mother passed away, and though this made her feel sad, she was still able to look back at their last visit together with a smile and warm feeling in her heart.

Toddler: The Next Few Years

As she got a little older, Dolores' fathers quickly learned just how much of a jokester she was. One time her fathers tried to teach her to do yoga, and while they were bent upside down, twisted into a yoga pose and encouraging her to try it, the energetic Dolores was somersaulting around the living room and playing with her toys. On another occasion, Dolores was watching a tv show and her father used the remote to turn off the television. She quickly jumped up, walked over to the tv, turned it back on, and promptly returned to her seat to continue watching her show. Surprised, and wondering if perhaps she hadn't understood that it was time to turn the tv off, her father turned it off again with the remote and softly said, "That's enough tv, Dolores". Without missing a beat, Dolores hopped to her feet, walked over to the tv and turned it on again, but this time instead of walking back to her seat she gave her father a mischievous grin. Her father couldn't help but laugh at his daughter's antics, and as soon as she had her father laughing, Dolores turned the tv off and skipped out of the living room.

Dolores also loved spending time with her friends, and quickly made life-long friendships. She befriended two sisters who lived a few houses away from her, as well as two brothers who lived close by, and she enjoyed playing outdoors and going to parks with them. Often while their parents were visiting, Dolores and her friends would learn the goofiest dances they could find to show to their parents, and would then burst into giggles at their parent's reactions. Other times, they would take the cushions off the couches, and then stack them up with each of the friends in between the cushions to make a Friend Sandwich that stretched towards the ceiling! No matter how many times they got together, there were always more games to be played when it came to Dolores and her friends.

Pre-Teen: Another Few Years

When Dolores was about ten years old, she and her fathers moved a few blocks away into a new house that felt a lot bigger than their old house. She really enjoyed this new house, as it was so big it had four bathrooms, was still close to her friends, and was right across the street from her school. She was also still enjoying spending time at her half-mother's house playing with her half-mother's cats and snakes, and she found it funny that one of her fathers was so scared of snakes that her half-mother would need to cover the snake enclosures whenever he came to visit. As hard as she tried to convince her fathers to get a pet snake for their own home, Dolores' fathers remained adamant that they did not want a snake in the home, but were willing to compromise and get a hamster instead. Dolores was very excited to have a pet in the home, and loved to feed and play with her little hamster.

One day, Dolores' fathers asked her if she would want to take a blood test to find out more about where she came from. They explained that she would send a little droplet of her blood away to a genetics testing lab, and then a few days later they would receive information on her genetics. This was not something Dolores had ever considered before, but after it was explained to her, she became a bit more curious. As her birth mother had passed away and she did not know who her birth father was, Dolores did not know much about where she came from and decided to do the genetics test. When her results came back, she thought it was cool to learn that she has African genes, but otherwise did not think too much about the results.

Dolores had always loved comic books and tv shows about superheroes and space, but as she grew older she started to learn even more about her favorite heroes and villains. She found the

backstories of her favorite heroes fascinating, and quickly discovered that she has an excellent memory for fantasy stories and lore. Unfortunately, some of the kids at her school liked to tease her about this, and called her hurtful names like "nerd" and "freak", but despite this she felt supported by her friends and was able to find pride in these aspects of herself. She decided not to let words like "freak" and "nerd" hurt her, and instead decided to proudly call herself a "geek" and continue to learn about the stories and characters that she loved so much.

Teen: The Most Recent Years

Dolores was met with a bit of a challenge when she became a teenager, as there were no other women living in her house to provide her with guidance through puberty. Never missing an opportunity to joke with and slightly embarrass their daughter, Dolores' fathers gave her a bunch of books on puberty and insisted that pads and tampons were the same thing, which Dolores knew wasn't true. As much as her fathers liked to joke around, they also made sure she had many opportunities to ask questions about puberty with them, as well as with other females in her life, like her half-mom, spiritual mom, aunt, and cousin. While her fathers weren't able to understand the experiences Dolores was going through at this time, they made sure that she had all the support she needed to get through this part of her life.

Now that she was in junior high, Dolores started to hear remarks in school that did not fit with her own experience of the world. She would overhear classmates saying things like "You like someone who is the same gender as you? Ew!". Additionally, on a few occasions she was made fun of for being adopted, at one time having someone say to her "Your mom gave you up because she didn't love you". While these kinds of remarks were hurtful, Dolores felt confident in not letting them bother her. She was surrounded by friends and family members who loved and cared for her, and she knew in her heart that the reason she was given up for adoption was not because her birth mother did not love her. She knew that she was given up for adoption because her birth mother loved her but was just unable to take care of her. Comfortable in her knowledge of the truth, Dolores was able to brush these hurtful comments aside, and instead strengthened her own resolve to be a caring, kind, and non-homophobic person.

Dolores had many strengths that she used to get through difficult situations, several of which she learned from her fathers. Throughout her life her fathers had loved and cared for her, and they were always quick to swoop in and take care of her whenever she got hurt or needed support, like when she crashed her bike and needed to get seven stitches. They also taught her to use her humor as a strength, something she was clearly naturally talented at, as just a few moments after getting a painful scratch across her eye she started jokingly referring to herself as Luke Skywalker. Even though Dolores had been too young to remember it, her fathers were doing exactly what they had promised her all those years ago – loving and caring for her until the end of time.

Walking Alongside Dolores

It was an absolute privilege to be able to spend time with Dolores as she shared her own experiences of her life with me. The experiences that stood out to her in her life were very different than those of Sarah's, and both of their important experiences were very different from my own. Dolores was 13 at the time of our conversations together, and she loved to joke and chat, especially about superheroes. I tried to capture this youthful approach to life and view of various experiences in the way I wrote her story, and she expressed happiness after reading her

story, commenting that it was “cool” and felt like her own story was captured in the written words. Even though Dolores and Sarah belong to the same group of “People Adopted into LGBTQ+ Families”, their lived experiences were incredibly different, as was my journey alongside both of them.

Meeting the Parents whose Story is Also Being Told

As Dolores was only 13 at the time of our visits, it was important that I gain her parents’ consent to have her participate in the study before I was able to meet with her and gain her own consent. Her fathers were truly enjoyable to meet – they were very friendly, with very different personalities. They both had inquisitive minds and were curious about my research and its purpose. While they were clearly excited to have Dolores involved and felt connected to the intent of this research, they were also cautious, and wanted to make sure that I was conducting this research for the right reasons and had considered the many angles involved in working with the LGBTQ+ parent population. I could feel their love for their daughter and their passion for supporting the LGBTQ+ community in every question and comment they had, and I would not have been able to predict how many times I would mentally return to this conversation to help re-invigorate my own passion throughout the gruelling process of completing all aspects of a dissertation research project.

Part of narrative research that was not as poignant in my own research due to the pandemic is the importance of context. It would have been expected for me to have met both Sarah and Dolores in their own identified environments, whether that was a coffee shop where they felt comfortable, a park that was important to them, or in their own living room. In narrative inquiry it is not uncommon to meet the friends or family members involved in your story as you co-construct narratives, however this was simply not possible with the pandemic restrictions that

were in place during this research. I think that the necessity of meeting Dolores' parents allowed me to dip my toes into this missing element, and I can understand how powerful these types of experiences could be in narrative research. I was very grateful for the unexpected opportunity that the meeting with Dolores' fathers ended up being.

Dolores' Identity: What Actually Matters?

My experiences with Dolores had me reflecting on the importance of honouring individual lived experiences. As she was my second participant, I had come into our conversations together naturally wondering if there would be any similarities in my conversations with her about what is important to her in her lived experience. I was struck by the stark differences in what Dolores found to be important in comparison to what Sarah found to be important. While it felt very fitting to title use a title like "What is Salient?" in Sarah's lived experience, this did not quite fit for Dolores. For her, this type of a title feels too clinical, too heady, and too jargony. Instead, even though it essentially means the same thing, it felt more representative of Dolores and her experiences to title this section "What Actually Matters?".

Friendships

Something that was immediately highlighted as important when speaking with Dolores was her friendships. She described having several different friendships, a few of which have been nearly lifelong, that are very important to her. She expressed feeling like she can be herself and just enjoy her life to its fullest when playing with her friends, which is why she tries to spend time with them whenever she can. Many of her stories and salient experiences in her life have happened with her friends right there beside her – from fun experiences like creating dances together and building "Friend Sandwiches" on the couch to more difficult experiences, like

experiencing an injury while biking and dealing with “mean kids” at school. Through it all, she focuses on the importance of her friendships in walking through her life.

Personal Interests

Another aspect of her life that is very important to Dolores right now is focusing on the things that she finds interesting. She expressed that she enjoys learning at school, but that she especially enjoys assignments that allow her to be more creative or to weave in her interests. For example, one of her teachers recently gave the assignment of creating your own superhero and writing about them, and Dolores was overjoyed to see her interests in storytelling and superheroes mix with her enjoyment of learning and school. Others noticed this as well, as Dolores shared that not only her friends, but also mere acquaintances also commented upon receiving the assignment, “This is going to be her favorite subject so far, we all know it!” In her own words, “At school I’m known as the geek and the superhero fan!”

Outside of school Dolores shared that she feels passionately about superhero culture and karate. She enjoys spending her spare time watching superhero tv shows and learning about their backgrounds. Indeed, I, the inquirer, consider myself quite a superhero fan who is fairly knowledgeable about superhero culture, however I could not hold a candle to the depth of Dolores’ knowledge in our conversations! In addition, Dolores expressed that she really enjoys being quite active and engaging in sports like skiing, tennis, and Taekwondo. She noted that she likes being able to move her body around because this feels fun for her, even if it does feel like quite a workout!

Challenges

When Your Classmates say "Ew!"

For Dolores, the more difficult aspects of her life right now primarily happen while she is at school. While she noted that she surrounds herself with her friends and tries not to give a second thought to negative comments from others, she did share that some of the mean kids at school. She noted that she would be called a "geek" or "nerd" for liking school and fictional worlds, and that these labels did not bother her at all, however she would sometimes also be called a "freak" for these same reasons, which was more hurtful.

In one particularly salient example of another challenge she faced at school she mentioned overhearing two classmates talking and one of them said "Ew, you like the same gender that you are!" This was an important experience for Dolores because she has two fathers who love each other, and this classmate was expressing his opinion that there was something wrong or bad about this. Dolores was quick to note that she did not feel really strongly impacted by this experience because she is not friends with this person and therefore does not give much weight to their opinion, however she did make sure to mention that it happened, and she overheard it. It had stuck with her enough for her to feel like it might be important to mention when discussing her relevant life experiences.

When Your Dads Don't Need Pads

Another challenge arose for Dolores when she reached the age of puberty, as she had a female body and her fathers both had male bodies. She explained that she was given books to read and menstruation supplies, and that her fathers had offered to have open discussions with her about her questions, but that she was unsure how well they could answer their questions if they had not experienced menstruation and female puberty themselves. She expressed that her

fathers had set her up with several female connections and role models, like her female cousin, “spirit mother”, and “half-mother”, and that she was able to connect with them as well with her questions and concerns as she started to experience puberty as a female. This is a challenge fairly unique to the children of LGBTQ+ parents, as sometimes the parents may only have experience of one type of puberty to draw from when helping their child move through these stages of life. In particular, two fathers or two mothers will be most likely to run into this challenge when raising a child of a different biological sex than themselves.

Strengths and Coping

Humor and Openness

Immediately upon meeting Dolores and her fathers, I was struck by how much they loved to laugh. From her fathers laughing together as they tried to predict how much Dolores would talk about superheroes with me to Dolores giggling as she shared some of her first memories of goofing around with her fathers, it was clear that this family values humour. Dolores expressed that she loves to joke around with her fathers and that they often use humour to help them work though challenging situations. For example, Dolores explained that when she started going through puberty her fathers would joke around and poke fun at their own lack of experience in this area. They would jokingly insist that pads and tampons are the same thing, which Dolores said made her laugh, which in turn made it easier to bring up these topics that might have otherwise felt more weighty.

When I directly asked Dolores about what strengths she feels her family has, she took a thoughtful pause before saying the word “negotiating”. She explained that her fathers have created a family structure and relationship with her where she feels very comfortable opening up to them about her difference of opinions. While this shows up in the form of “negotiating” things

like chores and homework times, this also shows up in her willingness to talk to them and discuss her thoughts and interests. As in the previous example, she feels comfortable telling her fathers if she needs more menstruation supplies or if she wants to talk with one of her female family members about her puberty experiences, and this is a direct result of the openness that has been developed in this family, often through humour. Dolores expressed in her own words how these qualities have been used as strengths in her life:

> "I didn't see the tree branch and I ran and it scratched my eye like that. [pretends to scratch eye] But the good thing that happened about that was I was able to look like Anakin Skywalker in Episode Three where he had a scratch! And so I was like, "I'm Anakin Skywalker!" and my parents laughed and it was like, well that's one way to make when you're hurt [turn] into laughter, right?"

Supportive Friendships

Dolores consistently highlighted her relationships as strengths for her. As aforementioned, many of her challenging experiences are happening in school, where she only has her friends to rely on in the immediate moment. She expressed that while she sometimes overhears anti-LGBTQ+ comments or is directly called a "freak" she is able to not take the comments personally because she knows that she is so strongly supported by her friends. She explained that "most of [her] friends are part of the LGBTQ+ community", so they have similar values to her and a "pretty cool about it" with regards to her having two fathers. She indicated that negative comments from others do not really stick with her for very long emotionally, and when asked about why this is she indicated that she feels so well-supported by her friends and family and these comments simply do not hold as much weight as a result.

LGBTQ+ Parents and Their Chosen Family

When asked whether having two fathers has impacted her as a person, Dolores was so quick to answer "yes!" that the question had barely even been asked yet. She felt very strongly impacted, especially with regards to her values, as shown in the following quote: "All the memories that I have is because I have two dads, the reason I am me is because I have two dads, right? Yeah, making me be non-homophobic because I have two dads that are gay!" She expressed feeling proud of this value, as she strongly believes that people are all "fine the way they are, they're humans". With regards to the classmates she overheard making discriminatory comments about LGBTQ+ people, Dolores expressed that she feels like "that's just rude, that's just being mean", and that she would not ever want to be someone who reacts like this.

When discussing the challenges she experienced in having two fathers who do not have personal experience with female puberty, Dolores indicated that this did not feel like a major difficulty for her because of how her fathers had intentionally surrounded her with female role models who would be able to support her with some of these concerns. Indeed, one of Dolores' fathers explained that there are two female family friends that had been involved throughout her life. He clarified that her spiritual mother was intended to be a spiritual guide in life, as she and her partner have a "non-dogmatic approach to life and a real connection to nature", and that throughout the years she provided both guidance and wisdom to both Dolores and her parents. Dolores' father further clarified that the person Dolores refers to as her half-mother is a woman who became a "de facto mother figure" early on in Dolores' life by having her over for regular sleepovers with her own four children growing up and being consistently present in their lives. He also shared that Dolores' half-mother is planning to ask Dolores to be one of her Maids of Honor in her upcoming wedding, illustrating the strong bond between the two. The intentional

efforts Dolores' fathers took to ensure that she had female role models in her life to connect with as needed created an environment where Dolores felt fully supported growing up, even in areas that her fathers did not have personal experience with.

Superheroes

Dolores' passion about superheroes is unmatched in my personal experience, and I am surrounded by quite a few superhero fans. On numerous occasions she would talk about the most recent episodes of the most recent superhero tv show and relate it back to the hero's backstory, sometimes even contrasting and comparing the show backstory to the comic book backstory. She expressed a fascination in the stories of how her favorite superheroes became superheroes and expressed that she really enjoys "fictional worlds" and their characters.

Superhero backstories almost always involve the main character going through an incredibly difficult time and then having to learn to transcend this challenge (Fradkin et al., 2015; Rubin, 2007; Rubin & Livesay, 2006; St. Clair, 2018). For example, Peter Parker struggles with being bullied and his uncle dies in a way where he feels partially responsible. In getting his powers as Spiderman he has to learn to overcome his bullying struggles in a healthy way as well as overcome his own personal struggles regarding his uncle's death. In another example, Matt Murdock is an orphan who ends up being blinded by chemical radiation as a child and struggling with poverty in New York. In getting his powers as Daredevil he has to learn to overcome his blindness as well as works to overcome poverty and try to give back to his community. These themes of people learning to transcend challenges both large and small over their lifetimes is essentially the definition of resilience. Dolores' love of superhero stories and feeling of personal connection with the characters can be seen as a connection with the experience of resilience, something that is an incredible strength to have.

There are Many Adopted Superheroes

Dolores' love of superheroes was clear from the moment I met her, and she was incredibly knowledgeable about a variety of superheroes from various different superhero universes. Thanks to my superhero-loving partner, I had enough of a base knowledge of superheroes to have some really interesting conversations with Dolores about superheroes and which ones she is drawn to. We had a good laugh about how she has corrected her teacher on the backstory of a superhero in class, and how she has been enjoying a class assignment on developing her own superhero.

What really stuck out to me was how much Dolores, along with a large number of the current population, have fallen in love with various superheroes and their stories. In my own experience the fictional characters I come to love are relatable to me, which made me reflect on whether there are any adopted superheroes. Much to my surprise, I was able to call up a handful of adopted superheroes without much difficulty. Superman came from a different planet and was adopted by two human parents; Spiderman's aunt and uncle adopt and raise him after his parents are forced to leave; Loki was adopted by Odin to grow up as Thor's brother; the Scarlet Witch and her brother are adopted after their parents are killed, and the list goes on.

I realized that while adoption, whether formal or informal, is actually quite prevalent in superhero backstories, and is not often portrayed as such or discussed in more mainstream versions of the superhero stories. While I think there is an incredible power in normalizing the experience of adoption in mainstream media, I would also be cautious with regards to focusing on the adoption aspects of these particular stories. As outlined earlier, adoptions are already negatively labelled and assumed to be difficult or problematic, with adoptees often being assumed as being psychologically troubled as a result of the adoption. While I could see the

benefit in normalizing some of the superheroes we look up to as having been adopted (such as Spiderman), I could see how highlighting this aspect of other superheroes' stories would further perpetuating this stereotype (e.g., Loki). It is incredible how something that was right before my eyes for so many years was imbued with a variety of adoption stories and I did not even realize it until Dolores opened my eyes to it!

An Inquirer's Lived Experience

As with Sarah, my conversations with Dolores had me reflecting not only on my own lived experiences, but also on representations of adoption and resilience in popular media. It was an incredible experience to sit down as a thirty-year-old woman with a thirteen-year-old and reflect on life in ways that had never occurred to me before. Dolores' lived experiences, thoughts about life, and unapologetic passion for her interests and hobbies were inspiring, and I hope to share just a few of my reflections here to illustrate the power of this experience on me as an inquirer and fellow adopted person.

What Would You Bring?

When I initially spoke with Dolores' parents and informed them that I would be asking her to bring an object representative of her adoption experience if she wanted to, one of her fathers had a few predictions for what of several possible items she would bring. Naturally, it came as a bit of a surprise when Dolores came to our first meeting together and told me that she did not feel there were any items that felt important to her adoption experience. I initially felt a little disappointed, as some of the items her father had mentioned seemed like they would be very relevant to her experience, but then quickly reminded myself that this is Dolores' story, not her fathers, and not my own. If there were no items that felt important to her, then she currently had no items that felt important to her experience at this point in her life.

After some reflection on my own experiences, I recognized the importance of walking alongside Dolores in her current lived experience as a 13-year-old. I remembered how I had thought I had never seen the photo album of my birthmother's letters before, only to find out that I had been given access to it throughout my life and it had not felt important to me at that time. Certainly, when I was 13 years old, an old photo album of letters would not have caught my attention for very long, even if I they were from my birthmother. It was only when I was a 30-year-old woman going through old photo albums with my mother that these letters would become important in my life.

So I ask myself to again reflect on the question: what item would I have brought when I was 13? Probably nothing. That does not mean that my adoption experience was not important, or these items I had held my entire life have no meaning. It just means that at that point in time, in the midst of my own evolving experiences, these items did not feel important in this way. I suspect this is the same for Dolores, and I would love to catch up with her years down the road to ask both of us again what items we would bring. Perhaps nothing at all, perhaps something that we currently have that just is not as important right now, or perhaps something we have not even identified yet, like a photo album of letters forgotten in the back of a closet.

DISCUSSION

Walking Between Lived Experience and Literature

It is important to connect the information gathered and narratives and experiences shared by participants to the research literature that is currently available. This creates room for reflection about how the findings of this research fit into the dominant messaging being brought forth in the research literature. As this research messaging is often the basis for information

sharing and theory development around working with different populations, it is vital to comment on how the present research findings fit in or contrast with current literature.

Challenges: External as Opposed to Internal

As aforementioned, research literature on adopted people is very problem-saturated and indicates that people who are adopted are much more likely to struggle with internal problems such as psychological concerns, mental health issues, and behavioral problems, leading to the "adopted child pathology" label (Baden, 2015; Balenzano et al., 2018; Barth & Miller, 2000; Ferranti et al., 2015; Fisher, 2003; Jones, 1997; Towse et al., 2019). Interestingly, these findings tend to show up in the research on adopted children and youth, but do not show up in the research on adopted adults (Balenzano et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2019; Fisher, 2003; Jordan & Dempsey, 2013; Whitten & Weaver, 2010; Wiley, 2017). As a result, this study was specifically looking at the experiences of adopted adolescents and young adults to explore what might be happening for this age group that can facilitate positive adaptation and resilience in response to any challenges faced during this critical period of development and transition.

