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Perceptions of Black Heterosexual Men in an Involuntarily Childless Relationship Considering Adoption

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2018

Abstract

Perceptions of Black Heterosexual Men in an Involuntarily Childless Relationship

Considering Adopting

by

Richard P. Campbell

MA, Montclair State University, 2011

BS, Washington Adventist University, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Research on involuntary childlessness and adoption among heterosexuals is primarily focused on women's needs and perceptions. Consequently, little is known about how men view childlessness and adoption, and less is known about Black men's perceptions. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore Black heterosexual men's experiences of considering adoption when involved in an involuntarily childless relationship. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory served as a foundation for this study. Data were derived from semi structured interviews with 7 participants and 3 adoption professionals. Transcribed and coded data were analyzed using MAXQDA 2018, a qualitative data analysis software. Initial codes were drawn deductively, by use of recurrent codes in published literature, and inductively, from an initial reading of the data. Themes were identified among codes, then placed within one of three broad categories: adoption perceptions, childlessness and adoption consideration experiences, and adoption consideration influences. The study results showed that couple difficulty in resolving adoption differences; gender nuances in the adoption decision-making journey; overwhelming social pressure to father children; limited social support; and silence, inaction, or procrastination surrounding adoption were common features of most male experiences. This study has implications for positive social change, as the findings can inform adoption recruiters' outreach program content and methodology. Family counselors will derive insight into multiple issues surrounding involuntarily childless Black couples to provide them with effective conflict resolution intervention.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my darling wife, Florence, and our two children, Melissa and Kevin. They have been my primary cheerleaders in this research project, even when, regrettably, I often shut them out to ensure I kept in step with my time markers. This achievement is as much theirs as it is mine, for these three loves of my life teach me about unconditional love and genuine family bond.

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against time, fatigue, restlessness, and procrastination. It *does* take a village…

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Adoptive parenting provides social stability and permanency to the lives of many children in the United States on an annual basis (Child Welfare Information Gateway [CWIG], 2016a). The success of adoption programs is primarily linked to the ability of recruiting personnel to engage prospective adoptive parents and provide guidance and support throughout the anxiety-inducing process (Eaves, 2013). Although high adoption favorability, which had declined significantly between 2007 and 2013, is now on the rise (Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption [DTFA], 2013, 2017), Blacks have lower adoption rates compared to other groups such as Whites and Hispanics. The high favorability rating for private infant adoption among Blacks equals that of Hispanics at 36%, with Whites at 45% (DTFA, 2017).

Although high foster care adoption favorability is outpacing other adoption types among all groups, high favorability among Blacks has only kept pace with its 2013 level of 44% (DTFA, 2013, 2017). Blacks comprise just 13% of the U.S. population (U. S. Census Bureau, 2016). However, Black children account for a disproportionate 23% of potential adoptees on foster care adoption waiting lists in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). The comparatively low level of high adoption favorability among that demographic could portend a stagnant pool of prospective Black adoptive parents and continued high levels of Black children on adoption waiting lists.

Scholars who have studied Black adoptive parenting have tended to include a disproportionately high number of female participants when compared to males (Alexander, Hollingsworth, Dore, & Hoopes, 2004; Riley-Behringer & Cage, 2014). For instance, 974 Black females and only 85 Black males participated in the 2007 National Survey of Fertility Barriers (Johnson & White, 2009). Park and Hill (2014) reviewed the study data and found that Black women with biomedical conception issues were two times more likely than their White counterparts to consider adopting. Data Sharing for Demographic Research [DSDR] (2017) listed 60 known published studies arising from the 2007 and 2010 National Survey of Fertility Barriers. I found only one of the published studies was focused exclusively on men (see Tichenor, McQuillan, Greil, Contreras, & Shreffler, 2011). However, in Tichenor et al.'s (2011) study on fathering importance, Black men were underrepresented, comprising only seven percent of the study population.

In this chapter, I will provide details on the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, study purpose, theoretical framework, assumptions, scope of the study, study significance, operational definitions, limitations, and delimitations.

Background of the Study

Although infertility is the most common basis for adoption (Park & Hill, 2014), infertility is not predictive of adoption (Herrera, 2013). Scholars who have studied adoption have revealed multiple issues that prospective adopters have experienced (Riley-Behringer & Cage, 2014; Weissinger, 2013). Lockerbie (2014) concluded that in

comparison to natural conception and ART, adoption is the least desired means to parenthood among childless heterosexual women. Favorability toward adoption is not a predictor of adoption pursuit (DTFA, 2013; Jennings, Mellish, Tasker, Lamb, & Golombok, 2014). Jennings et al. (2014) found that among male and female heterosexuals, adoption is the least preferred means of becoming a parent, when compared with traditional conception and ART, but same-sex couples reported a preference for adoption as compared to other means of procuring a child.

Weissinger (2013) noted that dissatisfaction with different aspects of adoption agency services was a deterrent to adoption, but also reported recurring individual patterns of financial difficulty, time management issues, sudden change in circumstances, and failing housing requirements. Scott, Bae-Lee, Harrell, and Smith-West (2013) found that the three deterrents to would-be adopters were financial issues, disagreements with biological parents, and personal issues. The potential obstacles to adoption can range broadly and can involve multiple facets of barriers.

Family formation studies have been largely female-focused, and clinicians may assume that the male partner has a secondary role in decision-making, even in the case of male infertility, as the woman's body is the focus of attention (Culley, Hudson, & Lohan, 2013; Park & Hill, 2014). South, Foli, and Lim (2012) emphasized relationship satisfaction in adoptive mothers, and Honig (2014) examined the early bonding issues between mother and adoptive child. The focus on female adoptive parent issues or perspective of the male as the secondary or support person in couples' reproductive and

adoption experiences is discussed in Herrera's (2013) study on male perceptions of their role in infertility treatment and adoption.