Sarah and Dolores' accounts of their lived experiences highlighted the fact that the challenges they experienced in their lives were limited, and suggested that they are not experiencing the high level of problems that past research suggests are prevalent among adopted people (Baden, 2015; Balenzano et al., 2018; Barth & Miller, 2000; Brown et al., 2019; Fisher, 2003; Jones, 1997; Sass & Henderson, 2000). Furthermore, the specific challenges they described to be impacting them are different from those that most of the existing research suggests. As reviewed earlier in this document, research literature seems to suggest that adopted people specifically experience challenges that come from an internal source, for example, their own mental health or behavioural responses (Baden, 2015; Balenzano et al., 2018; Barth &

Miller, 2000; Ferranti et al., 2015; Fisher, 2003; Jones, 1997; Towse et al., 2019). However, the challenges shared by both participants in this study were almost exclusively external in nature. For example, many of Sarah's challenges revolved around people questioning the legitimacy of her family due to their LGBTQ+ status and ethnic differences. Dolores had similar experiences in the fact that her primary challenges arose from overhearing classmates expressing discriminatory views towards LGBTQ+ people. These findings challenge what appears to be the common thread in the academic literature of adoptees struggling with a disproportionately high level of problems, as well as contests the assertion that the challenges they face are primarily from internal sources of concern, versus challenges imposed by outsiders to their family experiences, or biases in the surrounding society.

Indeed, many of the difficulties Sarah and Dolores faced stemmed from microaggressions they were experiencing based on the fact they have same-sex parents, the fact that they are adopted, or their ethnicity. Neither Sarah or Dolores noted experiences of microassaults or microfictions, however they did share experiences of microinsults and microinvalidations. Microinsults include unconscious remarks or behaviours that convey demeaning stereotypes or are insensitive (Docan-Morgan, 2010; Sue, 2010a, 2010b, 2019; Sue et al., 2019). An excellent example of this occurred when Dolores' classmate loudly exclaimed to someone, "Ew, you like the same gender that you are!", all the while being fully aware that Dolores has two fathers. This would be considered a microinsult because it is insensitive and conveys the stereotype that it is somehow wrong to like someone of the same gender, which not only impacts Dolores directly because of her same-sex parents, but also may impact her on a more personal level as she continues to explore her own sexual identity and gender expression. Dolores was also told by a classmate on one occasion that "Your mom gave you up because she didn't love you", which is

not only a very hurtful comment, but also conveys the stereotype that adopted children were unwanted and unloved by their birth families. Another very clear example of a microinsult occurred when Sarah was told on one of her very first days of school that having two moms is "weird", which was another insensitive comment suggesting that there is societal agreement that there is something wrong with being a same-sex couple. In my conversations with her throughout our time together, Sarah noted many other examples of microinsults that she experienced that convey demeaning stereotypes, including questions like "Who is the man in your moms' relationship?", and questions about how the family can possibly address house-related problems that are traditionally considered to be male roles, such as unclogging the sink. She shared that these microinsults were frustrating for her as it conveyed the message that without a male figure in her life she must be somehow missing out or feeling unfulfilled as a result.

In addition, Sarah reported that she has experienced a variety of microinvalidations, which are noted to be the most damaging form of microaggression because they deny the lived experiences of a person by negating or nullifying their experiences (Sue, 2010a, 2010b, 2019; Sue et al., 2019). In particular, the legitimacy of Sarah's family make-up often came into question, which she felt was often because of the fact that she not only has two moms, but also because she is Chinese and they are both Caucasian. As aforementioned, Sarah expressed that whenever people saw her with her mothers, they viewed her presence in the family as a "puzzle" to be solved and often asked insensitive or invasive questions. Indeed, Sarah noticed that as she got older people seemed to assume that she must simply be a family friend, simply visiting with these two Caucasian women, as they couldn't possibly be her parents. These types of ongoing

experiences are considered microinvalidations, as they deny Sarah's lived experience as a daughter to her two mothers and question the validity of her entire family make-up.

Interestingly, Sarah and Dolores experienced microaggressions in the form of microinsults and microinvalidations, and experienced these microaggressions as a result of being adopted ("Your mom gave you up because she didn't love you"), having same-sex parents ("Who is the man in your moms' relationship?"), and, in Sarah's case, the fact that she is a different ethnicity than her mothers ("Why didn't they adopt a child who looks the same?"). Microaggressions can have a variety of negative impacts on those who experience them, including physically (e.g., lower measures of overall health), emotionally (e.g., increased anxiety, depression, and hopelessness), behaviourally (e.g., feeling hypervigilant), and cognitively (e.g., decreased problem-solving skills) (Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Lui & Quezada, 2019; Sue, 2010a, 2010b; Sue, 2019; Sue et al., 2019). However, both Sarah and Dolores expressed that while experiencing these challenges was difficult, they have both been able to move forwards and grow from the experiences, demonstrating their resiliency in the face of struggle.

Resiliency: The Missing Piece of the Research Puzzle

Resilience is often viewed as a dynamic ability to overcome adversity through positive adaptation, and is viewed not as a stable trait, but as an ever-shifting process that is unique to different contexts (Farr et al., 2016; Fradkin et al., 2015; Fritz et al., 2018; Luther et al., 2014; Schwarz, 2018). There are a variety of factors that have been shown to contribute to developing resiliency, including individual, familial, and community factors (Fritz et al., 2018; Luther et al., 2014). Individual factors include things like having high levels of mental flexibility, distress tolerance, the ability to cognitively reappraise experiences, and personality factors such as

agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and low neuroticism (Fritz et al., 2018; Luther et al., 2014). Familial factors include having a supportive relationship with one's parents and extended family members, having a sense of cohesion and positive atmosphere within the family, and the use of positive parenting skills, while community factors primarily reference having high levels of social support outside of the family, which may include additional caregivers (e.g., teachers) or peers that act as positive role models (Farr & Vázquez, 2020; Fritz et al., 2018; Luther et al., 2014). Of note, personal and familial factors have been found to be the most effective resiliency factors (Fritz et al., 2018; Luther et al., 2014). It is important to note that resiliency theories have been critiqued for being too prescriptive, as resilience is not an absolute construct and will vary between each individual person (Farr et al., 2016; Fradkin et al., 2015; Fritz et al., 2018; Luther et al., 2014; Schwarz, 2018). However, research on resilience has identified correlations with individual, familial, and community factors that are important to acknowledge, especially when working with marginalized or vulnerable populations (Fritz et al., 2018; Luther et al., 2014).

One study by Farr at el. (2016) specifically examined the experiences of resiliency in children aged 6-11 who were adopted into lesbian- and gay-parented families. This study found that the most commonly expressed experience of these highly resilient children were having a positive relationship with their parents, having additional supportive adult relationships in their lives, tending to think more positively, and learning methods of coping with their negative experiences or microaggressions from their parents, who had already experienced many of these microaggressions earlier on in their own lives. Similar studies by Farr and Vázquez (2020a) and Goldberg et al. (2016) had similar findings. These studies provide further support for the link between several of these factors and a high sense of resiliency.

Sarah and Dolores have both experienced adversity in their lives, from the experience of being adopted through to the present day microaggressions that they experience as a result of various aspects of their identity. Despite these difficulties, both Sarah and Dolores noted that they do not feel they have been adversely affected, and instead view some of these experiences as opportunities for growth or importance experiences in developing positive aspects of themselves. Sarah appears to possess many factors related to the development of resiliency, including high mental flexibility and ability to cognitively reappraise experiences, as seen in her reflective tendencies and reframing of her experiences, and personality characteristics like agreeableness and openness, which were evident throughout her interactions during the study as well as in the stories of her experiences that she shared. She also noted having a very supportive relationship within her immediate family, a sense of cohesion and positivity within her family, and a high level of support within her social circles, including family friends, peers, and cultural mentors. Her individual characteristics in combination with the high level of familial and community support she experiences are likely related to her resiliency in the face of adversity.

Dolores also presented with many of the characteristics that have been noted to be linked with resiliency. She shared examples of her high level of distress tolerance and ability to cognitively reappraise her experiences, as shown in her ability to navigate hurtful classmate comments without taking them personally, as well as demonstrated resiliency-related personality factors such as agreeableness, openness, and low neuroticism in her conversations during this study. She also expressed having a strong supportive relationship with her parents and extended family members (including her chosen family members), a positive, humour-based atmosphere in her home, and high levels of perceived social support outside of her family, including many of her peers and family friends. This wide array of factors in Dolores' life are linked with resiliency

and may contribute to the fact that she has been able to positively adapt in the face of difficulty throughout her life.

Superheroes as Enhancing Resiliency

An area of additional interest in Dolores' life was her strong connection and identification with superheroes. The resiliency research mentions the importance of having positive role models, though these role models are often discussed in the context of parents, responsible adults, or peers (Farr et al., 2016; Fritz et al., 2018; Luther et al., 2014). However, superheroes can also be seen as positive role models, a fact that has been clinically applied in play therapy with children (Fradkin et al., 2015; Rubin, 2007; Rubin & Livesay, 2006; St. Clair, 2018). As aforementioned, most superheroes go through the process of experiencing adversity, having a moment of empowerment, and then learning how to positively adapt to their adversities and future problems (Fradkin et al., 2015; Rubin, 2007; Rubin & Livesay, 2006; St. Clair, 2018). Superhero-based play therapy often encourages the child who experienced adversity to draw parallels between their struggles and their hero's struggles, and then help them to also start identifying with the hero's powers, actions, and capabilities to transcend their difficulties (Fradkin et al., 2015; Rubin, 2007; Rubin & Livesay, 2006; St. Clair, 2018). Indeed, this process has been used successfully with pediatric cancer patients in Brazil, and was termed *invincibility suggestion* for its ability to help the children identify their own inner strengths and powers (Fradkin et al., 2015). It has also been noted that this type of approach is likely most beneficial for use with people who have experienced adoption, abuse, neglect, or abandonment, as these experiences most closely resemble the experiences of most common superheroes (Fradkin et al., 2015; Rubin, 2007; Rubin & Livesay, 2006; St. Clair, 2018).

Dolores' connection with superheroes may actually be another example of this resiliency-enhancing *invincibility phenomenon*. She connects very well with a variety of superheroes whose backstories, and sometimes ongoing struggles, center around the experience of familial loss (e.g., the Scarlet Witch). As Dolores identifies with the backstory or adversities her favorite superheroes face, she may also be identifying with their inner strengths and abilities to transcend their difficulties. This deeper level connection and reflection with positive role models is suggested to enhance a person's level of social and emotional growth, and deepen their own sense of identity as they begin to uncover and identify their own inner strengths. Given Dolores' resiliency in the face of her own adversity in combination with how much of her time and energy is focused on understanding and exploring superheroes and their backstories, it is likely that this hobby of hers is serving an even deeper purpose in helping her to grow and develop a more positive and resilient sense of herself.

LGBTQ+ Families: Assets as Opposed to Problems

There is a disconnect between what academic literature says about LGBTQ+ parents and families and what myths are still prevalent within general society. In particular, the academic literature notes that in comparison with heteronormative families, LGBTQ+ parented families often have similar or more positive outcomes across a variety of measures (Brodzinsky et al., 2012; Bruun & Farr, 2021; Cody et al., 2017; Domínguez et al., 2015; Farr et al., 2016; Farr & Patterson, 2009, 2013; Farr & Vázquez, 2020a, 2020b; Garanzini et al., 2017; Gartrell et al., 2012; Gianino et al., 2009; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Golombok et al., 2014; Horne et al., 2014; Lev, 2010; Lavner et al., 2012; Levitt et al., 2020; Mallon, 2007; Manning et al., 2014; McConnachie et al., 2021; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019; Patterson & Wainright, 2012; Ross et al., 2009; Russett, 2012; Ryan & Brown, 2012; Tasker & Bellamy,

2019; Wiley, 2017). Unfortunately, there are still strongly held incorrect beliefs and myths in society that LGBTQ+ parents are somehow less than heterosexual parents (Bruun & Farr, 2021; Costa et al., 2021; Farr & Vázquez, 2020a, 2020b; Garanzini et al., 2017; Gartrell et al., 2012; Goldberg & Garcia, 2020; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Goldberg et al., 2016; Levitt et al., 2020; McConnachie et al., 2021; Ryan & Brown, 2012; Zhang & Chen, 2020). This study aimed to explore the experiences of people who were adopted into families that had LGBTQ+ parents, with one participant's parents being two women and the other participants parents being two men.

Both Sarah and Dolores expressed that the very fact that their parents belong to the LGBTQ+ community is an asset and strength for them as an individual as well as an asset and strength for their family. As individuals, Sarah and Dolores both noted that the values their parents instilled in them felt very related to the fact that they are LGBTQ+ parents, and included values like gender equality, openness to all conversations, and acceptance of others regardless of their sexual orientation or gender presentation. Both participants noted that their parents took intentional steps to ensure that their family was surrounded by loving, supportive people who held similar beliefs and were members or allies of the LGBTQ+ community themselves.

In both participants' stories it was noted that the parents took pre-emptive steps to address any potential difficulties their child might experience as a result of having LGBTQ+ parents. Sarah's mothers raised her with several other LGBTQ+ families and were quick to identify the need to discuss the potential for discrimination in different communities when they found out that Sarah would be travelling in a different country. Dolores' fathers were also very intentional in setting her up with both a spiritual mother as well as a half mother because they were aware that she may want females in her life to discuss potential experiences that she may be

going through during puberty or other stages of her life. In both cases, the fact that LGBTQ+ people often have chosen families and are careful and intentional in constructing supportive social networks (Costa & Tasker, 2018; Dewaele, Cox, Van den Berghe, & Vincke, 2011; Domínguez, Bobele, Coppock, & Peña, 2015; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Green & Mitchell, 2015; Horne et al., 2014; LaSala, 2007) was a strong benefit to the children that were adopted into these families. As previously suggested, it is possible that due to the risk of discrimination these LGBTQ+ parents were extra thoughtful with regards to what kind of a family they were raising, what values they wanted to instill, and ensuring that there would be excellent support available for the family as they moved through life together.

Indeed, research shows that children raised by LGBTQ+ parents have been found to have similar outcomes to children raised in heterosexual families, with a few studies noting more positive outcomes (Brodzinsky et al., 2012; Bruun & Farr, 2021; Cody et al., 2017; Domínguez et al., 2015; Farr et al., 2016; Farr & Patterson, 2009, 2013; Farr & Vázquez, 2020a, 2020b; Garanzini et al., 2017; Gartrell et al., 2012; Gianino et al., 2009; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Golombok et al., 2014; Horne et al., 2014; Lev, 2010; Lavner et al., 2012; Levitt et al., 2020; Mallon, 2007; Manning et al., 2014; McConnachie et al., 2021; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019; Patterson & Wainright, 2012; Ross et al., 2009; Russett, 2012; Ryan & Brown, 2012; Tasker & Bellamy, 2019; Wiley, 2017). One area in which LGBTQ+ parents have been found to be different than heterosexual parents is their approach to gender roles. In particular, LGBTQ+ parents often demonstrate more equal division of labour and parenting duties in the home, and do not ascribe to traditional male-female gender roles (Bruun & Farr, 2021; Farr & Patterson, 2009, 2013; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Horne et al., 2014; Lev, 2010). As such, children raised in these families often have parents who are role modelling

a less rigid form of gender role and expression (Bruun & Farr, 2021; Farr & Patterson, 2009, 2013; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Horne et al., 2014; Lev, 2010), which in turn allows them to create their own more flexible view of gender and gender roles. Horne et al. (2014) also suggested that members of the LGBTQ+ community are more likely to use gender roles to express their values, which may in turn impact how gender roles are viewed within the family structure. These concepts of flexibility in gender roles are strongly exemplified in Sarah's experiences of seeing her mothers do all the household chores and parenting equally, as she expressed that she did not realize there were such rigid gender role expectations in society until she experienced these expectations outside of her home. For her, this ability to see all tasks as capable of being done by either gender allowed her to develop a strong sense of her own identity as a strong, independent, and highly capable woman.

In addition, LGBTQ+ parents have been found to be more open with their children (Costa et al., 2021; Farr & Patterson, 2013, 2021, 2022; Goldberg et al., 2016; Horne et al., 2014; Lev, 2010; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019), and both Sarah and Dolores noted this openness developed a strong relationship with their parents that created a strong sense of support and connection with their parents. This openness allows the children in these families to feel more comfortable and safe discussing their lives, shifting senses of identity, and challenges (Farr & Patterson, 2013; Lev, 2010; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019). This type of openness and its benefits are illustrated in Sarah's story when her mothers apologized to her for not giving her more opportunities to connect with her culture when she was younger, and then wholeheartedly walking alongside her as she moved forwards with connecting to this part of her identity. Given the likelihood that LGBTQ+ parents have gone through their own identity struggles and experiences of discrimination, this allows them to pass along the coping strategies they developed over the

years, increase their children's awareness of societal prejudice, and help them become more accepting of both themselves and others (Costa et al., 2021; Farr & Patterson, 2013, 2021, 2022; Goldberg et al., 2016; Lev, 2010). Indeed, it has been suggested that it is the strength of the parental relationship, not the family makeup that correlates with positive child outcomes (Brodzinsky et al., 2012; Cody et al., 2017; Farr & Patterson, 2009, 2013; Farr & Vázquez, 2020a; Gartrell et al., 2012; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Patterson & Wainright, 2012; Ryan & Brown, 2012; Tasker & Bellamy, 2019). Additional connections with the wider LGBTQ+ community then serves to further affirm their experiences, and support their own self-perception and identity development process (Horne et al., 2014).

The Impact of Developmental Levels

Something unexpected that occurred during this research project was the realization of just how impactful the differences in life experiences and foci within the adolescent and young adult years are on what aspects of life are focused on or valued at that point in time. The two participants in this study were at the youngest and oldest ends of the age range considered for participation in this research at ages 13 and 21. These two ages are quite far apart with regards to life experiences, both previous and ongoing, and general foci in life goals and interests. As a result, what was more salient for Sarah at this point in her life was very different than what was important to Dolores at this time.

Existing literature has noted the importance of an adoptee's developmental status on their interest in, understanding of, and emotional reactions to their adoption (Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Farr et al., 2014; Manning et al., 2014; Neil, 2012; Soares et al., 2017). In particular, the adolescent and young adult years are often noted to be critical with regards to the identity development process, which is often made more complex by

the fact that someone is adopted (Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Dunbar, 2003; Farr et al., 2016; Gianino et al., 2009; Grotevant et al., 2000; Hawk & McCall, 2014; Holmgren & Elovainio, 2019; Kraus, 1982; Krueger & Hanna, 1997; McConnachie et al., 2021; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019; Munro et al., 2019; Porch, 2007; Soares et al., 2017; Wrobel & Grotevant, 2019). For Dolores, the fact that she is an adopted person is not a major focus of her life right now and she does not feel the need to pursue more in-depth research on her background or where she came from. Even though her parents have been giving her explicit opportunities to explore her heritage and adoption in more detail, this simply is not that important to her at this point in her life. Indeed, research shows that many adoptees do not start to more deeply explore their identity and sense of self until their adolescence (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Koh et al., 2017; Krueger & Hanna, 1997; Henze-Pedersen, 2019; McConnachie et al., 2021; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019; Porch, 2007; Wrobel & Grotevant, 2019), a stage of life that Dolores is only just beginning to enter. In contrast, Sarah relatively recently became very interested in exploring her heritage and cultural roots and has been very reflective over the past several years about her adoption, how this has impacted her life, and her feelings about it. These findings support the assertion that developmental levels are critical with regards to developing a sense of self and, in particular, how relevant a person's adopted status or family make up may be to them at that point in time.

Cultural Identity Development

One area of identity development that was present in both Sarah and Dolores' stories was the process of developing a sense of cultural identity, as they both have ethnic backgrounds that differ from their parents and may be considered to be a minority status. Given that the Racial Cultural Identity Development model has been criticized for use with transracial adoptees

because it assumes a homogeneity of race between the parents and the child within a family (Baden, 2002; Baden & Steward, 2000), it will not be used to explore Sarah and Dolores' experiences. The Cultural-Racial Identity Model, on the other hand, was specifically developed for use with transracial adoptees and takes into consideration the adoptee's degree of identification with both their own cultural and racial identities as well as their parents' cultural and racial identities (Baden, 2002; Baden & Steward, 2000). However, as neither Sarah or Dolores discussed their level of identification with their parent's cultural backgrounds, it would be presumptuous to try to assign either of them to any of the Cultural-Racial Identity Model categories (see Table 1, page 43). Instead, their experiences could be discussed more broadly in relation to the model.

As aforementioned, Dolores did not find the racial or cultural aspects of her identity to be salient for her at this point in time. In an effort to ensure she had access to information about her ethnic background, her parents offered for her to do a DNA test, which she thought would be interesting and agreed to do. However, upon receiving her results she noted that it was "cool" to find out that she has African genes but was not interested in further exploring what this means to her. Though her parents thought that perhaps she would be more interested in learning about her cultural and ethnic background, this was not the case. It appears that Dolores has not yet started to explore her own ethnic or cultural background, and, regardless of the model used, she would likely be in a pre-exploration stage at this point in time, which may possibly be due to her younger age.

On the other hand, much of Sarah's lived experiences that she shared during this research were related to her journey to discover, understand, and connect with her own cultural background. Her parents ensured that she had someone of Asian background regularly in her life

to help keep her connected to her heritage culture, but the first big step in this journey occurred in when she was a teenager. In particular, she began attending a school where the majority of the students were of Asian heritage, and this is when she started to connect with and learn about her culture first-hand. As she continued to grow and develop, she started to independently pursue learning more about her culture and connecting with it on a more personal level, through taking courses on an Asian language and Chinese history, and teaching herself how to cook more traditional foods. She expressed enjoying being able to share her cultural learning with her family and find her own way to represent her heritage culture alongside the culture she grew up with.

Having a strong sense of cultural identity is related to more positive psychological well-being for transracial adoptees (Baden, 2015; Basow, Lilley, Bookwala, & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2008; Lindgren & Nelson, 2014; Sinclair, 2016). In order to develop this sense of cultural identity, adoptees must explore all aspects of their own identity, expose themselves to the customs, foods, and events of their home culture, and be reflective about their own sense of self while doing so (Baden, 2015; Basow et al., 2008; Ferrari et al., 2015; Whitten & Weaver, 2010). Sarah has been engaging with this process throughout the past several years, including attending cultural events like Chinese New Year's celebrations, cooking traditional Asian foods at home, learning about the history of her heritage culture, and reflecting on her own sense of self throughout the process. Given that creating a strong sense of cultural identity is related to more positive self-esteem (Basow et al., 2008), Sarah's journey in this area of her life may be related to how resilient she feels in the face of adversity and when dealing with microaggressions. It is important to note that the support of Sarah's mothers in her cultural identity exploration and

development can be considered to be a critical factor setting her up for positive identity outcomes.

Flexible Research as Vital

This research study had been developed and initially approved as a type of research that has an emergent methodology (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Josselson, 2011), so as the inquirer I had been prepared to adjust my approach to whatever would best suit the participants as I began working with them. I had assumed that this flexibility would be necessary in the form of shifting to suit the participant's style of sharing or representing their lived experience – I had not been prepared for the reality that I would end up having to shift my approach to "analyzing" the research.

This study was initially developed with the intention of pulling out common threads between my participants' stories with the intention of using these threads to make comment on potential commonalities of experience in this population (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Josselson, 2011). However, after meeting with my participants and helping them to develop their stories this task of identifying commonalities no longer seemed to fit. Indeed, it began to feel inappropriate. Not only did these two participants came from very different backgrounds on personal and familial levels, but the very intention of pursuing a narrative inquiry method of research was to highlight and honour the uniqueness of each individual's experience. After some in-depth conversations with my research supervisor these assertions were affirmed, and I made the decision to keep my participant's narratives and experiences separate and explore them as such. This felt like, and still feels like, the correct decision, as Sarah and Dolores' unique lived experiences are preserved and upheld as important in their own ways instead of being distilled into a few only generally relevant threads of commonality.

Responding to My Own Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of adolescent and emerging adults who were adopted before the age of one into LGBTQ+ families from their own perspectives. After learning about the experiences of these adoptees, I had hoped to discover some answers to the following questions: (a) How do these adoptee's personal characteristics, family characteristics, and adoption status intersect in shaping their identities? (c) What are the challenges they face? and (d) What strengths and coping strategies do they draw on to deal with these challenges?

Sarah and Dolores demonstrated many ways in which their personal, familial, and adoption characteristics have shaped who they identify as. For Dolores, her familial values of openness, humor, and being accepting of others helped to shape who she is becoming as a person. Her own love of superhero stories, many of which have adoption-related or adoption-adjacent backstories, has also helped to shape how she approaches and addresses challenges and successes in her life. She feels proud of her non-homophobic lens on life, broad acceptance of others, and ability to overcome challenges she may face at school. Sarah's familial values of open communication, independence, and non-traditional gender roles were instrumental in her developing such a strong sense of herself as an independent and strong woman. On a more personal level, her reflective nature and drive to connect with and share her own heritage culture have also contributed to her ongoing development of herself as a cultural being, and her parents have provided her with unwavering support in her cultural identity exploration process.

As aforementioned, both Sarah and Dolores experienced some challenges throughout their lives regarding their identity as an adopted person, their parents being a same-sex couple, and, in Sarah's case, the ethnic difference between herself and her parents. Importantly, the vast

majority of the challenges experienced by both Sarah and Dolores were external in nature. That is, they originated from other people's perceptions of them, and were often delivered in the form of microinsults or microinvalidations. This is an incredibly important finding, as this supports the more recent research findings that disprove the "adopted child pathology" bias within a large portion of older, yet still cited, adoption research (Brodzinsky, 1987; Gianino, Goldberg, & Lewis, 2009; Hoksbergen et al., 2003; Miller et al., 2000; Wegar, 1995).

In responding to these microaggressions and life challenges, Sarah and Dolores have drawn upon a number of strengths and coping resources. Dolores found strength in her open and supportive relationship with her parents, having supportive friends, her ability to view life through a humorous lens, connecting with resilient superheroes as role models, and having a larger chosen family to connect with if she ever needed additional support. Sarah managed the challenges she faced in life through her open and supportive relationships with her parents and larger LGBTQ+ community, her ability to explore and connect with her heritage culture, and the strong sense of self she developed from growing up with two strong female role models. Overall, both Sarah and Dolores demonstrated resiliency in the face of adversity and challenge, and are both continuing to grow and further develop their sense of themselves and their identities as they continue to move through and reflect on their ongoing lived experiences.

Implications

Children and youth are being adopted at an increasing rate into complex family units, often with LGBTQ+ parents (Brown et al., 2009; Costa & Tasker, 2018; Costa et al., 2021; Downing et al., 2009; Farr & Vázquez, 2020a, 2020b; Fisher, 2003 Gates, 2013; Goldberg & Garcia, 2020; Goldberg & Gianino, 2012; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Goldberg et al., 2016; McConnachie et al., 2021; Porch, 2007). Given the rates of microaggressions against adoptees,

LGBTQ+ families, and ethnic minorities, it is not surprising that adoptees in these families are more likely to use mental health services (Baden, 2016; Baden et al., 2013; Borders et al., 2000; Garber & Grotevant, 2015; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Goldberg et al., 2019; McConnachie et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2000; Nadal et al., 2010; Patterson & Wainwright, 2012; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011; Sue, 2010a, 2010b, 2019; Wiley, 2017). However, current mental health providers are often unprepared for working with the basics of adoption, let alone the complex dynamics within it (Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Henderson, 2002; Koh et al., 2017; Post, 2000; Park-Taylor & Wing, 2020; Sass & Henderson, 2000; Wiley, 2017). Current research is largely missing the voices of adolescent and young adult adoptees on their experiences, identities, challenges, strengths, and coping strategies, which is problematic given that this developmental stage has been identified as a critical period for the formation of an identity and sense of self (Barroso & Barbosa-Ducharne, 2019; Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Dunbar, 2003; Farr et al., 2016; Gianino et al., 2009; Grotevant et al., 2000; Hawk & McCall, 2014; Holmgren & Elovainio, 2019; Kraus, 1982; Krueger & Hanna, 1997; McConnachie et al., 2021; Messina & Brodzinsky, 2019; Munro et al., 2019; Porch, 2007; Soares et al., 2017; Wrobel & Grotevant, 2019). This research aimed to fill this information gap and has several important implications for practice and future research.

It is anticipated that these research findings will expand the counselling research base to inform ongoing theoretical and practical work with adoptees, and LGBTQ+ families. It will help counsellors, social workers, and researchers to better understand adoptees' lived experiences in these families, including both the positive aspects of their family lives, and the unique challenges they face. In addition, this research brought forth and highlighted the coping strategies and personal and family strengths these families and individuals have drawn on to overcome any

challenges they encountered. The findings of this research can help guide counsellors, psychologists, or other mental health workers in how to more effectively support people who have been adopted into LGBTQ+ families, which will be explored in more depth below.

Bolster LGBTQ+ Family and Community Connections

Both Sarah and Dolores highlighted the connections with the LGBTQ+ community as reasons for their resiliency. Sarah expressed that the fact that her mothers are a same-sex couple created an environment in which she was able to develop a strong sense of her own identity as a woman. She shared that this helped her navigate challenges she experienced during adolescence such as being confident in her own body in the changing room. Dolores explained that she feels like the fact that she was raised by a same-sex male couple is the reason for her having such a strong value in openness and being "non-homophobic", which she indicated is a quality she is proud of. Both Sarah and Dolores' stories highlight how having strong connections with their same-sex parents allowed them to create and hone qualities of themselves that led to them becoming more resilient.

In addition to being well-connected and supported by their parents, both Sarah and Dolores' families had strong connections with other members of the LGBTQ+ community. In Sarah's experience she was raised with several other children whose parents belonged to the LGBTQ+ community, which normalized her experiences and affirmed not only her own identity, but her family's status as valid and respected. In response to one of her very first school memories of another child telling her that her family is "weird" for having two moms, Sarah responded that to her the other child's family is the "weird" one. This strong sense of resiliency in the face of a microaggression so early in her is due to the fact that she and her family were so well-connected with the LGBTQ+ community that her own family experiences were normalized

and validated through this connection. In Dolores' experience, she noted that she has several LGBTQ+ friends at school that are part of her main friend group, and when asked about how she responds to microaggressions against her family for having two dads, she expressed that she does not feel impacted by these comments because she feels so supported by her friends. In her experience, having this greater connection to the LGBTQ+ outside of her immediate family created an additional layer of support that allowed her to take the microaggressions she experienced with a grain of salt.

In light of these findings, psychologists, counsellors, or other mental health workers who are working with people adopted into LGBTQ+ families may want to focus some of their efforts on bolstering connections with the LGBTQ+ community. This can be done through either deepening their connection with their LGBTQ+ parents and immediate family, or through helping them bolster their relationships with the larger LGBTQ+ community through friends, by attending events, or by engaging with LGBTQ+ community organizations. The findings of this study suggest that these relationships not only normalized and affirm their experiences, but also serve to buffer stress by helping to create a sense of resiliency and support for the adoptee. As such, it would be beneficial for people working with these adoptees in any capacity to consider investing their time in developing these connections.

Use Strengths-Based, Resiliency-Enhancing Approaches

One of the important findings of this research is the fact that the challenges Sarah and Dolores experienced regarding their status as an adopted person in an LGBTQ+ family almost exclusively originated outside of themselves. More specifically, these challenges arose from others' prejudices, misinformation, and microaggressions. Sarah and Dolores both relied on their inner strengths to find various ways to move through these difficult experiences without being

drastically impacted by them. This suggests that therapeutic work with these adoptees should focus on adapting and implementing positive psychology theories and approaches (Atkinson, 2020; Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005; Fredrickson, 1998; St. Clair, 2018), as these approaches often include activities or discussions designed to build on and enhance client strengths, coping strategies, and family and community supports. Interventions to identify and amplify these factors and promote client resiliency have also been linked to better overall levels of life satisfaction and well-being across the lifespan (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005; Fredrickson, 1998; St. Clair, 2018), creating further argument for exploring the use of these approaches. In particular, positive psychology, attachment-based techniques, and narrative therapy modalities may be a good fit for working with this population. It is important to note there are many strengths-based techniques that can be drawn from a variety of therapeutic modalities, and that the deeper exploration into the following therapeutic approaches is not meant to be exhaustive.

Positive Psychology Approaches

Positive psychology was an approach to working therapeutically with clients that arose in response to a perceived over-emphasis of client problems within the greater field of psychology (Horne et al., 2014; Luther et al., 2014; Macfarlane, 2021; Schwarz, 2018; St. Clair, 2018). This approach argues that by focusing on identifying and honing client strengths, they will not only be better positioned to tackle their challenges in life, but they will also be to develop a sense of resiliency so that these challenges do not feel so all-encompassing (Horne et al., 2014; Luther et al., 2014; Macfarlane, 2021; St. Clair, 2018; Yates et al., 2015). For example, taking a positive psychological approach to clinical work with adoptees may include activities that emphasize hope, forgiveness, and humor (Luther et al., 2014; Macfarlane, 2021; St. Clair, 2018). In sharing

their experiences and how they have reacted to challenges in their lives, both Sarah and Dolores demonstrated resiliency to their adversities they had faced. Given the strong connection between positive psychological interventions and the development of a sense of resiliency, clinicians working with this population may benefit from incorporating positive psychology interventions in their work.

Attachment-Focused Therapy

Attachment-focused therapy was developed on the premise that a child's first attachment to their primary caregiver serves as a vital template for how they will form relationships throughout their life (Brosinsky, 2017; DeLurgio, 2019; Feeney & Passmore, 2007; Hawk & McCall, 2014; Research in Practice, 2014; Wallin, 2015). In the case of adoption there is a severing of the relationship with the primary caregiver, often the birthmother, that has been noted to potentially lead to challenges in developing relationships, difficulty with feelings of pervasive separation and abandonment, and difficulty processing emotions around the meaning of one's adoption (Atkinson, 2020; Brosinsky, 2017; DeLurgio, 2019; Feeney & Passmore, 2007; Fitzhardinge, 2008; Research in Practice, 2014; Sinclair, 2016; Wallin, 2015). While these particular concerns were not noted in Sarah and Dolores' experiences, the importance of their strong attachment to their LGBTQ+ adoptive parents was highlighted as an important factor in their sense of support and resiliency. As such, clinicians working with people adopted into LGBTQ+ families should consider taking an attachment-focused approaches to their therapeutic work, as this approach is likely to address potential underlying emotional concerns that may arise regarding the adoption as well as improve the strength of their relational bonds and connections with their adoptive parents, leading to higher levels of perceived support and resiliency to microaggressions.

Narrative Therapy

Narrative therapy shifts the therapeutic process from seeing an adoptee and their concerns as an individual issue to viewing them within their greater family and societal system (Brosinsky, 2017; Karakurt & Silver, 2014; Kottler & Shepard, 2011). The purpose of this shift is to assist the adoptee and their family as viewing the adoptee's concerns as stemming from external issues and pressures as opposed to being generated internally. This allows the adoptee and their family to work towards re-writing their experience in a new light that lends itself to a more objective view that takes into consideration larger factors that may be at play outside of the family (Brosinsky, 2017; Kottler & Shepard, 2011; Stokes & Poulsen, 2014). Given that one of the major findings of this study is that Sarah and Dolores' struggles were external in nature, taking a narrative approach to clinical work with this population will likely be beneficial. In particular, this therapeutic approach may help adoptees to acknowledge the external factors impacting their experiences, such as microaggressions, and re-write their own experiences and re-tell and re-frame their own stories through a lens that takes into consideration the impact of these larger systems and acknowledges their strengths in standing up to external forces.

Highlight the Individuality of Experience

One very important implication of this research lies in the finding that the experiences of these two people adopted into LGBTQ+ families varied greatly. While there were important differences between the adoptees and their families in terms of age, parent make-up, and ethnicity, there were also several similarities. These similarities include having same-sex parents, being adopted before the age of one, and being in a cross-cultural adoption, among others, and may cause a less discerning researcher to want to combine these experiences and findings into themes or groups. I argue that given the paucity of research in this area, and the limitless number

of factors that may contribute to someone's life experiences and how they perceive them, both researchers and those working with this population in a more clinical setting should highlight as opposed to hide the uniqueness of these adoptee's experiences. By providing more accurate information about the actual lived experiences of adolescent and young adult adoptees in LGBTQ+ families, researchers and mental health workers will be much better positioned to explore, study, and implement more appropriate approaches to their work with this population moving forwards.

Acknowledge Developmental Levels

This research highlighted some poignant differences between Sarah and Dolores' life experiences, reflections, and emphasis of importance that may be related to their varying developmental levels. Dolores, who was 13 years old at the time of this study, was very focused on her hobbies and friendships, and when asked about the salience of some of her experiences related to being an adopted person in an LGBTQ+ family she noted that the experiences did not bother her and that she had not thought much about it past the moment she experienced it. She much rather preferred to discuss her favorite superheroes, talk about her hobbies and interests, and tell funny stories about her friendships. This was in stark contrast to Sarah, age 21, who was very reflective about her life experiences and how they have been shaping her as she moves into young adulthood. Sarah enjoyed sharing her beliefs about what constitutes a family, discussing her strong sense of identity as a female, and reflecting on how her experiences, both easy and difficult are continuing to shape her. As such, Sarah had much more to share and reflect on regarding any challenges she had experienced or personal and family strengths she possessed as an adopted person in an LGBTQ+ family. Of course, Sarah has several more years of lived experience to draw on in these conversations, however it would be foolish to ignore the impact

of developmental stages and milestones on these varying lived experiences. As such, it is important for those working with people adopted into LGBTQ+ families to acknowledge their developmental level and work through this lens to understand the adoptee's own lived experiences and why they may or may not be emphasizing certain aspects of their adoption or family at any given time.

Attending to Intersectionalities

This research additionally identified a variety of strengths and challenges that were associated with the intersecting aspects of both Sarah and Dolores' identities. For both Sarah and Dolores, aspects of their gender, ethnicity, race, and having same-sex parents were all interacting within their lived experiences. While the purpose of this research was not to delve into the specifics of these interacting aspects of identity, this is an important area to address with future research. Given the complex experiences of people who are adopted into LGBTQ+ families, it would be a misstep to ignore the intersections of these diverse aspects of their lives. Future research may benefit from specifically looking at these intersections to explore how they create both strengths as well as challenges for the adopted person, or members of the adoptive family.

Limitations

While this study has been important in many ways, it also comes with its limitations like any other study. The first limitation is the small sample size. While narrative inquiry often only includes a couple of participants, it is important to note that it is not the purpose of such studies to generalize from participants' experiences, but rather to describe and illuminate their experiences so the research audience can bear witness to and learn from these experiences. The stories shared in this study are so unique to each person's lived experience that they have been presented and honoured as individualized stories that serve as exemplars of the resilience of

youth and young adults adopted into LGBTQ+ families living in the midst of a heteronormative society.

The other primary limitations of this study revolve around representation. There are many different LGBTQ+ adoptive families in the world that encompass a wide variety of family types based on parent and child characteristics. This study's two participants happened to both be from families with same-sex parents, which is only a small portion of the parents that could fall within the LGBTQ+ parent umbrella, and hence did not include children of transgender parents, bisexual parents, or two spirit parents, for example. In addition, there were cross-cultural components in both participant's families, however neither of these adoptees or their families identified as Indigenous. Given Canada's history of the 60's Scoop and overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the adoption system, the lack of Indigenous representation in this research is also limiting, and future research studies should explore the experiences of youth and young adults adopted into different types of LGBTQ+ families and youth or parents among these families of Indigenous heritage. Finally, this study did not represent the experiences of LGBTQ+ families who have children with disabilities, which is a family make-up that is more common in adoptive LGBTQ+ families and would benefit from further research.

The Realities and Limitations of Recruitment

> One month ago, I put my research poster out there and spent a week hearing nothing. Sure, it was being shared on social media, but no one was reaching out to take part. I was bathed in self-doubt about the importance of this work. Maybe nobody cares. Maybe I've simply made up how important this is, but no one else sees the value in it. I was really struggling with my research decisions and worrying about how I was going to complete a dissertation that had no value.
>
> A week later I got a surprise email from CBC Radio asking to interview me about my study because they thought it sounded interesting. I was overjoyed and re-invigorated in my passions as I prepared for the interview. And the day of the interview I got a phone call from the CBC Radio's sister station asking if I would do a similar interview in the afternoon, and I think my stars had aligned because I happened to be free and able to do the interview. I was so nervous speaking on the radio as if I were an expert on this topic,

> but after the first minute I relaxed into the conversation and let my passion take over. It ended up being easy to talk about, and I felt like there were a million more things I could have said by the end of it – seven minutes was simply not enough time! I felt so much better about my research and its purpose after that.
>
> I remember joking with my partner that no one listens to the radio anymore, and that at best this interview would be more fire to fuel my passion and confidence in my research. I joked that only my parents and my partner would listen to the interview and care. Little did I know a young adult adoptee and her mom were driving home at the time of my interview, listening, getting excited, and frantically jotting down my email so that they could reach out to me when they got home. That interview got me my first participant.
>
> Flash forward another week and a half and I have been working with my first participant, but also wondering where potential other participants might be. One dad reached out about his child, but they were below my required age range. Another adoptee that met all criteria reached out for more information, which I gladly shared, but then they fell silent and stopped responding to my offer to chat further. I was starting to feel down again, and that familiar whisper of self-doubt was re-surfacing, this time with a flavour of "you've wasted your one participant's time with this study doomed to failure". It's funny how the things you feel most passionately about are also the things that have the most power to cripple you.
>
> And then, just a few hours ago, right in the middle of my spiral of self-doubt, an email popped up on my phone. I had been laying down in my physiotherapist's office with acupuncture needles resting in the sides of my jaw impatiently waiting out my ten minutes of sitting still when I saw the title of the email: "Missing Voices Research Project". It wasn't a participant, but, perhaps more interestingly, it was a social worker from Adoption Options who had heard about my research and wanted to learn more and make sure that I would send her my final results once I had them. She had no other reason to reach out other than to express her interest and how important this study was to her and her role as an adoption social worker. I don't know how much more clear of a message I could have been given: This work *is* important. It needs to be done. And I'm the one to do it.