Gillum (2011) stated that the history of formalized adoption in the Black community is recent and that the traditional form of adoption for this population is the informal adoption of a kin, with his or her biological identity intact. During slavery, separation of child from parent was a frequent occurrence, and adults informally adopted young children and nurtured them (Gillum, 2011). This unique feature in Black family tradition raises diversity awareness issues for adoption professionals and policymakers. Belanger, Cheung, and Cordova (2012) demonstrated that multicultural sensitivity is an important component in services offered to Black families, particularly as mistrust is a barrier that affects how Blacks view formal social structures and their agents (see Moore et al., 2013).

The literature on adoption is vast. However, studies on male perceptions of adoption, preadoption experiences, and on Black adoption contexts, are sparse. In addition, many of the relevant studies on Black adoption attitudes and experiences are outdated and in need of replication (Gillum, 2011). Researchers have examined the experiences of the dominant population in North America, and participants for most of the studies cited are largely female, thus suggesting the need for adoption studies with the study population of Black heterosexual males in involuntary childless relationships.

Statement of the Problem

In 2012, adoptions totaled 119,514 compared to 2008 when 139,647 children were adopted (CWIG, 2016a). This disparity represented a 14% decrease. Adoptions per

100,000 adults decreased from 65 in 2001, and 60 in 2008, to 49 in 2012 (CWIG, 2016a). This development could have implications for the Black community. Black children are disproportionately represented on foster care adoption waiting lists (23%) when Black comprise just 13% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). Moreover, Blacks trail other groups in adoption favorability (DTFA, 2017). However, there are limited recent studies on the adoption perceptions of Blacks, particularly Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship in which the parties are considering adopting. Involuntarily childless persons constitute an important demographic for adoption studies, as most heterosexuals who adopt do so due to infertility issues (Jennings et al., 2014; Park & Hill, 2014).

Involuntary childlessness results mainly from infertility of at least one sexual partner (Cserepes, Kollar, Sapy, Wischmann, & Bugan, 2013). A straight man in a relationship may have personal and social expectations of biological fatherhood (Baxter, Norwood, Asbury, & Scharp, 2014), which if unfulfilled, can lead to emotional distress (Culley et al., 2013), consideration of some form of reproductive therapy (Petersen, Blenstrup, Peterson, Knudsen, & Schmidt, 2015), or adoption considerations that can engender internalized adoption stigma (Goldberg, Kinkler, & Hines, 2011) and feelings of reduced manhood (Dimka & Dein, 2013). Declared gay partners, although subjected to social and structural biases (Goldberg, Moyer, Kinkler, & Richardson, 2012; Vinjamuri, 2015; Whatley, Cave, & Breneiser, 2016) are not socially held to the same biological expectations as the heterosexual male (Goldberg et al., 2011). Adoption considerations

can be a last resort measure with conflictual and traumatic experiences for the heterosexual male (Petersen et al., 2015).

The focus on the Black heterosexual male perception is important because of the prevailing assumption that women are the lead partners in reproduction and adoptive parenting decision-making (Chen, 2016; Honig, 2014; Lockerbie, 2014; Park & Hill, 2014). However, many Black men in a heterosexual relationship assume the role of domineering partner (Anderson, Stockman, Sabri, Campbell, & Campbell, 2015; Cross-Barnet & McDonald, 2015). A study on Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship considering adopting can provide insights into how such men's perceptions and considerations contribute to the adoption decision-making process in the dyadic heterosexual relationship.

Research Questions

RQ 1: What are the perceptions of Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship considering adoption?

RQ 2: What are the experiences of Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship in which adopting is under consideration?

RQ 3: What are the influences on Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship in deciding whether to adopt?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to discover the perceptions of, and influences on, Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship in which adoption was under consideration. The couple might or might not have formally started the process by

contacting an adoption agency, facilitator, or attorney. In most adoption research, heterosexual female representation disproportionately exceeds that of the heterosexual male. Also, most research on adoption involves participants who have already completed the adoption process as parents (Dance & Farmer, 2014; Foli, South, Lim, & Hebdon, 2012; Stover et al., 2015). Fewer scholars have focused on participants in a preadoption context (Pace, Santona, Zavattini, & Di Folco, 2015; Weissinger, 2013).

I employed a multiple case study comprising seven involuntarily childless Black heterosexual men (Group A) who were each in a relationship in which adoption was under consideration. Group A was the primary research group. A semi structured interview was administered to each participant, and data saturation was the basis for determining the final sample size. Participants had to be in a relationship with their partners for at least 24 months. Three adoption professionals (Group B) were also interviewed on their assessment of adoption perceptions and influences surrounding the researched demographic. Finally, a literature review of verbatim or summarized comments on adoption perceptions and influences related to the primary research demographic constituted the final data source. All interview data were coded using MAXQDA 2018, a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software, and research documents were manually coded.

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecology of human development, also called ecological systems theory (see Riley-Behringer & Cage, 2014), was used as a theoretical framework for examining the perceptions of, and influences on, straight Black men in a biologically

childless relationship in which adoption was being considered. Bronfenbrenner asserted

that the individual is informed and influenced by the larger context of environmental

forces that impact the human organism in tangible ways (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). There

are interconnected spheres or layers of influence around the developing person that

influence and shape his or her attitudes and choices (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Bronfenbrenner (1977) posited four layers of reciprocal interaction between the person

and the environment. The microsystem refers to the person's direct interaction in any

setting, and a convergence of two or more microsystems forms a mesosystem

(Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The exosystem is a physical or intangible setting that affects or

influences the developing person in any number of ways; however, the person is not

bodily present in the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The macrosystem embodies

societal patterns, policies, laws, and culture that provide blueprints for the exosystem

(Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The exosystem is comprised of social systems and institutions

(e.g., law enforcement, manufacturing industry, and postal services). Bronfenbrenner and

Evans (2000) suggested that when a person is unable to effect change in the environment

or feels he or she is unable to successfully navigate the environment, the person becomes

susceptible to dysfunction. The opposite and preferred outcome is called competence

(Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). This theory has been used in studies on people and

phenomena within their environmental context (Goldberg et al., 2012; Klevan, 2012;

Riley-Behringer & Cage, 2014).