I had initially aimed to recruit three participants ages 15-21 from diverse cultural and familial backgrounds, and figured that this would not be an issue, given the rising number of adoptees across Canada. I spent half a year struggling to recruit three participants from a country of 38 million people, questioning all the while the importance and feasibility of my research. I rode a roller coaster of emotions the entire time, and, having spent much time in reflection and journaling about my experiences, I now understand that I was failing in my job as an inquirer to acknowledge and consider the context in which my research was occurring.

A Global Pandemic

I had planned out all of my research and been in the process of scheduling my oral candidacy exam, where your committee decides if you are ready and prepared to move forwards with your research, when the pandemic hit. What is common knowledge now was unprecedented at the time, and I was one of the first people at my large university to have an oral doctoral exam done virtually so as to not delay my program. At the time I had considered and acknowledged the fact that my interviews would have to take place virtually to align with recommended safety protocols, but I had not considered the potential impact the larger pandemic could have on my recruitment efforts.

Practically, I was unable to recruit participants in the more traditional ways that I had planned, like putting up posters in relevant organizations, meeting for coffee with people who were interested in sharing or participating in my research, physically attending events directed at adoptees or LGBTQ+ families, and doing presentations on my research. Many of these activities were halted as a direct or indirect result of the pandemic, and I had to resort to less traditional ways of sharing my research information as a result. I ended up relying heavily on sharing my recruitment poster through my personal social media and social media "groups", which was then shared in a snowball-sampling-like fashion through various networks. Upon reflection, I believe that this method of sharing my recruitment poster was a really effective and efficient way to spread information about my study, as people I had never met before and organizations I had never contacted were also sharing my study information. I was asked to do two live interviews with CBC Radio, and a live Instagram interview with Adoption Options – interestingly, these methods of recruitment are what captured the attention of both of my participants. While there are a lot of aspects to consider about the benefits and limitations of sharing study information

through social media, I will say that I was impressed with how quickly and widely my study was shared.

Despite how widely my recruitment poster was shared, I still found myself struggling to recruit three participants and wondering whether my study was as important as I had thought. In reflection, I recognize that I had neglected to consider the wider impact the pandemic had on everyone's lives, including my own. Throughout the first few years, when I was recruiting, many people were in a state of disruption with tapped emotional and mental resources. Taking part in a research project, especially one of this nature, requires time, curiosity, commitment to an emerging process, and the emotional fortitude to explore personal experiences. While I can never truly know the impact the pandemic context had on the success of my recruitment endeavors, I suspect that if I had been trying to recruit participants during a different time, I may not have had as much difficulty.

Considering Historical Timelines

My study initially aimed to recruit participants between the ages of 15-21, as this was the particular age gap I had noted in the available research. In the midst of my months-long struggle to find a second participant, the father of a 13-year-old adoptee reached out to say his child was interested in taking part in the study. I felt really disappointed and like this participant opportunity was passing me by simply because she was a few years younger than my stated age range. As was my usual process, I vented my frustrations to my partner over dinner that evening. Attentive and number-oriented as he was, he clarified that I had previously said that the moratorium on adoptions in Alberta was only lifted around 2006, and then started scribbling on a piece of paper. After a brief moment, he turned this paper around to me: *2022-2006 = 16 years*. If I was aiming to finding participants adopted before the age of 1 in Alberta, the oldest potential

adoptees would be 16, meaning that the majority of potential participants would fall below my 15-21 age range.

I quickly realized my error and reached out to my research committee members to confirm that they would support me lowering my age range to 13-21 years. I did not want to include participants younger than 13, as I was not sure they would be emotionally and psychologically capable of understanding the risks of taking part in this emergent type of research. In addition, the currently available academic research already has some representation for children up to and including age 12, making age 13-21 the identified gap in the research. It was vital to continue to be reflective on the historical context surrounding adoption and to be willing to be flexible and responsive to these types of realizations, as they helped to identify and shift this study to best capture and represent adoptees and their families.

Revisiting the Word "Ideal"

Research studies of any type aim to fill gaps in currently available literature, and given the amount of time each study takes, it is preferable to address multiple research gaps in one study whenever possible. For example, I had identified several gaps in the LGBTQ+ adoption and general adoption literature: (a) there was limited research on teens and young adults, (b) there was limited research on adoptee's own perspectives, and (c) most studies on LGBTQ+ adoption included parents who identified as "lesbian", "gay", or "homosexual". It wasn't until I started to complete the research that I realized that the changes of addressing all three of these major gaps was an idealistic perspective. I could not simply cherry-pick specific families to ensure that my participants would represent demographics specifically reflective of all current gaps in research, so I had to rely on luck of the draw with regards to what the familial backgrounds of my participants would be.

These realizations helped me to look at the currently available literature through a new lens. Research studies cannot cherry-pick participants or families of certain demographics without that being the explicit purpose of the study, so many studies like mine must rely on the demographics of the participants who choose to reach out, with very little control over who these people might be. There are also many reasons why certain groups of people, for example, transgender parents or ethnic minorities, may not be willing to reach out to volunteer to take part in a research study. Previous experiences of mistreatment or misrepresentation, mistrust of the research field or authority, fear of being taken advantage of, and discomfort with working with people who do not identify as part of their own community are just a few of many legitimate reasons some marginalized groups may choose not to take part in research. While this is something I had always known and understood, I think that my experience of conducting a study and reflecting on why certain demographics did not reach out really solidified this understanding for me.

Evaluation of the Study

Within qualitative research it is important to ensure that there is a high level of quality to the data, which can be considered similar to the idea of establishing a sense of credibility or validity in quantitative data, although given the extremely different nature of these two broad approaches, the similarity does not extend much further than the purpose of credibility (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In qualitative research, it is important to take steps to ensure that the data and consequent results of the study are credible and trustworthy, as this is the way that qualitative studies are evaluated (Braun & Clarke, 2013). To achieve this level of quality, the following areas of evaluation are often explored: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Within narrative inquiry, the following

twelve touchstones are often used to indicate research that is ethically and methodologically sound: (a) recognizing and fulfilling relational responsibilities, (b) negotiating entry into the field, (c) negotiating relationships, (d) being in the midst, (e) engaging in narrative beginnings, (f) moving from field to field texts, (g) moving from field texts to interim and final research texts, (h) interacting with response communities, (i) attending to the three-dimensional space, (j) attending to audiences, (k) explaining justifications, and (l) having a commitment to understanding lives in motion (Clandinin et al., 2016; Shaw, 2017). The above criteria is further explored and used to evaluate this study in the following section.

Qualitative Research Evaluation Criteria

Credibility is often established through the researcher's sustained engagement in the field of research or topic of study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The inquirer in this study belongs to the adoptee population and is actively engaged in working with the LGBTQ+ community in her personal, as well as professional life. These experiences helped establish the inquirer's ongoing credibility in relation to the topic of inquiry.

Transferability is the idea that the research findings in qualitative research should be transferable to the experiences of others in different contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Taking the time as an inquirer to generate rich descriptions of the research participants, contexts, settings, and findings allows readers to determine how applicable the research, and therefore the research findings, are to other contexts, meeting these criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Generating detailed descriptions was a very important aspect of the current study, as the goal was to describe the adoptee's experiences within their unique intersectional contexts, which most previous research studies on adoptees have ignored.

Dependability of qualitative research is similar to reliability in quantitative research, as it focuses on ensuring that research practices are so well documented that the study can be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The inquirer's engagement in reflexivity, memo-writing, and journaling about the research process, how stories were transformed from field texts into their final forms, and the interpretations that shaped that co-construction of the stories generated a clear audit trail from data collection to analysis to story creation and dissemination. In the sections of this dissertation focused on the inquirer's experience of walking alongside each of her participants, she has made some of her reflections and interpretations of study data explicit for readers.

Confirmability and *authenticity* refer to how well the research outcomes, in this case the narratives, accurately reflect the participant's experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As mentioned throughout this research, member checks were built into the process to ensure that the final research texts were authentic representations of the participants' lived experiences. Both Sarah and Dolores were given multiple opportunities to provide feedback and alter their narratives to ensure that these narratives felt like accurate and authentic representations of their lived experiences.

Touchstones of Narrative Inquiry

As aforementioned, the ethical and methodological rigor of a narrative inquiry can be examined using twelve touchstones. *Recognizing and fulfilling relational responsibilities* involves working to develop a respectful relationship with participants that is marked by mutual openness and care, which is highlighted through the inquirer *negotiating entry into the field* and *negotiating relationships* (Clandinin et al., 2016; Shaw, 2017). These touchstones were achieved through the inquirer's openness about her own adoption experience and efforts to ensure the accuracy of the narratives developed, as well as by being flexible and meeting participants at

times when it was most comfortable for them to tell their story. Indeed, *negotiating relationships* involves letting the participants' experiences and stories lead the study, which is exemplified by the flexibility in the conversations held with both Sarah and Dolores. Only one broad interview question was asked that was designed to allow for participants to have the freedom to share their experiences in whatever way best suits them (Clandinin et al., 2016).

The third and fourth touchstones, *being in the midst* and *engaging in narrative beginnings,* underscore the importance of the inquirer during the study (Clandinin et al., 2016; Shaw, 2017). As an inquirer, I was always aware of the fact that I was working *in the midst* of my own experience as well as the experiences of the participants, and how these factors fed into or related to each other. I engaged in ongoing journaling and reflection throughout this narrative inquiry to honor and bring forth the impact of my own narrative beginnings. This journaling and self-reflection process was documented throughout this dissertation document.

Moving from field to field texts and *moving from field texts to interim and final research texts* are vital steps in conducting a methodologically sound narrative inquiry, as is *interacting with response communities* throughout this process (Clandinin et al., 2016; Shaw, 2017). Considering that this study did not involve living alongside participants during their experiences and instead asked them to relay their experiences through story, the field texts in this study consisted of interview transcripts, which were developed into initial stories as interim texts, which were then further refined into the final stories and final research text. As previously discussed, participants were asked to act as *response communities* in that they were asked to provide feedback on the interim texts and were given the ongoing opportunity to ask questions about how the inquirer is making sense of their stories throughout the process.

Three other touchstones of narrative inquiry involve *attending to the three-dimensional space, attending to audiences,* and *explaining justifications for narrative inquiry* (Clandinin et al., 2016; Shaw, 2017). As previously discussed, the three-dimensional space was attended to when interviewing participants as well as when developing participants' initial stories based on their transcripts, and careful attention was given to the wording of the final stories to reflect their purpose for their potential audiences. The previous sections of this study as well as approval from the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board have served to justify the use of narrative inquiry in this research.

The final touchstone of narrative inquiry is *having a commitment to understanding lives in motion*, which highlights the fact that people and their experiences are ever-changing (Clandinin et al., 2016; Mills et al., 2020; Shaw, 2017). As such, narrative inquiry posits that there can never truly be a final and completely accurate research text, and I have made this explicit in the writing of the participant's finished stories and highlighted this fact in the final booklet of stories (see Appendix G).

Directions for Future Research

The findings and limitations of this study provide clear directions for future research, including suggestions for future research methodologies, exploring the experiences of different family and adoptee groups, specifically honing in on the unique experiences of cross-cultural adoptions, and researching the effectiveness of strengths-based interventions with these adoptees. Theses directions for future research will be elaborated on below.

Pursue Qualitative or Mixed Methods Research

The first recommendation following this study is a recommendation for further qualitative or mixed methods research. One of the issues with the currently available research on

adoption and LTBTQ+ families is that it is primarily quantitative in nature and is likely missing the nuances and complex experiences that are present within the adoptee and LGBTQ+ family populations. While this research study provides a qualitative examination of two different adoptee experiences, there is still a lot of room and need for future qualitative studies to be completed that allow participants' voices to be heard and honoured in relation to their own experiences. Another consideration would be for mixed methods studies to be pursued in this area to assist with providing much-needed context and qualitative information alongside the statistical information that can still be important to gather to create a more well-rounded view of the adoptee's experiences.

Include Additional LGBTQ+ Family Types

It is also vital to acknowledge that the LGBTQ+ community is very large and consists of a variety of people who identify differently in terms of their sexual orientation or gender expression and identification. These aspects of their identity also intersect with other important parts of a person's identity, including their ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and age, among others. As such, this study is limited in the fact that two LGBTQ+ families included parents that identified as a same-sex couple. Future studies would benefit from exploring the experiences of a variety of different LGBTQ+ family types, for example, including transgender-parented families, bisexual-led families, and two spirit families.

In addition, the families in this study represented a traditional family structure with two parents heading the family. There are many other family structures present today, including single-parent families, families where one parent is a stepparent, and polyamorous families, and it would be important for future research to explore how these different family structures may impact the experiences of adoptees who have been adopted into them. Finally, foster families are

often involved in adoptees lives, whether they ended up adopting the child themselves or assisting them in finding their future adoptive parents. While the experience of foster care is likely much different than the experience of an adoptive family, it would be important to additionally explore these experiences, as foster families are such a vital part of the adoption and foster system and are likely to impact the children raised in them.

Explore the Experiences of Additional Groups of Adoptees

Just as there are a variety of LGBTQ+ and adoptive family types that are underrepresented in the research, there are also different groups of adoptees that were not represented in this study that would benefit from additional research focus. Firstly, this study did not examine the experiences of adoptees who were adopted as teens or children over the age of one, as it was suggested that these later adoptions may have an impact on the attachment experiences of the adoptees, which would in turn become the focus of the study. Similarly, this study did not include adoptees who have been diagnosed with disabilities or as having special needs, as these adoptees' experiences will inherently be different than the general adoptee population, effectively changing the focus of the research question. While these studies and research foci were not the intention of this research, they are still incredibly important experiences to examine, as there are many children who were adopted later in life, or have special needs, whose experiences are very complex and not well understood in the adoption community.

Another very important direction for future research in this area would be for specific research on the experience of Indigenous adoptees, both in general as well as those in LGBTQ+ families. There is a continued over-representation of Indigenous children in the adoption and foster system and only recently have changes to policy highlighted the importance of matching

Indigenous children up with Indigenous adoptive or foster parents. Given the historical context as well as ongoing issues of discrimination and marginalization of Indigenous people and their families it is vital that future research focuses on exploring the experiences of these adoptees and their families. Further, given the high level of bias and myths that are often believed about this population, future research that is strengths based and specifically focuses on identifying the personal and familial strengths, coping mechanisms, and resiliencies of Indigenous adoptees and their families is needed.

Examine the Experiences of Cross-Cultural Adoptions

It would also be beneficial for future research studies to hone in on the cross-cultural aspect of adoptee's experiences in LGBTQ+ families. Research shows that children adopted into LGBTQ+ families are more likely to be culturally different than their adoptive parents, and findings from this study support this assertion, given that both participants came from cross-cultural families. The present study also highlighted the importance of developing a sense of cultural identity, especially with regards to Sarah's experience, which raises the question of how this sense of cultural identity is developed in these families. In Dolores' experience, the opportunity to explore cultural identity and start connecting with these experiences was raised by her parents, but was not something that she felt was important to her at this point in her life. This raises further questions about whether or not developing a sense of cultural identity becomes salient for all adoptees, and if so, when this process occurs and how it can be supported.

Research the Effectiveness of Strengths-Based Interventions

As aforementioned, one of the important findings in this study is the fact that both Sarah and Dolores demonstrated a strong sense of resiliency in response to the challenges they faced. As such, it is recommended that clinicians working with this population in a mental health

capacity would benefit from using strengths-based and resiliency-enhancing approaches and modalities to therapy such as positive psychology, attachment-focused therapy, and narrative therapy (Brosinsky, 2017; DeLurgio, 2019; Feeney & Passmore, 2007; Hawk & McCall, 2014; Karakurt & Silver, 2014; Kottler & Shepard, 2011; Luther et al., 2014; Macfarlane, 2021; Research in Practice, 2014; St. Clair, 2018; Stokes & Poulsen, 2014; Wallin, 2015). Indeed, many programs have been developed in an effort to enhance the resilience of populations that have experienced adversity or are considered vulnerable, for example, Big Brothers/Big Sisters clubs and the Head Start education programs for low-income families (Fradkin et al., 2015). These types of programs have been found to be successful at making positive change and increasing resiliency, illustrating the importance of exploring the use of these approaches with additional populations that have been through adversity. That being said, whenever taking a new approach to working with a specific population it is important to also study the effectiveness of said approach to ensure that it is indeed providing benefit to those receiving the treatment. As such, future research would benefit from exploring the use of strengths-based and resiliency-enhancing approaches when providing clinical services to people adopted into LGBTQ+ families, which may include but is not limited to positive psychology, attachment-focused therapy, and narrative therapy.

There continues to be a paucity of high-quality research on adoption, adoptive families, and LGBTQ+ parenting despite their growing numbers. As such, further research in all of these areas are needed, regardless of their focus. The world continues to grow and develop, and the most common family make-up continues to shift and change alongside it. Researchers and funders should also shift their foci to mirror these changes to ensure that research being

conducted continues to be relevant and vital to the ongoing lived experiences of modern society and modern families.

A Final Reflection

This dissertation has been the most unexpected and rewarding journey I have yet to embark on. Even as I began my doctoral program, I did not entirely know what my research was going to focus on, and it feels like one day the idea just emerged from somewhere in the back of my brain. I am still not entirely sure how I got to this place, as so much of this study and my own development and growth as a student, inquirer, and person simply emerged as I went along. I am just now remembering the professor of my Narrative Inquiry course saying over and over, "trust the process", and I think that might be the best way to describe how I went through this entire experience.

I was struck once again this week by how my life has changed in such important ways through the research I chose to embark on, and by my openness in talking about this research and my own personal experiences. Several good friends have opened up to me about the fact that they, too, are adopted, and that this is not something they have shared with others. Whenever a psychologist is looking to refer a client who is adopted for services, my name is almost always one of the first thrown into the ring – by people I don't even know. My tiny private practice is full to the brim with clients who are part of the adoption triad and specifically sought me out. And, perhaps the most emotionally impactful of all, a very close friend reached out to me about her infertility struggles and asked if I and my family would be willing to share our experiences with adoption. I was more than happy to help, and my parents were excited at the opportunity to share about their experiences as adoptive parents.

I am absolutely humbled by the ways this research has changed my life. The number of people who have reached out to me to talk about their adoption experiences was unexpected – from Sarah and Dolores within my study, to strangers in private practice, to some of my closest friends. I love talking about these experiences and am honoured that so many people have felt safe enough to do so with me. I feel so very lucky in life to have found such a niche for myself that somehow translated into the work I do every day, and I will be forever grateful for this.

It is hard to believe that I am now planning for the "end" of my dissertation study – the defence date. I don't like the word "end", especially in this context, as in narrative inquiry there is no one final "end" or "truth". I will likely look back at this study and all of my journal entries down the road and find that things have changed for me, as I am continuing to grow and develop, influenced by my ongoing lived experiences. And that's exciting to me. I look forward to seeing how all these opportunities that have been given to me continue to help me learn and grow across all the roles I will live in my life.

So, I will leave you with this. This is not the end of my journey, not by a long shot. This is just the end of the particular snapshot of experiences contained in this document, and I am so honoured to have been a part of it.

Thank you.

References

Addison, S.M., & Coolhart, D. (2015). Expanding the therapy paradigm with queer couples: A relational intersectional lens. *Family Process, 54*(3), 435-453. doi: 10.1111/famp.12171

Adoption Council of Canada. (n.d.). *Frequently asked questions about adoption*. www.adoption.ca/faqs

Adoption Council of Canada. (n.d.). *Myths and realities.* http://www.adoption.ca/myths-and-realities

Allan, R., & Johnson, S. (2017). Conceptual and application issues: Emotionally focused therapy with gay male couples. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy, 16*(4), 286-305. doi: 10.1080/15332691.2016.1238800

Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre. (n.d.) *LGBT families.* http://www.aclrc.com/2-lgbt-families

American Psychological Association. (2006). *Answers to your questions about transgender individuals and gender identity.* https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/transgender.pdf

American Psychological Association. (2009). *Report of the American Psychological Association task force on appropriate therapeutic responses to sexual orientation.* https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf

American Psychological Association. (2012). Guidelines for psychological practice with lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients. *American Psychologist, 67*(1), 10–42. doi: 10.1037/a0024659

American Psychological Association. (2017). *Multicultural guidelines: An ecological approach to context, identity, and intersectionality.* http://www.apa.org/about/policy/multicultural-guidelines.pdf

American Psychological Association. (n.d.). *Definitions related to sexual orientation and gender diversity in APA documents.* https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/sexuality-definitions.pdf

Arayasirikul, S., & Wilson, E.C. (2019). Spilling the T on trans-misogyny and microaggressions: An intersectional oppression and social process among trans women. *Journal of Homosexuality, 66*(10), 1415-1438. doi: 10.1080/00918369.2018.1542203

Assembly of First Nations. (2004). *Report on Canada's Dispute Resolution Plan to Compensate for Abuses in Indian Residential Schools*. https://kathleenmahoney.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/afn-report-indian_residential_schools_report.pdf

Atkinson, A. J. (2020). Adoption competent clinical practice. In G.M. Wrobel, E. Helder, & E. Marr (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Adoption* (pp. 435-448). New York, NY: Routledge.

Baden, A. L. (2002). The psychological adjustment of transracial adoptees: An application of the Cultural-Racial Identity Model. *Journal of Social Distress & the Homeless, 11*(2), 167–191. http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/A:1014316018637

Baden, A. L. (2015). Culture camp, ethnic identity, and adoption socialization for Korean adoptees: A pretest and posttest study. *New Directions for Child & Adolescent Development, 150*, 19-31. doi: 10.1002/cad.20119

Baden, A. L. (2016). "Do you know your real parents?" and other adoption microaggressions. *Adoption Quarterly, 19*, 1–25. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2015.1026012

Baden, A. L., Gibbons, J. L., Wilson, S. L., & McGinnis, H. (2013). International adoption: Counseling and the adoption triad. *Adoption Quarterly, 16*(3/4), 218 –237. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2013.794440

Baden, A. L., Shadel, D., Morgan, R., White, E. E., Harrington, E. S., Christian, N., & Bates, T. A. (2019). Delating adoption disclosure: A survey of late discovery adoptees. *Journal of Family Issues, 40*(1), 1154-1180. doi: 10.1177/0192513X19829503

Baden, A. L., & Steward, R. J. (2000). A framework for use with racially and culturally integrated families: The cultural-racial identity model as applied to transracial adoptees. *Journal of Social Distress & the Homeless, 9*(4), 309–337. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/A:1009493827019

Baden, A. L., Treweeke, L. M., & Ahluwalia, M. K. (2012). Reclaiming culture: Reculturation of transracial and international adoptees. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 90*(4), 387-399.

Baden, A. L., & Wiley, M. O. (2007). Counseling adopted persons in adulthood: Integrating practice and research. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*(6), 868-901. doi: 10.1177/0011000006291409

Balenzano, C., Coppola, G., Cassibba, R., & Moro, G. (2018). Pre-adoption adversities and adoptees; outcomes: The protective role of post-adoption variables in an Italian experience of domestic open adoption. *Children and Youth Services Review, 85*, 307-318. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.01.012

Bamberg, M. (2012). Narrative analysis. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 85–102). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Barroso, R., & Barbosa-Ducharne, M. (2019). Adoption-related feelings, loss, and curiosity about origins in adopted adolescents. *Clinical Child Psychology & Psychiatry, 24*(4), 876-891. doi: 10.1177/1359104519858117

Baruth, L. G., & Manning, L. M. (2003). Counseling lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients. In L. G. Baruth and L. M. Manning (Eds.), *Multicultural counseling and psychotherapy: A lifespan perspective* (3rd ed., pp. 350-378). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Barth, R. P., & Miller, J. M. (2000). Building effective post-adoption services: What is the empirical foundation? *Family Relations, 49*(4), 447-455.

Basow, S. A., Lilley, E., Bookwala, J., & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, A. (2008). Identity development and psychological well-being in Korean-born adoptees in the US. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 78*(4), 473-480. doi: 10.1037/a0014450

Bertocci, D., & Schechter, M. D. (1991). Adopted adults' perception of their need to search: Implications for clinical practice. *Smith College Studies in Social Work, 61*(2), 179-196. doi: 10.1080/00377319109516693

Borders, L. D., Penny, J. M., & Portnoy, F. (2000). Adult adoptees and their friends: Current functioning and psychosocial well-being. *Family Relations, 49*, 407-418.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Branco, S. F., & Cloonan, V. (2022). False narratives. Illicit practices in Colombian transnational adoption. *Genealogy, 6,* 80.

Brodzinsky, D. M. (1987). Adjustment to adoption: A psychosocial perspective. *Clinical Psychology Review, 7*, 25-47.

Brodzinsky, D. M. (2003). *Adoption by lesbians and gays: A national survey of adoption agency policies, practices, and attitudes.* New York, NY: Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute.

Brodzinsky, D. M., & Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. (2003). *Adoption by lesbians and gays: A national survey of adoption agency policies, practices, and attitudes.* https://www.adoptioninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Lesbian-Gay-Adoption-Report.pdf

Brodzinsky, D. M., & Goldberg, A. E. (2016). Contact with birth family in adoptive families headed by lesbian, gay male, and heterosexual couples. *Children and Youth Services Review, 62*, 9-17.

Brodzinsky, D. M., Green, R. J., & Katuzny, K. (2012). Adoption by lesbians and gay men: What we know, need to know, and ought to do. In D.M. Brodzinsky & A. Pertman (Eds.), *Adoption by lesbians and gay men: A new dimension in family diversity* (pp. 233-253). New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Brosinsky, L. (2017). *Counselling adoptees: Research and practice*. (Master's Capstone Project). Education and Research Archive. https://doi.org/10.7939/r3-pphe-9724

Brown, J. (2017). *Counseling diversity in context*. North York, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Brown, S., Smalling, S., Groza, V., & Ryan, S. (2009). The experiences of gay men and lesbians in becoming and being adoptive parents. *Adoption Quarterly, 12*, 229-246. doi: 10.1080/10926750903313294

Brown, A., Waters, C. S., & Shelton, K. H. (2019). The educational aspirations and psychological well-being of adopted young people in the UK. *Adoption & Fostering, 43*(1), 46-59. doi: 10.1177/0308575919826900

Bruun, S. T., & Farr, R. H. (2021). Longitudinal gender presentation and associated outcomes among adopted children with lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 17*(3), 231-250. doi: 10.1080/1550428X.2020.1802382

Canada Adopts. (2014). *Home study.* http://www.canadaadopts.com/hoping-adopt/home-study/

Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. (2018). *Tri-council policy statement: Ethical conduct for research involving humans.* https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/documents/tcps2-2018-en-interactive-final.pdf

Canadian Psychological Association. (2000). *Canadian code of ethics for psychologists*. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Psychological Association.

Canadian Psychological Association. (2015). *CPA policy statement on conversion/reparative therapy for sexual orientation.* https://cpa.ca/docs/File/Position/SOGII%20Policy%20Statement%20-%20LGB%20Conversion%20Therapy%20FINALAPPROVED2015.pdf

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2012). *Adoption Disruption and Dissolution.* https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/s_disrup.pdf

Clandinin, D. J. (2013). *Engaging in narrative inquiry.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc.

Clandinin, D. J., & Caine, V. (2008). Narrative Inquiry. In Lisa M. Given (Ed.), *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. (pp. 542-545). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n275

Clandinin, D. J., Caine, V., Lessard, S., & Huber, J. (2016). *Engaging in narrative inquiries with children and youth.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Clapton, G. (2018). Language is never neutral: A critical analysis of the language surrounding adoption in the UK. *Adoption & Fostering, 42*(2), 122-134. doi: 10.1177/0308575918773038

Cody, P. A., Farr, R. H., McRoy, R. G., Ayers-Lopez, S. J., & Ledesma, K. J. (2017). Youth perspectives on being adopted from foster care by lesbian and gay parents: Implications for families and adoption professionals. *Adoption Quarterly, 20*(1), 98-118. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2016.1200702

Colaner, C. W., & Kranstuber, H. (2010). "Forever kind of wondering": Communicatively managing uncertainty in adoptive families. *Journal of Family Communication, 10*(4), 236-255.

Cole, J. (1995). *How I was adopted.* New York, NY: Morrow Junior Books.

College of Alberta Psychologists. (2019). *Annual Report 2018-2019.* https://www.cap.ab.ca/Portals/0/pdfs/Annual%20Reports/Annual%20Report%202019.pdf?ver=2019-09-20-124143-707

Costa, P. A., & Tasker, F. (2018). "We wanted a forever family": Altruistic, individualistic, and motivated reasoning motivations for adoption among LGBTQ individuals. *Journal of Family Issues, 39*(18), 4156-4178. doi: 10.1177/0192513X18810948

Costa, P. A., Tasker, F., & Leal, I. P. (2021). Different placement practices for different families? Children's adjustment in LGH adoptive families. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12.* doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.649853

Crea, T., Barth, R., & Chintapalli, L. (2007). Home study methods for evaluating prospective resource families: History, current challenges, and promising approaches. *Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program, 86*, 141–159.

Crenshaw, K. W. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersections of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum, 140*, 139–167.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Crowley, C. (2019) Exploring the views and perceptions of adopted young people concerning their education and social development: An interpretative phenomenological analysis, *Educational Psychology in Practice, 35*(2), 165-183. doi: 10.1080/02667363.2018.1547895

Curtis, R., & Pearson, F. (2010). Contact with birth parents: Differential psychological adjustment for adults adopted as infants. *Journal of Social Work, 10*(4), 347-367. doi: 10.1177/1468017310369273

DeLurgio, S. (2019). Please don't go, we love you so: Recognizing unrecognized early loss in adoptees. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry, 39*(5), 318-325.

Decker, S., & Omori, M. (2009). Age at adoption: Long-term measures of success in adulthood. *Adoption Quarterly, 12*, 37-52. doi: 10.1080/10926750902791953

Dewaele, A., Cox, N., Van den Berghe, W., & Vincke, J. (2011). Families of choice? Exploring the supportive networks of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 41*(2), 312-331.

Docan-Morgan, S. (2010). Korean adoptees' retrospective reports of intrusive interactions: Exploring boundary management in adoptive families. *Journal of Family Communication, 10*(3), 137-157.

Domínguez, D. G., Bobele, M., Coppock, J., & Peña, E. (2015). LGBTQ relationally based positive psychology: An inclusive and systemic framework. *Psychological Services, 12*(2), 177-185. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038824

Downing, J., Richardson, H., Kinkler, L., & Goldberg, A. (2009). Making the decision: Factors influencing gay men's choice of an adoption path. *Adoption Quarterly, 12*, 247-271. doi: 10.1080/10926750903313310

Duckworth, A. L., Steen, T. A., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2005). Positive psychology in clinical practice. *Annual review of Clinical Psychology, 1*, 629-651.

Dunbar, N. D. (2003). *Typologies of adolescent adoptive identity: The influence of family context and relationships* (Publication No. 3092738) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Egale Canada Human Rights Trust. (n.d.). Glossary of terms. https://egale.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Glossary-eng_121322.pdf

Ellingson L. (2009). *Engaging crystallization in qualitative research: An introduction.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412991476

Farr, R. H., Crain, E. E., Oakley, M. K., Cashen, K. K., & Garber, K. J. (2016). Microaggressions, feelings of difference, and resilience among adopted children with sexual minority parents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 45*(1), 85–104. doi: 10.1007/s10964-015-0353-6

Farr, R. H., Flood, M. E., & Grotevant, H. D. (2016). The role of siblings in adoption outcomes and experiences from adolescence to emerging adulthood. *Journal of Family Psychology, 30*(3), 386-396. doi: 10.1037/fam0000173

Farr, R. H., & Goldberg, A. E. (2018). Sexual orientation, gender identity, and adoption law. *Family Court Review, 56*(3), 374-383.

Farr, R. H., Grant-Marsney, H., Musante, D.S., Grotevant, H. D., & Wrobel, M. (2014). Adoptees' contact with birth relatives in emerging adulthood. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 29*(1), 45-66. doi: 10.1177/0743558413487588

Farr, R. H., & Patterson, C. J. (2009). Transracial adoption by lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples: Who completes transracial adoptions and with what results? *Adoption Quarterly, 12*, 187-204. doi: 10.1080/10926750903313328

Farr, R. H., & Patterson, C. J. (2013). Lesbian and gay adoptive parents and their children. In A. E. Goldberg & K. R. Allen (Eds.), *LGBT-parent families: Innovations in research and implications for practice* (pp. 39-55). Springer Science+Business Media: Heidelberg, Dordrecht, London.

Farr, R. H., & Vázquez, C. P. (2020a). Stigma experiences, mental health, perceived parenting competence, and parent-child relationships among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parents in the United States. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11.* doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00445

Farr, R. H., & Vázquez, C. P. (2020b). Adoptive families headed by LGBTQ parents. In G. M. Wrobel, E. Helder, & E. Marr (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Adoption* (pp. 164-175). New York, NY: Routledge.

Feast, J., Kyle, F., & Triseliotis, J. (2011). Adoptive fathers' experiences of search and reunion. *Adoption & Fostering, 35*(1), 57-64.

Feeney, J. A., & Passmore, N. L. (2007). Adoption, attachment, and relationship concerns: A study of adult adoptees. *Personal Relationships, 14*, 129-147.

Feigelman, W. (1997). Adopted adults: Comparisons with persons raised in conventional families. *Marriage & Family Review, 25*(3-4), 199-223. doi: 10.1300/J002v25n03_05

Ferrari, L., Rosnati, R., Manzi, C., & Benet-Martínez, V. (2015). Ethnic identity, bicultural identity integration, and psychological well-being among transracial adoptees: A longitudinal study. *New Directions for Child & Adolescent Development, 150*, 63-76. doi: 10.1002/cad.20122

Filax, G. (2006). *Queer youth in the province of the "severely normal".* Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.

Fisher, A.P. (2003). Still "not quite as good as having your own"? Toward a sociology of adoption. *Annual Review of Sociology, 29*, 335-361. doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.29.010202.100209

Fitzhardinge, H. (2008). Adoption, resilience and the importance of stories: The making of a film about teenage adoptees. *Adoption & Fostering, 32*(1), 58-68.

Fradkin, C, Weschenfelder, G. V., & Yunes, M. A. M. (2016). Shared adversities of children and comic superheroes as resources for promoting resilience. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 51*, 407-415.

Fredrickson, B. L. (1998). What good are positive emotions? *Review of General Psychology, 2*(3), 300-319.

Fritz, J., de Graaff, A. M., Caisley, H., van Harmelen, A. L., & Wilkinson, P. O. (2018). A systemic review of amenable resilience factors that moderate and/or mediate the relationship between childhood adversity and mental health in young people. *Frontiers in Psychiatry, 19*(230). doi: 10.3389/fpsyt.2018.00230

Gaetz, S., O'Grady, B., Buccieri, K., Karabanow, J., & Marsolais, A. (2013). *Youth homelessness in Canada: Implications for policy and practice.* Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press. https://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/YouthHomelessnessweb.pdf

Garanzini, S., Yee, A., Gottman, J., Gottman, J., Cole, C., Preciado, M., & Jasculca, C. (2017). Results of Gottman method couples therapy with gay and lesbian couples. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 43*(4), 674-684. doi: 10.1111/jmft.12276

Garber, K. (2020). Adoptive microaggressions: Historical foundations, current research, and practical implications. In G.M. Wrobel, E. Helder, & E. Marr (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Adoption* (pp. 308-320). New York, NY: Routledge.

Garber, K. J., & Grotevant, H. D. (2015). "YOU Were Adopted?!": Microaggressions toward adolescent adopted individuals in same-race families. *The Counseling Psychologist, 43,* 435–462. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0011000014566471

Gartrell, N., Peyser, H., & Bos. (2012). Planned lesbian families: A review of the U.S. national longitudinal lesbian family study. In D.M. Brodzinsky & A. Pertman (Eds.), *Adoption by lesbians and gay men: A new dimension in family diversity* (pp. 112-129). New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Gates, G. (2013). *LGBT parenting in the United States.* Williams Institute. http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Parenting.pdf

Gianino, M., Goldberg, A., & Lewis, T. (2009). Family outings: Disclosure practices among adopted youth with gay and lesbian parents. *Adoption Quarterly, 12*(3), 205–228. doi: 10.1080/10926750903313344

Gibson, M. F. (2014). Adoption difference: Thinking through adoption by gay men in Ontario, Canada. *Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 39*(2), 407-432.

Goldberg, A. E. (2009). Lesbian and heterosexual preadoptive couples' openness to transracial adoption. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 79*(1), 103-117. doi: 10.1037/a0015354

Goldberg, A. E. (2014). Lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parents' experiences in preschool environments. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 29*(4), 669-681. doi: 10.1016/j.ecresq.2014.07.008.

Goldberg, A. E., Frost, R.L., Manley, M. H., McCormick, N. M., Smith, J. Z., & Brodzinsky, D. M. (2019). Lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parents' experiences with pediatricians: A mixed methods study. *Adoption Quarterly*. doi: 10.1080/10926755.2019.1675839

Goldberg, A. E., & Garcia, R. (2020). Community characteristics, victimization, and psychological adjustment among school-aged adopted children with lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00372

Goldberg, A. E., & Gianino, M. (2012). Lesbian and gay adoptive parent families: Assessment, clinical issues, and intervention. In D.M. Brodzinsky & A. Pertman (Eds.), *Adoption by lesbians and gay men: A new dimension in family diversity* (pp. 112-129). New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Goldberg, A. E., & Sweeney, K. K. (2019). LGBTQ parent families. In B. H. Fiese, M. Celano, K. Deater-Deckard, E. N. Jouriles, & M. A. Whisman (Eds.), *APA handbook of*

contemporary family psychology: Foundations, methods, and contemporary issues across the lifespan (pp. 743-760). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Goldberg, A .E., Sweeney, K., Black, K., & Moyer, A. (2016). Lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parents' socialization approaches to children's minority statuses. *The Counseling Psychologist, 44*(2), 267-299. doi: 10.1177/0011000015628055

Golombok, S., Mellish, L., Jennings, S., Casey, P., Tasker, F., & Lamb, M. (2014). Adoptive gay father families: Parent-child relationships and children's psychological adjustment. *Child Development, 85*(2), 456-468.

Green, R. J., & Mitchell, V. (2015). Gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues in couple therapy. In A. S. Gurman, J. L. Lebow, & D .K. Snyder (Eds.), *Clinical handbook of couple therapy* (5th ed.) (pp. 489-511). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Grzanka, P. R. (2014). *Intersectionality: A foundations and frontiers reader.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Grotevant, H. D., Dunbar, N., Kohler, J. K., & Esau, A. M. L. (2000). How contexts within and beyond the family shape developmental pathways. *Family Relations, 49*(4), 379-387.

Grotevant, H. D., Wrobel, G. M., Von Korff, L., Skinner, B., Newell, J., Friese, S., & McRoy, R. G. (2008). Many faces of openness in adoption: Perspectives of adopted adolescents and their parents. *Adoption Quarterly, 10*(4), 79-101. doi: 10.1080/10926750802163204

Habarth, J. M. (2015). Development of the heteronormative Attitudes and Beliefs Scale. *Psychology & Sexuality, 6*(2), 166-188. doi:10.1080/19419899.2013.876444

Harris, R. (2009). *ACT made simple: An easy-to-read primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

Hawk, B. N., & McCall, R. B. (2014). Perceived relationship quality in adolescents following early social-emotional deprivation. *Clinical Child Psychology & Psychiatry, 19*(3), 439-459. doi: 10.1177/1359104513489978

Henderson, D .B. (2002). Challenging the silence of the mental health community on adoption issues. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless, 11*(2), 131-141.

Henney, S., Ayers-Lopez, S., McRoy, R., & Grotevant, H. (2007). Evolution and resolution: Birthmothers' experience of grief and loss at different levels of adoption openness. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 24*(6), 875-889. Doi: 10.1177/0265407507084188

Henze-Pedersen, S. (2019). Known and unknown identities: Openness and identity as experiences by adult adoptees. *Adoption Quarterly, 22*(2), 135-156. doi: 10.1080/10926755.2019.1625834

Higgins, C., & Stoker, K. (2011). Language learning as a site for belonging: A narrative analysis of Korean adoptee-returnees. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 14*(4), 399-412.

Hoksbergen, R. A. C., ter Laak, J., van Dijkum, C., Rijk, S., Rijk, K., & Stoutjesdijk, F. (2003). Posttraumatic stress disorder in adopted children from Romania. *Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 73*(3), 255-265. doi: 10.1037/0002-9432.73.3.255

Hollingsworth, L. D. (1998). Adoptee dissimilarity from the adoptive family: Clinical practice and research implications. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 15*(4), 303-319.

Holmgren, E., & Elovainio, M. (2019). Issues in interpreting the findings from adoption outcome studies: A checklist for practitioners. *Adoption & Fostering, 43*(2), 210-213. doi: 10.1177/0308575919841753

Horne, S. G., Puckett, J. A., Apter, R., & Levitt, H. M. (2014). In J. T. Pedrotti & L. M. Edwards (Eds.), *Perspectives on the intersection of multiculturalism and positive psychology* (pp. 190-202). Springer Science+ Business Media Dordrecht: Heidelberg, New York, London.

Horvath, A. O., & Symonds, B. D. (1991). Relation between working alliance and outcome in psychotherapy: A meta-analysis. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 38, 139-149.

Howe, D., Shemmings, D., & Feast, J. (2001). Age at placement and adult adopted people's experience of being adopted. *Child and Family Social Work, 6*(4), 337-349. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2206.2001.00215.x

Huber, J., Caine, V., Murphy, M.S., Lessard, S., Menon, J., & Clandinin, D. J. (2018). A narrative inquiry into the experiences of urban indigenous families as they ready their children for, and during, Kindergarten. *Journal of Childhood Studies, 43*(2), 46-57.