I used the ecology of human development to provide insight into a theoretical

explanation for the adoption perceptions of, and influences on, Black heterosexual men in

an involuntarily childless relationship contemplating adoption. Straight men in such

relationships are subjected to queries about their manhood from the network of people in

their lives (Bhaskar, Hoksbergen, van Baar, Tipandjan, & Laak, 2014), representing

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) microsystem and mesosystem influences. Moreover, due to the

social expectation of biological offspring, a person may expedite a pregnancy, or consider

an adoption as a final recourse in meeting social expectations and avoiding the stigma of

childlessness (Herrera, 2013). The drive to socially normalize an individual's relationship

and manhood through fathering a child exemplifies the influence of the larger culture, or

macrosystem. However, some men may view an effort to adopt as a public revelation of

defeated manhood and resist this option to attain fatherhood (Petersen et al., 2015). That

response to social pressure is what Goldberg et al. (2011) described as internalized

adoption stigma, reflecting what Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) regarded as a

dysfunctional reaction to environmental tension.

An ecological view of adoption will be discussed further in the following Chapter

2, and I will include a literature review of recent application of ecological systems as a

guiding theory in adoption studies.

Assumptions

I assumed that I would be engaging with nervous participants whom I would need

to set at ease. In so doing, I needed to appear relaxed, which made it easier for them to be

calm and undistracted. Mohorko (2014) found that the interviewer's personality and

interviewing style influenced interviewees' responses. I was also aware that the topic for

discussion was private and potentially fraught with painful emotions for each participant

so that participants might not wish to share their experiences with me. I assumed that the participants' consent to the interview suggested a willingness to share their experiences and perceptions, even when I sensed a hesitancy during the session. Men are not known to self-disclose as readily as women (Zhang, Dang, & Chen, 2013), so I anticipated that I would need to exercise patience, tact, and understanding. Moreover, I needed to reassure the participants about my commitment to confidentiality and privacy.

Adoption favorability or positive consideration toward adopting is not synonymous with a commitment to adopting (Jennings et al., 2014). I did not conclude that participants had decided on proceeding with an adoption. I also assumed that each participant held an independent position on adopting that might or might not coincide with his partner's view. Moreover, I did not assume that the participant had previously shared his adoption views and perceptions with his partner. I also resisted the assumption that participants were experiencing emotional setbacks and other liabilities owing to the condition of involuntary childlessness. At the outset, I assumed each participant's wholeness and ability to articulate his views.

Nature and Scope of the Study

In case study inquiry, a scholar explores the complexity of the case with a variety of data sources that can provide rich material (Hamel, Dufour, & Fortin, 1993). In this qualitative research, I employed a multiple case study comprised of seven Black heterosexual men who were in an involuntarily childless relationship considering adoption (Group A). Data saturation was the determinant of the sample size. I also interviewed three adoption professionals (Group B) concerning patterns of adoption

perceptions and influences among the study population that the professionals might have noted.

The third data source was a targeted literature review of verbatim and summarized participant comments on adoption perceptions and influences found in current scholarly research, where either Blacks, heterosexual men, or involuntarily childless men were the study participants.

I used face-to-face contact with each primary participant in an individual interview setting. I had the opportunity to obtain data from each participant's verbal responses to my questions, while also visually gauging the impact of the interview. Because my interviews were limited to the male participant, the scope of this study did not include data from the female partner. Moreover, I employed what Stake (1994) described as an instrumental approach in which each case was a means to derive greater understanding of adoption considerations, including perceptions of, and influences on, Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship.

I coded all interview data using MAXQDA 2018 QDA software, and manually coded literary sources. Using a system of pattern matching, I identified and compared themes and patterns across interviews and current peer-reviewed sources.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study can lead to positive social change in a variety of ways. Adoption counselors and child welfare personnel may derive insight into the perceptions of, and influences on, straight Black men in an involuntarily childless relationship, and the results of this study can inform what and how to communicate with this population in

the adoption environment. Black men often experienced distrust in dealing with authority figures and formal social structures (Brooms & Perry, 2016; Murray, 2015; Wingfield & Wingfield, 2014). This study provided insight into ways in which the study population's adoption considerations were mediated by their perceptions about formal adoption structures and their agents.

Insight into this population's perceptions and considerations can also provide diversity awareness to adoption and family counselors that can help to reduce bias (Sweeney, 2013). Belanger et al. (2012) demonstrated that multicultural sensitivity was an effective component in adoption services offered to Black families. This study could also help to alleviate gender bias among those who consider childlessness and adoption as chiefly female issues. There are more women in the field of adoption counseling and child welfare services than men (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2015). Professionals should gain awareness about male adoption perceptions.

I also hoped to give a voice to male perceptions and emotions that could allow more men to self-disclose on matters of involuntary childlessness and adoption. Bhaskar et al. (2014) stated that isolation, anxiety, and low self-worth are some of the feelings linked to involuntarily childless men. Consequently, the outcomes of this study provided data about how men cope emotionally, which could provide counselors with insight in shaping an informed and therapeutic intervention regimen.

This study holds social change implications. Adoption agencies can use the knowledge gained from this study to invest in outreach strategies that speak directly to Black men. These agencies can then help prospective male adoptive parents through the

adoption process, while confronting negative perceptions men may hold. With the disproportionate number of Black children on foster care adoption waiting lists, this study can provide heightened awareness to policymakers on adoption barriers for Black heterosexual men and lead to social policy revisions that could improve the likelihood of increased adoptions and a resulting reduction in adoption waiting lists.