Huber, J., Murphy, M.S., & Clandinin, D.J. (2011) Narrative inquiry as relational multiperspectival inquiry. In *Places of curriculum making: Narrative inquiries into children's lives in motion*. Bigely: Emerald Group Publishing.

Hughes, E. (2015). "There's no such thing as a whole story": The psychosocial implications of adopted women's experiences of finding their biological fathers in adulthood. *Studies in Gender and Sexuality, 16*(3), 151-169.

Hulshof-Schmidt, R. (2012). What's in an acronym? Parsing the LGBTQQIP2SAA community. *Social Justice for All.* https://hulshofschmidt.wordpress.com/2012/07/11/whats-in-an-acronym-parsing-the-lgbtqqip2saa-community/

Jones, A. (1997). Issues relevant to therapy with adoptees. *Psychotherapy, 34*(1), 64-68.

Jordan, C., & Dempsey, M. (2013). Exploring experiences of adoption: Emerging implications for therapeutic practice. *Counselling Psychology Review, 28*(1), 37-46.

Josselson, R. (2007). The ethical attitude in narrative research: Principles and practicalities. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *The handbook of narrative inquiry* (pp. 537–566). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452226552.n21

Josselson, R. (2011). Narrative research: Constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing story. In F. J. Wertz., K. Charmaz, L. M. McMullen, R. Josselson, R. Anderson, & E. McSpadden (Eds.), *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry* (pp. 224–243). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Karakurt, G., & Silver, K. E. (2014). Therapy for childhood sexual abuse survivors using attachment and family systems theory orientations. *The American Journal of Family Therapy, 42*, 79-91. doi: 10.1080/01926187.2013.772872

Kline, S. L., Karel, A. I., & Chatterjee, K. (2006). Covering adoption: General depictions in broadcast news. *Family Relations, 55,* 487-498.

Koh, B. D., Kim, J., & McRoy, R. (2017). Exploring adoption-specific curricula in undergraduate and graduate degree programs. *Adoption Quarterly, 20*(3), 252-265. https://doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2017.1349698

Koh, B. D., Kim, J., & McRoy, R. (2020). Adoption-specific curricula in higher education. In G. M. Wrobel, E. Helder, & E. Marr (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Adoption* (pp. 493-507). New York, NY: Routledge.

Kottler, J. A., & Shepard, D. S. (2011). Introduction to counseling: Voices from the field. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Kraus, J. (1982). Adopted persons in search of their origin: Review of research. *Australian Social Work, 35*(2), 3-6. doi: 10.1080/03124078208549758

Krueger, M. J. J., & Hanna, F. J. (1997). Why adoptees search: An existential treatment perspective. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 75*(3), 195-202.

Kuvalanka, K. A. (2012). From ball culture to the Gay Rodeo: Expanding notions of family. *Sex Roles, 67*, 366-368. doi: 10.1007/s11199-012-0147-1. https://link-springer-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs11199-012-0147-1.pdf

Larson, A. (2019). An American stuck in another body: Narratives of adopted emerging adults. *Proceedings of a GREAT Day, 2018*(1), 23-31. https://knightscholar.geneseo.edu/proceedings-of-great-day/vol2018/iss1/7

LaSala, M. C. (2007). Old maps, new territory: Family therapy theory and gay and lesbian couples. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 3*(1), 1-14. doi: 10.1300/J461v03n01_01

Lavner, J. A., Waterman, J., & Peplau, L. A. (2012). Can gay and lesbian parents promote healthy development in high-risk children adopted from foster care? *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 82*(4), 465-472. doi: 10.1111/j.1939-0025.2012.01176.x

Legislative Assembly of Ontario. (2007). *Bill 12*. http://www.originscanada.org/documents/Bill_12_Ontario_2007.pdf

Leighton, K. (2012). Addressing the harms of not knowing one's heredity: Lessons from genealogical bewilderment. *Adoption & Culture, 3*, 63-106.

Lev, I. S. (2010). How queer! - The development of gender identity and sexual orientation in LGBTQ-headed families. *Family Process, 49*(3), 268-290.

LeVine, E. S., & Salle, A. L. (1990). Critical phases among adoptees and their families: Implications for therapy. *Child and Adolescent Social Work, 7*(3), 217-232.

Levitt, H. M., Schuyler, S. W., Chickerella, R., Elber, A., White, L., Troeger, R. L., Karter, J. M., Preston, J. M., & Collins, K. M. (2020). *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 32*(3), 261-282. doi: 10.1080/10538720.2020.1728461

Lewis, S., & Brady, G. (2018). Parenting under adversity: Birth parents' accounts of inequality and adoption. *Social Sciences, 7*, 1-14. Doi: 10.3390/socsci7120257

LGBTQIA Resource Center. (2020). *LGBTQIA Resource Center Glossary.* https://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/glossary

Library of Congress. (2022). Canada: Bill C-4 banning conversion therapy Comes into force. https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2022-01-19/canada-bill-c-4-banning-conversion-therapy-comes-into-force/

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newberry Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Lindgren, C., & Nelson, K. Z. (2014). Here and now – there and then: Narrative time and space in intercountry adoptees' stories about background, origin and roots. *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice, 13*(4), 539-554.

Lomash, E. F., Brown, T. D., & Galupo, M. P. (2019). "A whole bunch of love the sinner hate the sin": LGBTQ microaggressions experienced in religious and spiritual context. *Journal of Homosexuality, 66*(10), 1495-1511. doi: 10.1080/00918369.2018.1542204

Lui, P. P., & Quezada, L. (2019). Associations between microaggression and adjustment outcomes: A meta-analytic and narrative review. *Psychological Bulletin, 145*(1), 45-78. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/bul0000172

Luther, S.S ., Lyman, E. L., & Crossman, E. J. (2014). Resilience and positive psychology. In M. Lewis & K. D. Rudolph (Eds.), *Handbook of Developmental Psychopathology* (pp. 125-

140). New York, NY: Springer Science & Business Media. doi: 10.1007/978-1-4614-9608-3_7

Macfarlane, J. (2021). Positive psychology: Resilience and its role within mental health nursing. *British Journal of Mental Health Nursing, 10*(1), 1-14. doi: 10.12968/bjmh.2020.0049

Mallon, G. P. (2007). Assessing lesbian and gay prospective foster and adoptive families: A focus on the homestudy process. *Child Welfare, 86*(2), 67-86.

Manning, W. D., Fettro, M. N., & Lamidi, E. (2014). Child well-being in same-sex parent families: Review of research prepared for American Sociological Association Amicus debrief. *Population Research and Policy Review, 33*, 485–502. Doi: 10.1007/s11113-014-9329-6

Marr, E. (2017). U.S. transracial adoption trends in the 21st century. *Adoption Quarterly, 20*(3), 222-251. https://doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2017.1291458

McConnachie, A. L., Foley, S., Lamb, M. E., Jadva, V., Golombok, S., Ayed, N., & Tasker, F. (2021). Adoptive gay father families: A longitudinal study of children's adjustment at early adolescence. *Child Development, 92*(1), 425-443. doi: 10.1111/cdev.13442

Messina, R., & Brodzinsky, D. (2019). Children adopted by same-sex couples: Identity-related issues from preschool years to late adolescence. *Journal of Family Psychology.* doi: 10.1037/fam0000616

Miller, B. C., Fan, X., Christensen, M., Grotevant, H. D., & von Dulmen, M. (2000). Comparisons of adopted and nonadopted adolescents in a large, nationally representative sample. *Child Development, 71*(5), 1458-1473.

Mills, K., Nichols, J., & Murphy, S. (2020). Storying the past, creating the future: Hope and narrative openness in an older women's writing group. *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy, 54*(3), 430-450.

Morris, E. R., Lindley, L., & Galupo, M. P. (2020). "Better issues to focus on": Transgender microaggressions as ethical violations in therapy. *The Counseling Psychologist, 48*(6), 883–915. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000020924391

Morton, C., & Shelton, S. (2019). The framing of adoption: A content analysis of print news coverage 2014-2016. *Journal of Public Interest Communications, 3*(1), 27-49.

Munro, L., Travers, R., & Woodford, M. R. (2019). Overlooked and invisible: Everyday experiences of microaggressions for LGBTQ adolescents. *Journal of Homosexuality, 66*(10), 1439-1471. doi: 10.1080/00918369.2018.1542205

Murphy, S. (2019). Coming alongside during the dissertation process: Living, telling, reliving, retelling a story of being and becoming a narrative inquirer. In C. Clark & D. Hutchinson (Eds.), *Landscapes, edges, and identity-making: Narrative examinations of teacher knowledge advances in research on teaching* (Vol. 33, pp. 37-49). Emerald Publishing Limited. doi:10.1108/S1479-368720190000033006

Murphy, M., Huber, J., & Ross, V. (2012). Attending to the temporal dimension of narrative inquiry into teacher education identity. In D. Keyes, E. Chan, & V.D. Ross (Eds.), *Narrative inquirers in the midst of meaning-making: Interpretive acts of teacher educators* (Vol. 16, pp. 51-75). Emerald Group Publishing. doi:10.1108/S1479-3687(2012)0000016007

Nadal, K. L., Rivera, D. P., & Corpus, J. H. (2010). Sexual orientation and transgender microaggressions: Implications for mental health and counselling. In D. W. Sue (Ed.),

Microaggressions and marginality: Manifestation, dynamics, and impact (pp. 217-240). Hoboken, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Neil, E. (2012). Making sense of adoption: Integration and differentiation from the perspective of adopted children in middle school. *Children and Youth Services Review, 34*, 409-416. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.11.011

Neimeyer, R. A. (2006). Bereavement and the quest for meaning: Rewriting stories of loss and grief. *Hellinic Journal of Psychology, 3*, 181-188.

Nelson, K. P. (2018). The disability of adoption: Adoptees in disabling societies. *Adoption Quarterly, 21*(4), 288-306. doi: 10.1080/10926755.2018.1526841

Nestor, P. G., & Schutt, R. K. (2012). *Research methods in psychology: Investigating human behavior.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Oke, M., Groza, V., Park, H., Kalyanvala, R., & Shetty, M. (2015). The perceptions of young adult adoptees in India on their emotional well-being. *Adoption & Fostering, 39*(4), 343-355. doi: 10.1177/0308575915611776

Palacios, J., & Brodzinsky, D. (2010). Review: Adoption research: Trends, topics, outcomes. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 34*(3), 270–284. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0165025410362837

Passmore, N. L., & Chipuer, H. M. (2009). Female adoptees' perceptions of contact with their birth fathers: Satisfactions and dissatisfactions with the process. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 79*(1), 93-102. doi: 10.1037/a0014954

Patterson, C. J., & Wainright, J. L. (2012). Adolescents with same-sex parents: Findings from the national longitudinal study of adolescent health. In D.M. Brodzinsky & A. Pertman

(Eds.), *Adoption by lesbians and gay men: A new dimension in family diversity* (pp. 85-111). New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Park-Taylor, J., & Wing, H. M. (2020). Microfictions and microaggressions: Counsellors' work with transracial adoptees in schools. *Professional School Counselling, 23*(1), 1-14.

Parliament of Canada. (2020). *Bill C-8.* https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-1/bill/C-8/first-reading#ID0EBAA

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995) Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 8*(1), 5-23. doi: 10.1080/0951839950080103

Porch, T. K. (2007). *Counseling adoption triad members: Making a case for adoption training for counselors and clinical psychologists.* Washington, DC: Sage Publications.

Post, D. E. (2000). Adoption in clinical psychology: A review of the absence, ramifications, and recommendations for change. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless, 9*(4), 361-372.

Research in Practice. (2014). Attachment theory and research: Key messages. http://fosteringandadoption.rip.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Attachment-Theory-Final-PDF-14.04.14.pdf

Richardson, L., & St. Pierre, E. A. (2005). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 959–978). Sage Publications Ltd.

Riggle, E. D. B., & Rostosky, S. S. (2012). An introduction. In *A positive view of LGBTQ: Embracing identity and cultivating well-being* (pp. 1-16). Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 21*, 95-103.

Ross, L., Epstein, R., Goldfinger, C., Steele, L., Anderson, S., & Strike, C. (2008). Lesbian and queer mothers navigating the adoption system: The impacts on mental health. *Health Sociology Review, 17*(3), 254-266. doi: 10.5172/hesr.451.17.3.254

Ross, L., Epstein, R., Anderson, S., & Eady, A. (2009). Policy, practice, and personal narratives: Experiences of LGBTQ people with adoption in Ontario, Canada. *Adoption Quarterly, 12*(3-4), 272-293. doi: 10.1080/10926750903313302

Rubin, L. C. (2007). Using superheroes in counseling and play therapy. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company.

Rubin, L., & Livesay, H. (2006). Look, up in the sky! Using superheroes in play therapy. International Journal of Play Therapy,15(1), 117-133. doi:10.1037/h0088911

Russett, C. (2012). American adoption: A brief history. In D.M. Brodzinsky& A. Pertman (Eds.), *Adoption by lesbians and gay men: A new dimension in family diversity* (pp. 3-19). New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Ryan, S., & Brown, S. (2012). Gay and lesbian adoptive parents: Stressors and strengths. In D.M. Brodzinsky & A. Pertman (Eds.), *Adoption by lesbians and gay men: A new dimension in family diversity* (pp. 184-203). New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Samuels, G. M. (2009). "Being raised by White people": Navigating racial difference among adopted multiracial adults. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 71*(1), 80–94. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2008.00581.x

Sass, D. A., & Henderson, D. B. (2000). Adoption issues: Preparation of psychologists and an evaluation of the need for continuing education. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless, 9*(4), 349-359.

Schwarz, S. (2018). Resilience in psychology: A critical analysis of the concept. *Theory & Psychology, 28*(4), 528-541. doi: 10.1177/0959354318783584

Sellinger, L. (2016). *Adoption policies in Canada and Norway: A comparative study of the Adoption Act in British Columbia, Canada and the Adoption Act in Norway* (Doctoral dissertation). Stavanger, Norway: University of Stavanger.

Shaw, J. (2017). Thinking with stories: A renewed call for narrative inquiry as a social work epistemology and methodology. *Canadian Social Work Review, 34*(2), 207-227. doi: https://doi.org/10.7202/1042889ar

Shelton, K., & Delgado-Romero, E. A. (2011). Sexual orientation microaggressions: The experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer clients in psychotherapy. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 58*(2), 210-221.

Siegel, D. H., & Smith, S. L. (2012). *Openness in adoption: From secrecy and stigma to knowledge and connections*. New York: Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute.

Simon, K. A., & Farr, R. H. (2021). Adoption and racial/cultural socialization in diverse adoptive families: Associations with demographic factors, academic outcomes, and parent-child relationships. *Research in Human Development, 18*(4), 295-310. doi: 10.1080/15427609.2021.2010492

Simon, K. A., & Farr, R. H. (2022). Identity-based socialization and adopted children's outcomes in lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parent families. *Applied Developmental Science, 26*(1), 155-175. doi: 10.1080/10888691.2020.1748030

Sinclair, R. (2016). The Indigenous child removal system in Canada: An examination of legal decision-making and racial bias. *First Peoples Child & Family Review, 11*(2), 8-18.

Soares, J., Barbosa-Ducharne, M., Palacios, J., & Fonseca, S. (2017). Being adopted in the school context: Individual and interpersonal predictors. *Children & Youth Services Review, 79,* 463-470. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.06.043

Soares, J., Ralha, S., Barbosa-Ducharne, M., & Palacios, J. (2019). Adoption-relation gains, losses and difficulties: The adopted child's perspective. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 36*, 259-268. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-018-0582-0

Sorosky, A. D., Baran, A., & Pannor, R. (1974). The reunion of adoptees and birth relatives. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 3*(3), 195-206.

Statistics Canada. (2017). *Same-sex couples and sexual orientation… by the numbers.* https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/dai/smr08/2015/smr08_203_2015

Statistics Canada. (2019a). *Portrait of family life in Canada in 2016.* https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016006/98-200-x2016006-eng.cfm

Statistics Canada. (2019b). *Police-reported hate crime, by type of motivation, Canada (selected police services).* https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3510006601

Statistics Canada. (2019c). *Same-sex couples in Canada in 2016.* https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016007/98-200-x2016007-eng.cfm

Statistics Canada. (2019d). *Family Day 2019 and the Diversity of Families in Canada.* https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-28-0001/2018001/article/00011-eng.htm

Statistics Canada. (2022). *Police-reported hate crime in Canada, 2020.* https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2022001/article/00005-eng.htm

St. Clair, K. (2018). *Using superheroes as response art to explore client strengths: A heuristic study*. [Master's Thesis, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College]. https://scholars.smwc.edu/bitstream/handle/20.500.12770/241/St.%20Clair%2C%202018.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Stokes, L. D., & Poulsen, S. S. (2014). Narrative therapy for adoption issues in families, couples, and individuals: Rationale and approach. *Journal of Family Psychotherapy, 25*, 330-347. doi: 10.1080/08975353.2014.977681

Sue, D. W. (2010a). *Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender, and sexual orientation.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Sue, D. W. (2010b). Microaggressions, marginality, and oppression: An introduction. In D.W. Sue (Ed.), *Microaggressions and marginality: Manifestation, dynamics, and impact* (pp. 3-22). Hoboken, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Sue, D. W. (2019). Disarming racial microaggressions: Microintervention strategies for targets, white allies, and bystanders. *American Psychologist, 74*(1), 128-142. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp0000296

Sue, D. W., Alsaidi, S., Awad, M. N., Glaeser, E., Calle, C. Z., & Mendez, N. (2019). Disarming racial microaggressions: Microintervention strategies for targets, White allies, and bystanders. *American Psychologist, 74*(1), 128-142. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp0000296

Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (2016). *Counseling and the culturally diverse: Theory and practice* (7th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Tan, T. X., & Nakkula, M. J. (2004). White parents' attitudes towards their adopted Chinese daughters' ethnic identity. *Adoption Quarterly, 7*(4), 57-76. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J145v07n04_03

Tasker, F., & Bellamy, C. (2019). Adoption by same-sex couples – Reaffirming evidence: Could more children be placed? *Family Law, 49*.

ter Meulen, G., Smeets, D., & Juffer, F. (2019). The relation between adult adoptees' feelings about relinquishment, adoption and satisfaction with life. *Adoption & Fostering, 43*(2), 192-209. doi: 10.1177/0308575919841754

Torrance, K. (1997). Alberta's new family policy. (cover story). *Alberta Report/Newsmagazine, 24*(35), 10.

Towse, H., Cooper, B., & John-Legere, S. (2019). The high incidence of developmental difficulties and evolving needs of children and young people after adoption: A review of 40 children adopted from Southwark. *Adoption & Fostering, 43*(1), 101-105. doi: 10.1177/0308575919833872

Truscott, D. (2010). Psychodynamic. In *Becoming an effective psychotherapist: Adopting a theory that's right for you and your client* (pp. 21-36). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Honouring_the_Truth_Reconciling_for_the_Future_July_23_2015.pdf

Vaccaro, A., & Koob, R. M. (2019). A critical and intersectional model of LGBTQ microaggressions: Toward a more comprehensive understanding. *Journal of Homosexuality, 66*(10), 1317-1344. doi: 10.1080/00918369.2018.1539583

Vashchenko, M., D'Aleo, M., & Pinderhughes, E .E. (2012). "Just beyond my front door": Public discourse experiences of children adopted from China. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 49*, 246-257. doi: 10.1007/s10464-011-9441-2

Vik, T.A., & Bute, J.J. (2009). Utilizing crystallization in qualitative methods. *Review of Communication, 9*(4), 340-343. Doi: 10.1080/15358590903151211

Wallin, D. L. (2015). *Attachment in psychotherapy.* New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Wampold, B. E., & Imel, Z .E. (2015). *The great psychotherapy debate: The evidence for what makes psychotherapy work (2nd ed.).* New York, NY: Routledge.

Watson, D. L., Latter, S., & Bellew, R. (2015). Adopted children and young people's views on their life storybooks: The role of narrative in the formation of identities. *Children and Youth Services Review, 58*, 90-98. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2015.09.010

Wegar, K. (1995). Adoption and mental health: A theoretical critique of the psychopathological model. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 65*(4), 540-548.

Weistra, S., & Luke, N. (2017). Adoptive parents' experiences of social support and attitudes towards adoption. *Adoption & Fostering, 41*(3), 228-241. doi: 10.1177/0308575917708702

Whitten, K. L., & Weaver, S. R. (2010). Adoptive family relationships and healthy adolescent development: A risk and resilience analysis. *Adoption Quarterly, 13*, 209-226. doi: 10.1080/10926755.2010.524873

Wiley, M. O. (2017). Adoption research, practice, and societal trends: Ten years of progress. *American Psychologist, 72*(9), 985-995. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp0000218

Wolfgram, S. M. (2008). Openness in adoption: What we know so far – A critical review of the literature. *Social Work, 53*(2), 133-142.

Wood, Z. B. (2012). *Public child welfare adoption: The adoptive parent and adolescent adoptee perception of adoption outcomes* (Publication No. 3530112). [Doctoral dissertation, Case Western Reserve University]. UMI Microform.

Wrobel, G. M., & Grotevant, H. D. (2019). Minding the (information) gap: What do emerging adult adoptees want to know about their birth parents? *Adoption Quarterly, 22*(1), 29-52. doi: 10.1080/10926755.2018.1488332

Wydra, M., O-Brien, K. M., & Merson, E. S. (2012). In their own words: Adopted persons' experiences of adoption disclosure and discussion in their families. *Journal of Family Social Work, 15*, 62-77. doi: 10.1080/10522158.2012.642616

Yalom, I. D., & Leszcz, M. (2005). *The theory and practice of group psychotherapy* (5th ed.). New York: Basic Books.

Yates, T. M., Tyrell, F. A., & Masten, A. S. (2015). In S. Joseph (Ed.), *Positive psychology in practice: Promoting human flourishing in work, health, education, and everyday life (pp. 773-790).* Hoboken, NJ; John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Young, A. (2012). Choose intercountry adoption: An Australian study of the motivations and attitudes of intending and recent adoptive parents. *Australian Journal of Social Issues, 47*(2), 221-241.

Zhang, D., & Chen, Y. (2020). “We are the unusual factor”: Queering family communication norms with gay adoptive parents. *Journal of Family Communication, 20*(3), 206-220. doi: 10.1080/15267431.2020.1767621

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

The following definitions were developed using the following resources: American Psychological Association, 2006, 2009, 2012, n.d.; Egale, n.d.; Habarth, 2014; Hulshof-Schmidt, 2012; Riggle & Rostosky, 2012; & LGBTQIA Resource Center, 2020.

Allies → supporters of the LGBTQ+ community

Asexual → a person who does not experience sexual attraction

Bisexual → having sexual attraction to both men and women, regardless of one's own gender identity

Cisgender → having a gender identity that corresponds to the gender assigned at birth

Cisnormativity → the assumption or belief that being cisgender is the norm and is therefore more valued

Gay → includes both males and females who are attracted to members of the same sex

Gender → the attitudes, feelings, and behaviours that have come to be attributed to each sex through socially constructed beliefs and consequent pressures about what behaviours and attitudes are considered to be appropriate for men as opposed to women.

Gender identity → an internal sense of being male or female, which may or may not match a person's birth sex, as in the case of transgender individuals. *Please note that gender identity and sexual orientation are independent from each other, as a person's internal sense of being male or female (gender identity) is not related to the sex of the person or people that they are romantically attracted to (sexual orientation).*

Heteronormativity → the belief that opposite-sex attraction is normal or natural, and that people should comply with the gender role they were assigned at birth.

Intersex → people with two sets of genitalia or other chromosomal differences

Lesbian → a female who is attracted to members of the same sex

Pansexual → attraction to anyone, regardless of gender or sexual identities

Queer → a controversial term used by some people in the LGBTQ+ community to indicate their status as an LGBTQ+ person, and used by others to indicate that their personal identity does not necessary fall into a categorical distinction and is more inter-related than these categories allow for. *Please note that not all members of the LGBTQ+ community will use the term queer, as this word has historically been used with negative connotations against this community.*

Sex → a person's biologically based status as male, female, or intersex based on indicators such as sex chromosomes, gonads, and reproductive organs.

Sexual identity → the label a person chooses to describe the emotional and cognitive understandings they have about their own sexuality, which is in contrast to their sexual orientation, which is tied to psychological and biological drives and is not something that a person chooses.

Sexual minority → when a person's sexual identity or sexual orientation does not match societal expectations. *Please note that some members of the LGBTQ+ community may not identify with the term "sexual minority", as sexuality may not actually be a factor in their personal identity, although they still belong to the LGBTQ+ population.*

Sexual orientation → the sex of the person or people to whom a person is romantically or sexually attracted. *Please note that gender identity and sexual orientation are independent from each other, as a person's internal sense of being male or female (gender identity) is not related to the sex of the person or people that they are romantically attracted to (sexual orientation).*

Transgender → an umbrella term that has been used to represent a large spectrum of gender identities and manners of expression, and is intended to indicate that a person does not identify

with their birth sex, for example, when a person is born with female genitalia but they internally identify as a man (*see gender identity*)

Two Spirit → a First Nations tradition considering sexual minorities to have both male and female spirits

Appendix B: Recruitment Poster

Appendix C: Adult Consent Form

Listening to the Missing Voices of Adopted Teens and Young Adults in LGBTQ+ Families
Study Pro# 00101819

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

This study is about the experiences of teens and young adults who were adopted before the age of one into families with lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer-or other (LGBTQ+) parents. This study is being done by Larissa Brosinsky, a Ph.D student in Counselling Psychology at the University of Alberta working under the supervision of Dr. Noorfarah Merali. While there may not be any direct benefits to the participants themselves, these study results will help counsellors, adoption agencies, and LGBTQ+ agencies better understand the experiences of being adopted into LGBTQ+ families so that they can provide improved services to adopted people and LGBTQ+ parents.

If I initial the boxes below and sign this form, it means I understand these things about the study:

I understand that:	Initials:
• I know I will meet with Larissa by myself for one to three hours online using a secure videoconferencing platform. She will ask me to tell her about my experience growing up in my adoptive family, including my best memories, any challenges I have faced, and my strengths and my family's strengths that have helped me to cope.	
• I know that while we are talking, Larissa will be recording only my voice using a digital audio recorder. She will do this so she can listen to the interview again after it is over and write out a story about my adoption experience using a fake name for me. I will be able to provide feedback on her write-up in 1 or 2 follow-up meetings that will take less time than the first interview. In these meetings, I can ask Larissa to change or take out any information to make sure I feel the story reflects my true story and experiences, and that no one reading the story can recognize that it is about me. These meetings will also take place online using the same secure videoconferencing platform.	
• I know Larissa will record just my voice and what I say in all of our talks, unless I disagree with this. If I disagree, she will write down what I say instead.	
• I know that Larissa will use a made-up name for me when writing up my adoption experience, and that I can choose this fake name. Only the fake name will be linked to the interview and the tape recording.	
• I know that Larissa will remove any information that may reveal who I am from the interview information and any reports she writes or presentations she makes based on the study results.	

• I know that Larissa will not tell anyone or any agencies I may have found out about this study through that I am taking part in the study or if I decide to leave the study.	
• I know that Larissa will keep everything from the interview (the recording of my voice and notes she makes) in a locked filing cabinet in her office, and no one else will get to see this information.	
• I know that if I feel stressed or worried when I talk about my experiences, I can get a list of support services if I tell Larissa.	
• I know that even if I sign this form, I can still stop taking part in this study at any time without any questions or problems.	
• If I have questions or concerns about this study, I can send an email to Larissa at brosinsk@ualberta.ca. I can also call her supervisor, Dr. Noorfarah Merali, at the University of Alberta at *[phone number removed]*.	
• I know that the plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta that makes sure people taking part in research are treated properly.	
• If I have any questions about my rights as a person taking part in this study or about how research should be conducted, I can call the Research Ethics Board at (780) 492-2615. This office is not connected to the researchers.	

Participant Name (please print)**:** _____

Participant Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Larissa Brosinsky, M.Ed.
Dept. of Educational Psychology
Email: *brosinsk@ualberta.ca*
Phone: *[phone number removed]*
6-102 Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5

Noorfarah Merali, Ph.D.
Dept. of Educational Psychology
Email: *noorfarah.merali@ualberta.ca*
Phone: *[phone number removed]*
6-107D Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5

Appendix D: Adolescent Consent Form

ASSENT FORM

Listening to the Missing Voices of Adopted Teens and Young Adults in LGBTQ+ Families

Principal Investigator: Larissa Brosinsky. **Phone:** *[phone number removed]*
Study Supervisor: Dr. Noorfarah Merali. **Phone:** *[phone number removed]*

What is a research study?
A research study is a way to find out new information about something. Children and teenagers do not need to be in a research study if they don't want to.

Why are you being asked to be part of this research study?
You are being asked to take part in this research study because we are trying to learn more about people who were adopted into families with LGBTQ+ parents. We are asking you to be in the study because you were adopted into a family with LGBTQ+ parents. About 3 teenagers and young adults will be in this study.

If you join the study what will happen to you?
We want to tell you about some things that will happen to you if you are in this study.

- You will meet with Larissa on a secure online video platform to tell her about what it was like growing up in your family. It may take a few hours to do this.
- A few weeks later Larissa will send you a story she wrote about you.
- You will meet with Larissa one more time to tell her if you want any parts of the story changed, added, or taken out. It will take about 1 hour to do this.

Will any part of the study hurt?
No part of this study will hurt, but some people may find it hard to talk about what it was like for them growing up. If you feel stressed or worried while talking to Larissa she will give you and your parents some names of people you can talk to about your worries.

Will the study help you?
Some people like to talk about what it was like for them growing up, and if you are one of those people you might feel good after telling Larissa your story.

Will the study help others?
This study might find out things that will help other children who are being adopted into LGBTQ+ families some day.

Do you have to be in the study?
You do not have to be in the study. It's up to you. No one will be upset if you don't want to do this study. If you join the study, you can change your mind and stop being part of it at any time. All you have to do is tell Larissa or your parents. It's okay, the researchers and your parents won't be upset.

Do your parents know about this study?
This study was explained to your parents and they said that we could ask you if you want to be in it. You can talk this over with them before you decide.

Who will see the information collected about you?
The information collected about you during this study will be kept safely locked up. Nobody will know about it except the people doing the research.

The study information about you will not be given to your parents, but they may see all the stories Larissa writes about adopted people and be able to tell which story is yours. The researchers will not tell your friends or anyone else.

What if you have any questions?
You can ask any questions that you may have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, either you can call or have your parents call Larissa at *[phone number removed]*.

Other information about the study.

- If you decide to be in the study, please write your name below.
- You will be given a copy of this paper to keep.

☐ Yes, I will be in this research study. ☐ No, I don't want to do this.

Child's Name	Signature	Date
Person obtaining Assent	Signature	Date

Larissa Brosinsky, M.Ed.
Dept. of Educational Psychology
Email: *brosinsk@ualberta.ca*
Phone: *[phone number removed]*
6-102 Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5

Noorfarah Merali, Ph.D.
Dept. of Educational Psychology
Email: *noorfarah.merali@ualberta.ca*
Phone: *[phone number removed]*
6-107D Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5

Appendix E: Parental Consent Form

Listening to the Missing Voices of Adopted Teens and Young Adults in LGBTQ+ Families

PARENT AGREEMENT FOR CHILD'S PARTICIPATION

This study is about the experiences of teens and young adults who were adopted before the age of one into families with lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer-or other (LGBTQ+) parents. This study is being done by Larissa Brosinsky, a Ph.D student in Counselling Psychology at the University of Alberta, working under the supervision of Dr. Noorfarah Merali. This study will help counsellors, adoption agencies, and LGBTQ+ agencies better understand the experiences of being adopted into LGBTQ+ families, so that they can provide improved services to adopted youth and LGBTQ+ parents.

If I initial the boxes below and sign this form, it means I understand these things about the study:

I understand that:	Initials:
• I know that my child will meet with Larissa by themselves for one to three hours using a secure videoconferencing platform. She will ask my child about the experience of growing up in our family, including the best memories my child has of our family life, any challenges my child has faced, and the personal and family strengths that have helped with coping with any challenges that have come up.	
• I know Larissa will be writing out my child's adoption experience in a story format, and that my child will be able to provide feedback on this write-ups in 1 to 2 follow-up meetings that will likely be shorter that the first interview, and that will also happen using secure videoconferencing. In these meetings, my child can ask Larissa to change or remove any information to make sure they feel the story represents their true experiences, and that nobody reading the story can figure out that it is about them in order to protect their privacy and your family's privacy.	
• I know Larissa will record just my child's voice in all of their talks on a digital audio recorder, unless my child disagrees with this. If my child disagrees, Larissa will write down what they say instead.	
• I know that Larissa will use a fake name for my child when writing up their adoption experience. Only the fake name will be linked to the interview and the tape recording.	
• I know that Larissa will remove any information that may reveal who my child is from the interview and any reports or presentations she creates based on the study results. Only fake names will be used to report research results.	
• I know that Larissa will not tell anyone (including myself) or any agencies I or my child may have found out about this study through that they are participating in the study or if they decide to leave the study.	

• I know that Larissa will keep everything from the interview (the recording, and notes she makes) in a locked filing cabinet in her office, and no one else will get to see this information.	
• I know that if my child feels stressed or worried when they talk about my experiences, they can get a list of support services if they tell Larissa.	
• I know that my child can stop taking part in this study at <u>any time,</u> without any questions or problems, and that I will not be informed if they choose to withdraw.	
• I know that I will have no access to the information that my child shares during the interview or the write-up of their stories as it is being developed to make sure that my child feels comfortable fully sharing their experience with Larissa during this study.	
• If I have questions or concerns about this study, I can send an email to Larissa at brosinsk@ualberta.ca. I can also call her supervisor, Dr. Noorfarah Merali, at the University of Alberta at *[phone number removed]*.	
• I know that the plan for this study has been reviewed by the Ethics Board at the University of Alberta that makes sure people taking part in research are treated properly. This Board is called Alberta Research Information Services (ARISE).	
• If I have any questions about my rights as a person taking part in this study, I can call the head of ARISE at (780) 492-0459.	

Participant Name (please print)**:** _____

Parent 1 Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Parent 2 Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Larissa Brosinsky, M.Ed.
Dept. of Educational Psychology
Email: *brosinsk@ualberta.ca*
Phone: *[phone number removed]*
6-102 Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5

Noorfarah Merali, Ph.D.
Dept. of Educational Psychology
Email: *noorfarah.merali@ualberta.ca*
Phone: *[phone number removed]*
6-107D Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5

Appendix F: Participant Information

Questions About You:

1. Age: _____ 2. Gender: _____

3. Sexual Orientation: _____

4. Ethnicity (How do you identify in terms of your ethnic/cultural background or heritage?)

_____

_____

5. What type of adoption did you have? (Please check ✓ one):

- □ Domestic → I was adopted from within Canada
- □ International → I was adopted from outside of Canada
- □ I do not know

6. What type of adoption do you have? (Please check ✓ one):

- □ Open → I have contact with one or more members of my birth family.
- □ Closed → I do not have contact with any members of my birth family.
- □ Other → Please explain: _____

_____

Questions About Your Family:

1. For each sibling you have, please fill out the following:

Sibling 1: Age: _____ Are they also adopted? □ Yes □ No

Sibling 2: Age: _____ Are they also adopted? □ Yes □ No

Sibling 3: Age: _____ Are they also adopted? □ Yes □ No

Sibling 4: Age: _____ Are they also adopted? □ Yes □ No

Sibling 5: Age: _____ Are they also adopted? □ Yes □ No

Please turn over to page 2

2. For each of your parents, please fill out the following:

Parent 1: a) Gender: _____ b) Ethnicity: _____

c) Sexual Orientation: _____

d) Employment Status (please check ✓ one):

- □ Not employed
- □ Part-time employment
- □ Full-time employment
- □ Part-time student
- □ Full-time student
- □ Retired
- □ Other: _____

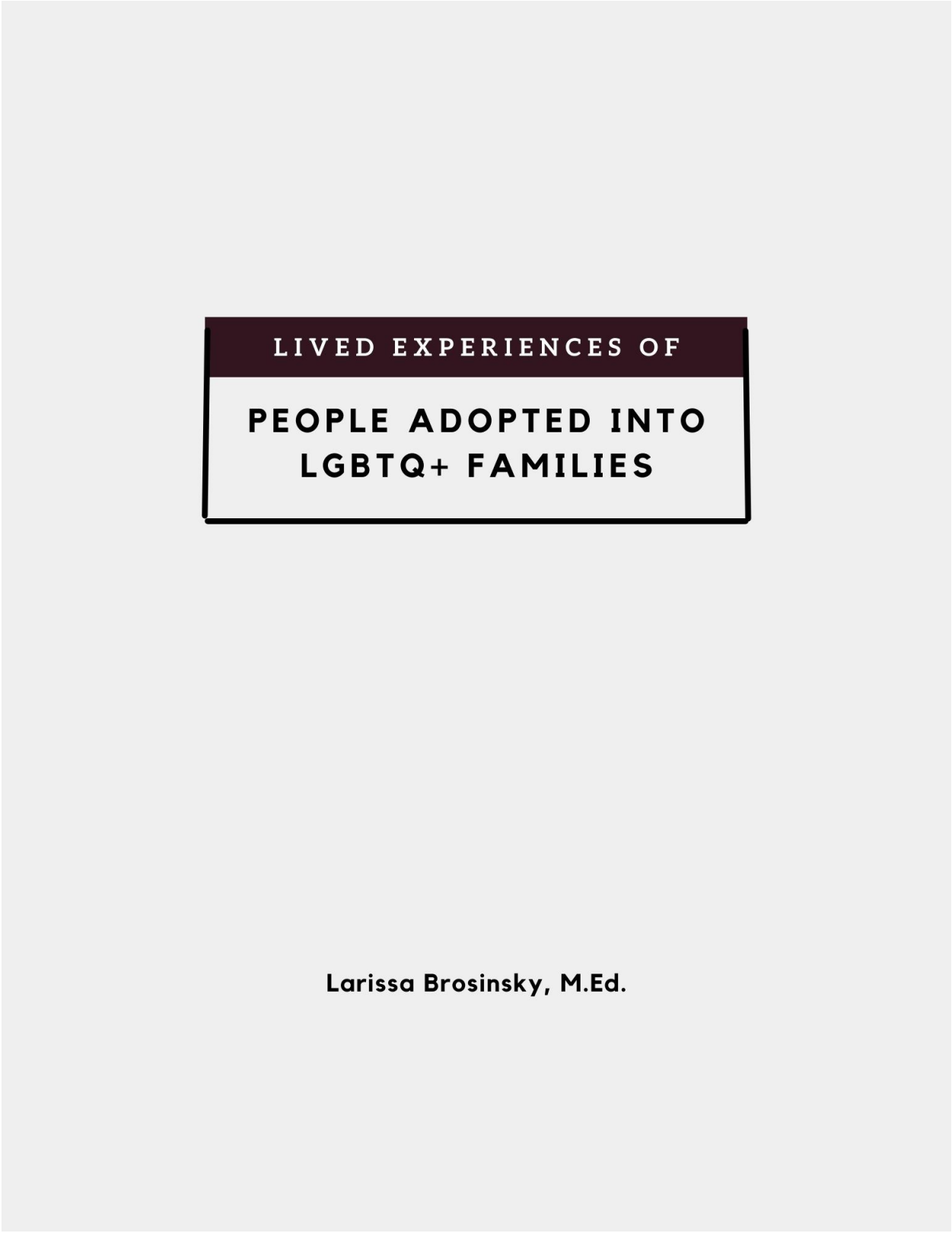
Parent 2: a) Gender: _____ b) Ethnicity: _____

c) Sexual Orientation: _____

d) Employment Status (please check ✓ one):

- □ Not employed
- □ Part-time employment
- □ Full-time employment
- □ Part-time student
- □ Full-time student
- □ Retired
- □ Other: _____

Appendix G: Booklet of Stories



INTRODUCTION

These stories were gathered as part of a dissertation study completed by Larissa Brosinsky. The stories were developed with the people whose lives they represent, and some details have been altered to protect the identity of those who shared their stories.

I hope that these stories will help to dispel some of the myths surrounding adoption and adoptive parents. These stories represent the real, lived experiences of two people adopted into LGBTQ+ families in Canada.

Our Lives Are Always in Motion

Given that our experiences are always changing, these stories should not be considered "final". Instead, they can be considered a snapshot of where these people were at in their own experiences during the moments in time that they shared with me.

SARAH'S STORY

"I didn't' even have consciousness when I was adopted, like, I literally did not have consciousness until I was already in Canada, I was already a Canadian citizen."

The two women toured around China for an entire week one crisp November, familiarizing themselves with the local cuisine, fashions, and customs. They appeared to be a couple of adventurous friends exploring China for their first time, taking photographs wherever they went, journaling about their experiences, and gathering little mementos as they moved along on their trip.

Little did anyone realize, these women were a couple, deeply in love and on the adventure of a lifetime together. Indeed, they had taken specific precautions to ensure that they were not seen as a couple and were simply assumed to be friends or sisters. They didn't do this out of shame, fear, or some other negative feeling they personally harbored towards their relationship. No, they hid their relationship so they would not be discriminated against, and so that they would be allowed to connect with another little soul who desperately needed them.

The two women met this little soul in the shape of an 11-month-old baby who they would come to name Sarah. She was just a tiny baby, swaddled in cloth to keep her warm, as she was fighting off a rough bout of bronchitis. While this was the first time they'd met, her mothers had been falling in love with little Sarah every day since they started the adoption process over a year earlier, even before they knew who she was. As they held her in that moment all the puzzle pieces seemed to fall into place, and they knew in their hearts that this had always been meant to be. The two mothers took turns holding their little girl in their arms and taking photographs of this monumental moment, all the while maintaining their façade of only being friends to protect their newly formed family. They were overjoyed and full of love as they held their daughter together that night in their hotel, safe from prying eyes, fully relishing the moment when their family of two grew to three.