Operational Definitions

Adoption: A legal transaction in which an adult is awarded permanent parental custody of a nonbiological child (Brumble & Kampfe, 2011)

Adoption consideration: A stage during which an adult is contemplating the merits or demerits of pursuing an adoption (Slauson-Blevins & Park, 2016).

Adoption favorability: A subjective rating (not at all favorable, somewhat favorable, favorable, very favorable, extremely favorable) of how positive a person is about becoming an adoptive parent (DTFA, 2013).

Adoption stigma: Adoption viewed as a negative, undesirable, or inferior choice and/or as an indication that the parties (adoptive parent and/ or adoptive child) are not normal (Park & Hill, 2014).

African American: An American of Black African descent (Merriam-Webster, 2017).

Afro-Caribbean: A Black person of Caribbean heritage; Also, *Caribbean Black*. (Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014).

Artificial insemination: Fertility treatment in which sperm is artificially introduced into the uterus to achieve a pregnancy (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2017).

Assisted reproductive technology [ART]: All fertility treatments in which "both eggs and embryos are handled" (CDC, 2017, para. 1).

Female factor infertility: A case in which the inability to conceive is attributed to the female in the relationship (Vizheh, Pakgohar, Rouhi, & Veisy, 2015).

In a relationship: An amorous partnership that may involve either shared or separate residence.

In vitro fertilization [IVF]: This is the most prominent form of ART, in which eggs are removed from the uterus, fertilized, then returned in the form of embryos (CDC, 2018, para. 1).

Infertility: Failure at childbearing after 12 continuous months of attempts to conceive (Louis et al., 2013).

Informal adoption: A casual arrangement in which another person raises a child in the absence of the biological parent. Also, *informal kinship care* (Gillum, 2011).

Involuntarily childless: Describes a person's or couple's failure at childbearing after repeated efforts (Bhaskar et al., 2014). Also, *biological childlessness* or *unwanted childlessness*.

Kinship care: An arrangement in which *"*relatives care for children whose own parents are unable to care for them" (CWIG, 2016b). This arrangement may be formal or informal (CWIG, 2016b; Washington, Gleeson, & Rulison, 2013).

Male factor infertility: A case in which the inability to conceive is attributed to the male in the relationship (Vizheh et al., 2015)

Limitations

Qualitative research bears some inherent limitations. The researcher's subjectivity is a potential influence on research outcomes (Hamel et al., 1993; Hewitt, 2007). Additionally, the data retrieved are subjective material and cannot be corroborated with any objective measure (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). Atieno (2009) indicated that most qualitative research is very dependent on words as a vehicle for data derivation. However, participants understand and respond to a question based on their grade level functioning, knowledge base, grasp of the spoken language, and unique experiences. There is also no guarantee that the interviewee will have appropriate answers to questions asked.

Ashton (2014) suggested that semi structured interviews on sensitive topics may be inappropriate for participants, particularly if they have previously experienced some measure of related emotional distress. There is also no valid and reliable measure to query a participant's veracity concerning his or her feelings and other internal experiences. Moreover, qualitative researchers do not seek to infer findings to a larger population because it is not a representational enterprise (Mantzoukas, 2004). In a case study, the sample is limited and cannot be regarded as having inferential significance (Lloyd-Jones, 2003).

Because I found little research on adoption for the study demographic, most of the studies cited in the literature review involved participants who were either female, White,

or both. Supporting research was limited. Findings of such studies with different

demographic samples could not be ascribed to my study population. Also, some of the

relevant studies I cited with male participants were conducted outside of the United

States (Bhaskar et al., 2014; Herrera, 2013). In addition, most of the adoption research I

found on Blacks was outdated (Gillum, 2011; Hollingsworth, 1998; Hollingsworth, 2000;

Jackson-White, Dozier, Oliver, & Gardner, 1997; Smith-McKeever, 2006; Smith-

McKeever & McRoy, 2005).

Delimitations

My inclusion criteria specified Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily

childless relationship in which one or both partners had been considering adopting. I

sought participants who had a current experience of adoption consideration to discover

and explore their existing feelings, perceptions, influences, and stereotypes concerning

adoption. It becomes easier for participants to recall, explore, and articulate their

emotions and perceptions if their experience is not far removed in time. Participants must

have attempted to conceive children biologically with their current partner for at least 24

months, must not have a mental health diagnosis, and could communicate and read

English well enough to participate without an interpreter. Finally, prospects for whom I

had served as church pastor or professional counselor within the last 3 years were not

included in the study.

Summary

Adoption is a method for managing permanent placement needs for the hundreds

of thousands of children in the United States who lack stability in their lives. However,

adoption favorability, though improved overall, is still lower than in 2007 (see DFTA, 2007, 2017), and the rate of adoptive parents is still in decline (CWIG, 2016a). In heterosexual contexts, adoptive parenting has been viewed mainly from a female or couple perspective, and there are few studies on male adoption perceptions and experiences. Furthermore, there are few adoption studies dedicated to the Black population, compared to the wealth of documented research reflecting adoption-related studies of White participants. Adoption studies on Black heterosexual males in involuntarily childless relationships could result in enhanced services by adoption workers and counselors.

In Chapter 2, I will provide a review of the relevant literature on adoptive parenting.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Adoptive parenting plays a role in bringing stability to the lives of thousands of children in the United States who are in the child welfare system and others whose placements are managed privately by legal personnel or adoption agencies. However, the Children's Bureau showed that in 2012, adoptions totaled 119,514 compared to 2008 when 139,647 children were adopted (as cited in CWIG, 2016a). The lower number in 2012 represented a 14% decrease (CWIG, 2016a). The rate of adoptions per 100,000 adults progressively decreased from 65 in 2001, and 60 in 2008, to 49 in 2012 (CWIG, 2016a).

Although high adoption favorability has increased among the general population (DFTA, 2017), favorability to adoption guarantees neither pursuit nor finalization of an adoption (Eaves, 2013; Petersen et al., 2015), even after completion of the required home study (Riley-Behringer & Cage, 2014). Adoption consideration can involve many issues and real and perceived barriers. There are many contributing social factors to adoption barriers, including internalized stigma, family preferences, structural issues, unfavorable policies and practices, personnel and stereotype issues in relation to multicultural sensitivity concerns, economic difficulties, and emotional and psychological distress (Goldberg et al., 2011; Weissinger, 2013).

Studies on Black adoption are sparse (Eaves, 2013) and largely outdated (Gillum, 2011). Scholars have not focused on Black male adoptive parenting issues or Black heterosexual men who are in an involuntarily childless relationship. In the literature

review in this chapter, I address the following topics: (a) social and emotional issues in involuntary childlessness, (b) adoption as an option for involuntarily childless relationships, (c) gender roles and stereotypes in reproduction and adoption, (d) barriers to adoption, (e) preadoption studies, (f) history of adoption and adoptive parenting among Blacks, (g) adoption perceptions and practices among Blacks, and (h) an ecological systems view.

Research Strategy

I accessed most of my literary databases through the Walden online library, employing several multidisciplinary databases including Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Central, Science Direct, Sage Journals, and Psychinfo. I used several variations on search terms including *Black and adoption*, *African American and adoption*, *infertility and adoption*, *involuntary childlessness and adoption*, *adoptive parent*, *adoptive father*, *adoptive father and heterosexual*. In narrowing my search terms, I added *Black or African American*. My limiters included narrowing the publication date from 2012-2017, peer-reviewed literature, and journal sources. However, I often discarded the year limitation when material appeared to be scarce, as it was for *history and Black adoption*, and *heterosexual Black and adoptive parent*. In several instances, I used nonacademic literature in the form of authoritative governmental or institutional sources, particularly for statistical or historical data.

Review of the Literature

Upon discovering that they have fertility or other conception issues, involuntarily childless persons must determine their course of action, which may include continued

copulation in hope of a miracle, some form of ART or artificial insemination, pursuing an

adoption, or resigning themselves to fate. In the following literature review, I provide

insight into adoptive parenting issues and perceptions as context for my inquiry into the

adoption considerations of my study population.

Social and Emotional Issues in Involuntary Childlessness

Involuntary childlessness describes a person's or couple's failure at childbearing

after repeated efforts (Bhaskar et al., 2014). Infertility, defined as the inability to

conceive after attempting for 12 continuous months (Louis et al., 2013), is the primary

cause of involuntary childlessness (Cserepes et al., 2013), and it afflicts approximately

12% of couples (Louis et al., 2013).

Involuntary childlessness takes a social and emotional toll on infertile couples

(Kissi et al., 2013; Petersen et al., 2015; Singh, 2016; Yazdani, 2016). Vizheh et al.

(2015) found that both male factor infertility and female factor infertility had an impact

on marital relationships. In female factor infertility, both partners reported less marital

satisfaction than their counterparts with other fertility issues (Vizheh et al., 2015).

Husbands and wives dealing with male factor issues reported less sexual satisfaction than

their counterparts with other issues (Vizheh et al., 2015). Vizheh et al. concluded that

although involuntarily childless women experienced less overall satisfaction than their

male partners, men with female factor infertility reported lower relationship satisfaction

than men with other forms of infertility, and men with male factor infertility reported

lower sexual satisfaction than their counterparts with other infertility barriers.

Most researchers report greater distress for females than males in infertile relationships (Cserepes et al., 2013; Kissi et al., 2013; Ying, Wu, & Loke, 2015). Cserepes et al. (2013) reported greater infertility-related stress and depression for women than men. Corley-Newman (2016) found that stress levels in women receiving infertility treatment were comparable to levels experienced by those with life threatening diseases. Ying et al. (2015) found higher stress, lower self-esteem, and greater perceived infertility stigma in women than men.

On social support, women reported positive emotional benefits from support of family, friends, and partner, whereas men identified medical provider and partner support as helpful (Ying et al., 2015). Men placed less value on the social support of friends and other family members (Ying et al., 2015). Whereas men reported healthier levels of coping than women, men's levels of stress, prolonged anxiety, and relationship issues were significant enough to warrant further attention, study, and intervention (Ying et al., 2015). Women are generally more apt to self-disclose than men, and they are more open in communicating feelings (Zhang, Dang, & Chen, 2013). Men are traditionally socialized to deal with issues in preference to talking about them (Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015). Consequently, when scholars make gender comparisons about social and emotional coping with childlessness, men generally seem to cope better than women (see Kissi et al., 2013). However, men have unique coping challenges that can necessitate counseling intervention (Nahon & Lander, 2014).

I found scant research focused on the effects of involuntary childlessness on men. Dooley, Dineen, Sarma, and Nolan (2014) found that participants who placed a high

priority on their masculinity, who had mental health issues, who reported relationship satisfaction difficulty, or who had low self-esteem were most likely to have emotional distress. Dooley et al. stated that study participants engaged in clinic intervention reported better emotional wellbeing than an online group. Dooley et al. suggested that the findings may reflect the emotional benefits of fertility clinic support, or alternatively, that the online group was more willing to self-disclose, given their greater perception of anonymity and privacy.

Hanna and Gough (2015) found scant qualitative studies on male infertility. Hanna and Gough cited a pattern of men equating male infertility with the failure of their manhood. Infertile men talked about the need for strength to face the social and personal challenges arising from their fertility issue (Hanna & Gough, 2015). Hanna and Gough also cited the need for further male infertility research with infertile men as participants, allowing for more male disclosure of feelings.