"Their little China dolls, that's what we were"

Sarah's parents expanded their family a second time by adopting another little girl from China when Sarah was around four or five years old. Their mothers were excited to share the world with them, including their passions for travel and food. Sarah found it endlessly exciting to be taken on annual trips all around the world, reveling at the beauty she experienced worldwide. She was also exposed to a wide variety of foods from a young age, which sparked in her a sense of adventure and excitement for trying new cuisine. She felt very stable, supported, and fortunate growing up surrounded by these opportunities.

Lovers of photography and fashion, Sarah's mothers would regularly find her and her sister cute outfits when they were children and have family photoshoots together. Sarah loved these photoshoots, feeling warm and connected with her mothers, who fondly called the girls their "Little China Dolls". Little did she know that these photos would give her smiles and laughter whenever she looked back over them over the years to come. To her, these photos were a well-documented story of her journey though life with her loving family, blossoming in her a deep sense of gratitude for the life she has been given.

"That's how [family] is supposed to be! They're all men and they're all together, and we're all women so we're all together, that's just how it works. You don't mix them, you don't have multiple in one family!"

Sarah grew up within her parent's social circles, as many children do, and these people quickly became her points of reference for what constitutes a family. One of her closest friends as a young child was Mark, and she often had playdates with him. Mark had two fathers, and in connecting the dots in her own head about what families look like, young Sarah assumed that all families were one sex. In the budding mind of a four-year-old this simply made sense – her family was all girls, Mark's family was all boys, and all of the other couples she could remember meeting up to that point were same-sex relationships. To Sarah, to have a family was to have a loving group of people together who were the same sex.

Off to her first day of preschool, Sarah was shocked to discover not only that men and women often became couples and had children together, but also to discover that she was the only child in her preschool class of 15 with same-sex parents. She thought that it was so strange to have a man and a woman as your parents, as this simply didn't fit with her own experiences of family, and couldn't imagine what this dynamic might look like. In the blunt nature of conversation that is often attributed to young children, it wasn't long before another preschool child approached Sarah and told her that it was weird that she had two moms. The strong-minded and confident girl that she was, Sarah was quick with her retort, "What do you mean? You're weird because most people I know have two moms". And she wasn't wrong!

"Growing up without gender roles was a huge asset to my life. Nowadays we have the feminism movements and girls are told they can do anything a man can, but when you grow up just knowing it your entire life and it just being intrinsically there in you… It's different than having to learn it later in life."

Sarah's mothers were both very petite women, quite short and very thin, and yet there was never a task they wouldn't tackle. She grew up watching her mothers unplug drains that were clogged, climb counters to reach top shelves, change tires, cook, clean, and work full-time. Being surrounded by these models of independence and strength fostered in Sarah a hard-working can-do attitude as well as a deep sense of confidence in her ability to meet any challenge she could possibly be faced with. She grew up watching her mothers tackle every challenge head on without asking for assistance, and this is how she learned to function in life.

In Sarah's experience there was no such thing as gender roles or jobs allocated to certain genders – all work was just that: work. All members of her family engaged equally in all tasks and there was no division between any of the family members on what roles they played or which chores were theirs. As young Sarah started to learn more about traditional gender roles in school, she also quickly learned that these role divisions can often cause frustration in families. This was interesting to her, as this was something that she had never considered before given the equality of division of Laboure in her own home.

Sarah was, however, quite taken aback by the sudden shift she experienced in middle school where all of a sudden boys and girls were being treated drastically differently. She thought it was strange that girls and boys were separated and given separate sex talks in school when she felt that it was equally important for both groups to understand sex and pregnancy. She felt confused and frustrated that she was suddenly being labelled "weird" and "gay" for being willing to change into her gym clothes in the women's changeroom while most of the other girls waited in lines to get changed in one of the private bathroom stalls. Even despite being called these names, Sarah felt a quiet sadness for the girls in this line-up, as they were so clearly ashamed of their bodies, and she didn't know how to help them realize what she was raised to inherently understand – "bodies are just bodies".

As she continued to grow into a young woman, Sarah noticed social trends towards empowering women and breaking down traditional gender roles, and while she was glad to see this shift happening, it also felt a bit strange to her. She was watching other women struggle with this shift and struggle to become more self-confident and independent, which was in such contrast to her own strong sense of independence. She was struck with the realization that she had been raised from the beginning of her life in a way that allowed her to have an intrinsic sense of worth, value, strength, and independence, and that this was something that many other young girls had not been given.

"I kind of had to go back into the closet about my family when I was there… I had to put on the sleuthing goggles and make sure I got a good idea of what people were like and their opinions before I really revealed my family to anyone"

An adventurous teen, Sarah was thrilled at the opportunity to move to the United States of America to live with a relative and attend a year at one of the local schools. Recognizing both the benefits and risks to taking this step of independence, her mothers sat her down and had a long conversation with her about how in different areas of the world people may be less supportive of two men or two women having a child together. This idea was so far from the reality that her life had been up until this point that Sarah had a hard time believing that things could really get that bad, yet she took her mothers' words to heart as she travelled to the United States.

Sarah began her junior high school year in a large city in the United States at a private Catholic school, and she quickly became aware of being surrounded by belief systems that did not necessarily support her mothers' love or her mothers' decision to have a family together. Having spent most of her life up until this point in a community and school system that supported her family, this was a new experience for her. Instead of chatting candidly and openly about her family and life, she felt like she had to keep this part of herself hidden from others and put the story of her family "back in the closet" to keep herself and her family safe. For the first few days in this new environment, Sarah was uncomfortable and quite unhappy.

On the third or fourth day in this new school, Sarah heard that a young devout Catholic student had confidently argued in her debate class for women to have the right to be priests. She sought out this person and a quick friendship blossomed between them. Feeling comfortable in knowing this person's values, Sarah finally shared the story of her family, which was received with warmth. She quickly learned that while religion is often equated with tradition, this is not always the case, and that there are very devout religious people who also hold progressive values. While she still had to be more aware of who she was choosing to share her family story with, Sarah began to open up more with other friends who were all accepting of her and her family. She was told that the fundamental principle of their religion was to love others, and that this was of utmost importance in how they viewed and treated others. Sarah developed deep friendships that semester, and despite only having planned to attend this school for one semester, she felt so incredibly welcomed by her newfound friends that she opted to stay for the entire school year.

"People outwardly see, like, oh you're Chinese. I'm like, I don't know anything [about Chinese culture]. People tell you a lot of things that are yours, but you don't understand them. So that's something that's a struggle, especially as an adopted kid."

Sarah grew up with a special little notebook from her mothers from as early as she can remember. This notebook was the one they took with them on their trip to adopt her, filled with their photos, memories, and personal writings about the experience and the unconditional love they felt for her from the very start. She was also given so many items and trinkets that her mothers had gathered on their trip that she needed a small box to hold them all. She grew up with these cultural connections at arms reach, yet never really felt truly connected to her culture.

As a younger child she always felt like something was missing, but struggled to put her finger on exactly what this missing thing was. She felt incredibly loved and supported by her mothers and didn't have any other concerns in her life that felt connected to this missing piece of herself. It wasn't until she was an older teenager that she realized this missing piece was a personal connection to her Asian culture.

Sarah sometimes wondered what her day-to-day life would have looked like if she had grown up in China where she was born, as she would have been raised in such a different culture. As she grew up in Canada, others would often assume that she is connected to and aware of Chinese culture, as she visually looked Asian, but this was not the case. She was also frequently told that she doesn't look entirely Chinese and therefore she must only be half Chinese, or "mixed". These conflicting messages left Sarah feeling confused and a bit concerned that making efforts to connect to Chinese culture may actually be misplaced, as she does not know for certain the ethnicity of her biological parents.

Having grown up with such supportive parents who valued and modelled open communication in the family, Sarah felt comfortable opening up to her parents about this sense of a missing cultural component of her identity. Her mothers were immediately supportive of her desire to reconnect with this part of herself and expressed their remorse for not having made Chinese culture more of an active component of her life. Sarah was surprised at her mothers' apologies, as she truly believed that they had done nothing wrong. When she had been adopted, adoption agencies were not focusing on the cultural impact of cross-cultural adoptions, and it was not yet understood that an adopted child's heritage culture is important to include in their daily home life. It made her sad to think that her mothers blamed themselves for her sense of a missing cultural connection, and she reassured them that this was not the case. Together as a family they began to reconnect Sarah with her culture, and she loved that her entire family was now learning alongside her with equal excitement.

"It's a common joke in a lot of ethnic communities, and I like to joke with my parents that white people don't know spice. If you're going to eat with me, you're going to eat seeds and spices you've never seen before!"

Raised by Caucasian mothers, Sarah had not had much exposure to Chinese people or Chinese culture as a child, with the exception of a Chinese family friend she fondly referred to as Uncle Steve. Near the end of her high school career, she switched to a new school that was locally known as the "Asian high school", made up of a variety of students from different Asian cultural backgrounds. She loved her experience at this school, as she was able to see herself in many of her new friends, who themselves had varying levels of connection to their heritage cultures. It was through these relationships that she started to develop some initial connections with her cultural roots, attending festivals with her friends, engaging in new cultural celebrations, and trying new traditional foods. Sarah even pursued additional schooling after high school and used this opportunity to learn even more about her cultural background, taking classes in Mandarin and a course on the history of imperial China.

An unexpected silver lining arrived in Sarah's life with the arrival of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Like many families, Sarah found herself cooped up at home with her parents and sister with few things to do. As her family had instilled in her a love for food, Sarah decided to devote some of her time at home to learning how to cook different meals, and quickly found herself drawn to a variety of Asian foods. Not only did she learn about different ingredients and spices than she had grown up eating, but she also began to learn about the history of the food and why it had become such a staple in certain cultures.

As Sarah delved into cooking these new meals, she could feel her family coming together over the dinner table and reconnecting with each other, which was an incredible experience to have during the height of social distancing and disconnection brought on by the pandemic. She was excited to share the history of these new foods with her family, and her family was excited to learn about it as they shared the meal together. Sarah learned to cook a variety of more traditional Asian foods from an array of different cultures, including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indonesian, and Malaysian cultures, and she continued to be inspired to learn more recipes throughout her life. Not only did she love the experience of cooking, but she also loved the sense of reconnection with her cultural roots and the fact that her entire family was joining her on this journey.

"I started to think about our family as a unit, and I was like, you know, people aren't actually used to that. It was like one night it just popped into my head after we'd gone for dinner and I was like, you know, I bet that people with a mom and a dad don't get this."

As an adult, Sarah realized that some of her other experiences growing up were also a bit unusual compared to her friends who had heterosexual parents. Always the inquisitive mind, she surveyed her friends about some of their experiences and compared these with her own. During her reflections she realized that throughout her life there have been several instances where her family was assumed to not be a family at all.

One particularly poignant example that stuck out in her mind were several instances of her and her sister as children being taken to a restaurant with their mothers. After enjoying their meals together the server would ask this family of two parents and two children, without fail, "Do you want the bill separate?" While she didn't think too much of this as a child, Sarah's recent survey of her friends confirmed her suspicion that those with heterosexual parents were assumed to be a family and given the bill together without question. Upon further conversation with her friends, she learned that when the bill was delivered to her friend's families it was often placed in front of the father figure, whereas in her own family, once it was clarified that the bill was indeed together, the bill would be placed in the canter of the table.

Curiosity peaked, Sarah speculated that these assumptions are likely happening on a subconscious level without any malicious intent. She understood that the physical differences in skin tone between herself and her sister as compared with her mothers was likely a factor, and that as adults it makes sense that people would assume they're friends as opposed to relatives. Yet despite these understandings, it still felt strange and didn't sit well with her that the world outside of her own home and upbringing assumes that she and her mothers are not a family.

In her own experience, her mothers had fought for their right to become a family with her and had devoted themselves entirely to their family. Her mothers had pretended to be simple friends and adopted her as a "single parent adoption" to ensure no discrimination would prevent their family from being whole. They worked incredibly hard to make sure their children had access to as many experiences as possible growing up, taking them on many family vacations and exploring new foods and cultures together. They diligently strove to provide their children with every possible opportunity growing up, and showered them with love, care, and compassion. In many ways it felt absurd that her family could ever be considered anything less than just that: a family.

"I don't want to discount anyone's experiences. There is equal ability and instinct in parents from both male and female sexes."

Reflecting on all the reactions she has had to her family throughout her life had Sarah contemplating the different reactions people had to men and women as parents. She had often heard single mothers applauded as strong, independent women, while the absent father figure was immediately labelled a "deadbeat dad" who the child was better off not knowing. Interestingly, when it came to her own family and having two mothers, people would often label her as missing an important and necessary father figure in her life. She felt as though the message was being delivered that two mothers raising a child together was somehow wrong because there was no male presence, but that a single mother raising a child alone was not wrong, despite the similar absence of a male presence. She had never once in her life felt as though she wanted or needed a father figure, and it was frustrating to her that she was assumed to be in need of something more and that having two mothers was somehow not enough.

And yet Sarah wanted to be very clear that she in no way discounts men as parents, and fully believes that all people regardless of their sex or gender can be incredible parents. She loved to reference the many examples in the animal kingdom of the sex of an offspring's parent not being an important factor in the roles they play, which is something that has become so emphasized with humans. She learned that both male and female pigeons make breastmilk for their young, that male seahorses carry their babies, and that male penguins take care of their eggs while the females go hunt. Sarah wanted to be clear in her belief that there is equal parenting ability between males and females, and that the best parents are not based on their sex or gender identity. She knew how hard her own parents had fought to adopt her, and how much harder they had to fight as a result of systemic discrimination. Sarah grew up feeling endlessly loved and supported, knowing that her parents fought harder than she could have ever imagined to create their family together.

"It doesn't matter what you look like or who you love, and it doesn't matter what your child looks like and who they love. That willingness to see the adoption process through to the end and face discrimination at the same time proves your commitment to loving that child openly and generously for the rest of their life."

DOLORES' STORY

Newborn: The First Few Days

Dolores was only two days old when her life changed forever. She was lifted out of the hospital basinet and hugged in the arms of a man she would come to call her father. He was accompanied by his friend, a woman Dolores would later call her half-mother. Her father took her home that evening into his cozy bungalow home that he and his partner had lovingly re-organized to prepare for her arrival. It had everything she could ever have wanted as a baby – a warm crib, soft clothes, colourful toys, and fuzzy stuffed animals. As her father kissed her goodnight that first evening, he told her how much he loved her, and said that he had a surprise to share with her – she had another father who was rushing home to meet her as soon as possible!

A few days later, Dolores was busy grabbing fistfuls of teddy bear fur and marveling at the feeling, when suddenly someone burst through the doors. It was her other father, who had rushed home from his international work meeting the second he heard that Dolores had been born. He tossed his briefcase on the table and knelt down beside the little Dolores, who was staring at him with wide, wondering eyes. He told her how excited he was to meet her and that he loved her very much, and then he lifted her into his arms for a great big hug. Her other father joined in the hug, and together both fathers promised to love and care for Dolores until the end of time.

Baby: The First Few Years

Dolores felt very loved as a baby. Not only did she have two loving fathers who made sure she had everything she could ever want, but she also had two special women in her life – her half-mother and her spiritual mother. She enjoyed spending time at her spiritual mother's home, which was always very well-kept and tidy, and she loved to watch her spiritual mother's dog run around the house with tiny socks on his little feet. Dolores also enjoyed the many sleepovers she had at her half-mother's house, which usually included watching her favorite tv show, Blues Clues, and having her half mother read her multiple bedtime stories.

For the first five years of her life, Dolores also had another woman in her life – the woman who gave birth to her. Dolores' fathers felt it was important for her to have a connection with the woman who gave birth to her, and made sure to arrange visits with her birth mother as often as they could. As she was so young, Dolores was not able to remember most of these visits, however one visit in particular stood out in her mind. As an energetic five-year-old, she had enjoyed munching on a sub sandwich for lunch with her fathers and her birthmother, and was excited to spend some time playing at the park afterwards. She remembers having a lot of fun that day, and this became a special memory for her, as this was the last time she saw her birth mother. Shortly after this visit, Dolores' birth mother passed away, and though this made her feel sad, she was still able to look back at their last visit together with a smile and warm feeling in her heart.

Toddler: The Next Few Years

As she got a little older, Dolores' fathers quickly learned just how much of a jokester she was. One time her fathers tried to teach her to do yoga, and while they were bent upside down, twisted into a yoga pose and encouraging her to try it, the energetic Dolores was somersaulting around the living room and playing with her toys. On another occasion, Dolores was watching a tv show and her father used the remote to turn off the television. She quickly jumped up, walked over to the tv, turned it back on, and promptly returned to her seat to continue watching her show. Surprised, and wondering if perhaps she hadn't understood that it was time to turn the tv off, her father turned it off again with the remote and softly said, "That's enough tv, Dolores". Without missing a beat, Dolores hopped to her feet, walked over to the tv and turned it on again, but this time instead of walking back to her seat she gave her father a mischievous grin. Her father couldn't help but laugh at his daughter's antics, and as soon as she had her father laughing, Dolores turned the tv off and skipped out of the living room.

Dolores also loved spending time with her friends, and quickly made life-long friendships. She befriended two sisters who lived a few houses away from her, as well as two brothers who lived close by, and she enjoyed playing outdoors and going to parks with them. Often while their parents were visiting, Dolores and her friends would learn the goofiest dances they could find to show to their parents, and would then burst into giggles at their parent's reactions. Other times, they would take the cushions off the couches, and then stack them up with each of the friends in between the cushions to make a Friend Sandwich that stretched towards the ceiling! No matter how many times they got together, there were always more games to be played when it came to Dolores and her friends.

Pre-Teen: Another Few Years

When Dolores was about ten years old, she and her fathers moved a few blocks away into a new house that felt a lot bigger than their old house. She really enjoyed this new house, as it was so big it had four bathrooms, was still close to her friends, and was right across the street from her school. She was also still enjoying spending time at her half-mother's house playing with her half-mother's cats and snakes, and she found it funny that one of her fathers was so scared of snakes that her half-mother would need to cover the snake enclosures whenever he came to visit. As hard as she tried to convince her fathers to get a pet snake for their own home, Dolores' fathers remained adamant that they did not want a snake in the home, but were willing to compromise and get a hamster instead. Dolores was very excited to have a pet in the home, and loved to feed and play with her little hamster.

One day, Dolores' fathers asked her if she would want to take a blood test to find out more about where she came from. They explained that she would send a little droplet of her blood away to a genetics testing lab, and then a few days later they would receive information on her genetics. This was not something Dolores had ever considered before, but after it was explained to her, she became a bit more curious. As her birth mother had passed away and she did not know who her birth father was, Dolores did not know much about where she came from and decided to do the genetics test. When her results came back, she thought it was cool to learn that she has African genes, but otherwise did not think too much about the results.

Dolores had always loved comic books and tv shows about superheroes and space, but as she grew older she started to learn even more about her favorite heroes and villains. She found the backstories of her favorite heroes fascinating, and quickly discovered that she has an excellent memory for fantasy stories and lore. Unfortunately, some of the kids at her school liked to tease her about this, and called her hurtful names like "nerd" and "freak", but despite this she felt supported by her friends and was able to find pride in these aspects of herself. She decided not to let words like "freak" and "nerd" hurt her, and instead decided to proudly call herself a "geek" and continue to learn about the stories and characters that she loved so much.

Teen: The Most Recent Years

Dolores was met with a bit of a challenge when she became a teenager, as there were no other women living in her house to provide her with guidance through puberty. Never missing an opportunity to joke with and slightly embarrass their daughter, Dolores' fathers gave her a bunch of books on puberty and insisted that pads and tampons were the same thing, which Dolores knew wasn't true. As much as her fathers liked to joke around, they also made sure she had many opportunities to ask questions about puberty with them, as well as with other females in her life, like her half-mom, spiritual mom, aunt, and cousin. While her fathers weren't able to understand the experiences Dolores was going through at this time, they made sure that she had all the support she needed to get through this part of her life.

Now that she was in junior high, Dolores started to hear remarks in school that did not fit with her own experience of the world. She would overhear classmates saying things like "You like someone who is the same gender as you? Ew!". Additionally, on a few occasions she was made fun of for being adopted, at one time having someone say to her "Your mom gave you up because she didn't love you". While these kinds of remarks were hurtful, Dolores felt confident in not letting them bother her. She was surrounded by friends and family members who loved and cared for her, and she knew in her heart that the reason she was given up for adoption was not because her birth mother did not love her. She knew that she was given up for adoption because her birth mother loved her but was just unable to take care of her. Comfortable in her knowledge of the truth, Dolores was able to brush these hurtful comments aside, and instead strengthened her own resolve to be a caring, kind, and non-homophobic person.

Dolores had many strengths that she used to get through difficult situations, several of which she learned from her fathers. Throughout her life her fathers had loved and cared for her, and they were always quick to swoop in and take care of her whenever she got hurt or needed support, like when she crashed her bike and needed to get seven stitches. They also taught her to use her humor as a strength, something she was clearly naturally talented at, as just a few moments after getting a painful scratch across her eye she started jokingly referring to herself as Luke Skywalker. Even though Dolores had been too young to remember it, her fathers were doing exactly what they had promised her all those years ago – loving and caring for her until the end of time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to extend my gratitude to Sarah, Dolores, and families for being willing to let me walk alongside them on their journey. I am truly honored that you chose to share these moments of your life with me. Thank you.