Culley et al. (2013) posited that men experience as much infertility distress as women, and that the psychological and social costs to the male are significant. Culley et al. further found that most of the studies on male distress in infertility is quantitative, thus limited in their ability to provide data about male experiences, and that most studies are on couples in which the men are generally secondary partners.

Adoption as an Option for Involuntary Childless Relationships

Adoption is "a legal procedure that provides a permanent home and family for a child whose biological parents are unable, unwilling, or legally prohibited from keeping

the child" (Brumble & Kampfe, 2011, p. 157). Although most heterosexuals who adopt

have infertility issues (Park & Hill, 2014), infertility is not predictive of adoption (see

Herrera, 2013; Park & Hill, 2014). There are many issues that may affect prospective

adopters (Riley-Behringer & Cage, 2014; Weissinger, 2013).

Involuntarily childless couples have a greater propensity to elect ART than

adoption (Jennings et al., 2014; Lockerbie, 2014). Petersen et al. (2015) found that men

and women expressed preference for continuing medical intervention after 1 year of

failed infertility treatment (m= 72.5%; f= 71.9%) than opting for adoption (m=19.2%; f=

20.2%). Adoption is regarded as a third option, or last recourse, particularly in

technologically advanced settings (Park & Hill, 2014), and not second best as Baxter et

al. (2014) suggested. Reproductive parenthood is the preferred standard, and heterosexual

couples often resort to adoption as a means of terminating the pain of failure after several

attempts at natural conception and some form of reproductive therapy (Jennings et al.,

2014).

According to the 2007 National Survey of Fertility Barriers, Black women with

biomedical conception issues were two times more likely than their White counterparts to

consider adopting (as cited in Park & Hill, 2014). Black women are less likely to have

enrolled in health insurance than their White counterparts (Barnett & Vornovitsky, 2016),

signifying greater fertility treatment affordability issues. Black women are also less likely

to experience successful IVF treatment (Hill et al., 2017), a form of ART. Although

Black male heterosexual partners were represented in the survey, they were viewed as

secondary partners, meaning that the study did not prioritize their adoption considerations.

Gender Roles and Stereotypes in Reproduction and Adoption

According to the 2007 National Survey of Fertility Barriers, reproduction and adoption issues are generally female-oriented, and the male partner is assigned a secondary role in the process. South et al. (2012) emphasized relationship satisfaction in adoptive mothers, and Honig (2014) examined the early bonding issues between mother and adoptive child, with the underlying assumption that the adoptive mother is the primary caregiver. Gauthier, Genesee, Dubois, and Kasparian (2013) found that adoptive mothers were as effective as biological mothers in nurturing language development in their children. Pérez-Hernández, Hernández-González, Hidalgo-Aguirre, Amezcua-Gutiérrez, and Guevara (2017) found that adoptive mothers' cerebral responses to their babies' cries were more significant than those of biological mothers in their study, confirming the ability of adoptive mothers to exercise caring responses to their child's needs.

Scholars have focused on the roles and influences of adoptive mothers in relation to adopted children, reinforcing the notion that the role of the father in the adoptee's life is secondary to that of the mother. Culley et al. (2013) contended that not only is the male minimized or excluded, and his sentiments not regarded in the adoption and reproduction literature, but his contribution to, and influence on, his partner's reproductive choices and reproductive wellbeing have not been studied. Herrera (2013) described the paucity of

studies in male adoption participation and asserted that the focus is on birth and adoptive mothers and adoptive couples, with little investment in the experiences of men.

Hinton and Miller (2013) drew data from two separate studies, one a narrative study of 11 White males who had experienced an involuntarily childless relationship, and the other a qualitative longitudinal first-time fatherhood study of 17 White males. Many of the accounts from the first group of men showed that even in male-factor infertility, the object of focus, culturally and medically, is the woman's body, and the problem is practically regarded as a female issue (Hinton & Miller, 2013). Some men reported feeling marginalized and as mere spectators (Hinton & Miller, 2013). Some first-time fathers from the fatherhood study reported experiencing a sense of helplessness, particularly during their partner's times of pain and discomfort, and an overall feeling that their masculinity disqualified them from a primary role in the reproduction process (Hinton & Miller, 2013). Park and Hill (2014) suggested that the woman's body is the focus of a couple's fertility issues.

Herrera (2013) noted that childless Chilean men found it easier to establish their importance in an adoptive experience. Herrera claimed that some participants experienced fulfillment of their idealized manhood in presenting themselves as the lead partner in the adoption process. However, Gibbons, Rufener, and Wilson (2006) found that women were more favorable to adoption then men. Gibbons et al. ascribed the disparity to stereotypes among many men that devalued adoption as a basis of family extension and further regarded it as an affront to their manhood. McCallum (2012) found that although adoptive fathers reported personal relief from the distress of childlessness,

they also reported experiencing adoption stigma. This was both internalized stigma from their own feelings that adoption was not the ideal and perceived social stigma from their diverse interactions with people who found ways to remind them that they were not *real* parents (McCallum, 2012).

Kissi et al. (2013) found that women also experienced distresses due to infertility, and Bhaskar et al. (2014) asserted that both men and women experience feelings of defectiveness and low self-esteem in an involuntarily childless relationship. Dimka and Dein (2013) opined that a woman bears the heavier burden of social stigma because her body provides evidence of fruitfulness or the lack thereof. She is stereotyped and blamed for the couple's childlessness and regarded by her in-laws as a reproach to her husband and a failed investment (Dimka & Dein, 2013). The pain of childlessness and the stigma of adoption are not gender restricted (Culley et al., 2013; Vizheh et al., 2015).

Barriers to Adoption

Adoption stigma, defined as a perception of adoption as negative, undesirable, or inferior (Park & Hill, 2014), is a barrier to adoption (Jacobson, 2014; Lockerbie, 2014). Goldberg et al. (2011) found that heterosexuals who adopted within their race were more likely to report higher levels of internalized adoption stigma than all other categories, including all gay/lesbian categories, and were most likely to report high levels of depression. Internalized stigma is indicative of a stereotype that has been drawn from external influences; perceived stigma is suggestive of a negative attitude to which someone personally and consciously adheres (Goldberg et al., 2011). Goldberg et al. ascribed heterosexuals' elevated adoption stigma to their failed attempts to conceive and

their regard for adoption as an admission of failure. In contrast, gay, lesbian, and transgender couples may generally prioritize adoption (Goldberg, 2011). In-race adopters' heightened adoption stigma is further explained by their sensitivity to the negative stereotype associated with families in which parents and children do not match physically (Goldberg et al., 2011).

Baxter et al. (2014) found that adoptive parents reframed the stigma attached to adoption by positing it as a viable alternative to conception; a higher call of destiny; a normal, nondramatic process; and as a family bonding experience. Park and Hill (2014) asserted the need for reduction in adoption stigma as a requirement for enlarging the adoptive parent pool and minimizing the number of children on adoption waiting lists. Every child who remains in foster care throughout their childhood and youth represents an argument in favor of adoption.

Although adoption is not the most popular form of family addition, multiple other factors may deter prospective adopters (Riley-Behringer & Cage, 2014; Weissinger, 2013). Jacobson (2014) found that 71% of study participants reported adoption in a negative light, particularly the dangers, risks, and frustrations that prospective parents faced. These issues included structural and procedural problems, unhealthy adoptees, and exposure to fraudulent adoption schemes (Jacobson, 2014). Riley-Behringer and Cage (2014) reported multiple systemic barriers for would-be adopters. Several participants reported unsupportiveness of case worker and poor interagency communication between the Department of Child and Family departments and lamented ineffective advice from caseworkers (Riley-Behringer &Cage, 2014). Those who aborted the process reported the

following barriers more than the completed group: financial hardship, family

responsibility, and unsupportiveness of child's case worker (Riley-Behringer & Cage,

2014).

Weissinger (2013) also noted dissatisfaction with different aspects of adoption

agency services as a deterrent to adoption, but also reported recurring individual patterns

of financial difficulty, time management issues, sudden change in circumstances, and

failing housing requirements. Scott et al. (2013) found that the three primary deterrents to

would-be adopters were financial issues, disagreements with biological parents, and

personal issues.

Eaves (2013) found multiple barriers to adoption by prospective Black adoptive

parents, including stereotypes, family structure issues, bureaucratic hurdles, inadequate

financial resources, and mistrust of the welfare agency. The primary stereotypes were of

foster children as unruly, the child welfare system as dysfunctional, and those who

desired to adopt as imbalanced risk takers or as having selfish motivations (Eaves, 2013).

Many Black adults are single and, therefore, are at a disadvantage in raising an adopted

child. Moreover, some participants felt that many Black parents would not want to take in

another child if they already had children, for fear that the newcomer could negatively

influence their other children (Eaves, 2013). Bureaucratic hurdles was the term used to

describe the lengthy and detailed adoption process with red tape barriers (Eaves, 2013).

One participant assumed that because the adoption process is long and frustrating for

White people, it would be more so for her as a Black person (Eaves, 2013). Some

participants indicated that they were willing to adopt but were financially unable as they

were currently struggling to survive (Eaves, 2013). Mistrust in the adoption system was another barrier and was presented as one reason why would-be adopters might not contact a child welfare agency (Eaves, 2013). Some participants expressed unease with the private questions and perceived meddling attributed to welfare agencies and adoption workers (Eaves, 2013). One person warned that the church should be cautious about promoting adoption because of a need to beware scams (Eaves, 2013). Mistrust can have a dampening effect on legitimate initiatives to educate the Black community on adoption matters (Eaves, 2013). Consequently, adoption workers must counter misconceptions, alleviate myths, increase awareness and interest, and form healthy alliances in growing the pool of prospective Black adopters.

Preadoption Studies

Most adoption studies on preadoption issues involve participants who have already completed an adoption. Fewer studies include participants who have been contemplating adoption but have not completed the process leading to an actual placement of a child in the home. Tasker and Wood (2016) conducted a preadoption interview and a follow up six months into adoption placement. Preadoption themes included the pain of waiting at every stage, waiting for a pregnancy that never came, waiting anxiously through failed fertility interventions, and waiting restlessly through a drawn-out adoption process (Tasker & Wood, 2016). Participants also talked about the hope that adoption would eliminate the pain of waiting in futility for so long (Tasker & Wood, 2016). Tasker and Wood (2016) noted participants' expressed uncertainty and

apprehension as to whether the adoptee would be a good family fit, and whether they could successfully manage their parental responsibility.

Smith (2014) found that 25% of prospective parents at an adoption match party were not satisfied with the children they met. Forty-seven percent said the experience of meeting with prospective adoptees was stressful, and 41% said it was intimidating (Smith, 2014). Some parents lamented that the environment was too competitive, however others shared that they felt relaxed (Smith, 2014). Some expressed appreciation for the event as they experienced healthy connections with others who had shared experiences and aspirations (Smith, 2014). Unlike participants in my study, the prospective parents in Smith's study were all White, all female, and had already completed the home study process.

Pace et al. (2015) evaluated emotional and relationship factors among Italian couples seeking to adopt. Prospective adoptive fathers reported greater attachment with their partners than did nonadopting fathers, and prospective adoptive couples were more likely to express significant positive feelings about their relationship than nonadopting couples (Pace et al., 2015). Pace et al. found that following a fertility setback, childless couples could achieve greater resolve and couple cohesion, in their efforts to have children.

A Brief History of Adoption and Adoptive Parenting among Blacks

The Adoption of Children Act of 1851 in the state of Massachusetts was the first adoption law enacted in the United States, giving judges the authority to scrutinize the adoption process and adoption requests. In 1868, the Massachusetts Board of State

Charities piloted a program to deinstitutionalize foster care and to have a home-based

environment for children who qualified for rescue (University of Virginia, 2013). The

Catholic Home Bureau was formed in 1898 to provide good Catholic homes in New York

for adoptees who would otherwise have been sent to farming families in the West (Poust,

1999). An unregulated system of noninstitutionalized adoption existed at the time (Poust,

1999). Children's Bureau Centennial (2012) recorded that "from 1854 through the early

1930s, approximately 200,000 orphaned or abandoned children from Eastern cities were

transported by train to new families in other parts of the country" (para. 1).

Apart from the early regulatory and legislative adoption attempts in

Massachusetts, other states were also gradually trending towards a formal, accountability-

driven system of adoptions (University of Oregon, n.d.-a.). In 1891, Michigan enacted

laws to require prospective adoptive parents to give evidence of moral rectitude and

ability to support adoptees financially (University of Oregon, n.d.-a.). In 1917, Minnesota

passed the first law upholding confidentiality of adoption records and mandating an

investigation board to take compatibility into account in making placement

recommendations (University of Oregon, n.d.-b.). Moreover, the first adoption agencies

in the United States were opened between 1910 and 1930, both in New York and Illinois

(University of Oregon, n.d.-a).

Black adoption history. Despite advances in adoption regulation, including

screening of prospective adoptive parents and greater safeguards for adoptees, the formal

adoption system did not include Black adoptees or adoptive parents (Eaves, 2013).

Blacks were overlooked, notwithstanding the assurances from the Children's Bureau's

inaugural head that the Bureau's ultimate purpose was to "give to every child a fair chance in the world" (Bradbury, 1956, p. 6). Black adoptions at the time were therefore informal, unregulated, and undocumented.

The first on-record adoption of a Black child by a White family was in 1948, but 50,000 other Black orphans at the time were not adopted (University of Oregon. n.d.-c.). Although social policies after World War II allowed for greater Black access to public services, including child welfare, Black children were matter-of-factly bypassed for adoption consideration (Schwartz & Austin, 2011).

Up until the 1950's, there was no known program for recruiting Black adoptive parents (University of Oregon. n.d.-c.). Jackson-White et al. (1997) asserted that mainstream adoption agency professionals lacked insight into Black culture and values, and the systemic disadvantages that Black families faced. Consequently, the requirements with which adoption agencies operated automatically disqualified many Black families from becoming adoptive parents (Jackson-White et al., 1997). Would-be adopters who were single or elderly were ruled out by many agencies who may have been unaware that, in the Black community, the elderly played a critical care giving and stabilizing role in many African American families (Jackson-White et al., 1997). With Black adoptees being the least desirable demographic to prospective White adopters (Baccara, Collard-Wexler, Felli, & Yariv, 2014), and prospective Black adopters being screened out or easily disqualified by strict policy and practice biases (Riley-Behringer & Cage, 2014), the pool of Black adoptees was barely reduced.

Formal and private African American adoption services first appeared in the 1960's, particularly arising out of the age of Black self-consciousness fostered by the Civil Rights Movement (Jackson-White et al., 1997). Several studies provided evidence that Black adoptive parents who used private adoption services were generally more educated, younger, and had higher incomes than their Black counterparts who adopted through a public agency (Hairston & Williams, 1989; Smith-McKeever & McRoy, 2005). Smith-McKeever and McRoy (2005) also found that most Blacks who adopted from a Black-operated adoptive agency cited the presence of a race-compatible adoptive agency as a significant factor in their decision to adopt. Blacks often felt they had a reduced chance of adoption success if the adoption entity was owned or managed by nonBlack personnel.

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 included a financial subsidy provision for adoptive parents of special needs children. In 1994, the United States Congress passed the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA), thus expediting the permanent placement of children in adoption. Race incompatibility could not be the only basis for denying a prospective adoptive parent (Jennings, 2006, p. 561). However, the Inter-Ethnic Adoption Provision (IEP) of 1996 completely forbad race considerations, and the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 represented another shift from the focus of reuniting families to a priority of formal adoption. Under ASFA, the goal of permanency would reduce the likelihood of children experiencing an extended tenure in foster care (Eaves, 2013). Whereas the new thrust toward adoption over family reunification had a reasonable basis, some regarded the development as a significant

setback for Black families, because reunification and the sanctity of family ties were

critical dimensions in supporting and meeting the needs of Black families (Curtis &

Denby, 2004; Morris, Rambo-Freeman, & Powell, 2005).

ASFA was the first federal legislation to normalize kinship care and legal

guardianship as next-best options to formal adoption. However, kinship care givers were

expected to meet the same standards as nonkinship caregivers, while receiving less

financial support (Scott et al., 2013). However, Black kinship caregivers tend to be older,

less healthy, and more economically challenged than their nonkin counterparts

(Iyalomhe, 2016).

Preadoption Perceptions and Practices among Blacks

The perceptions and practices of Blacks toward adoption have been partly

influenced by their exclusion from the formal adoption system until fairly recently

(University of Oregon. n.d.-c). As a result of systemic adoption exclusion and other

historical social disadvantages, many Blacks still view the child welfare system with

mistrust (Schwartz & Austin, 2011). The practice of informal adoption among the Black

population is one of the outcomes of this policy of exclusion (Gillum, 2011).

Informal adoption. In Smith-McKeever's (2006) study on Black adoptive family

satisfaction, over 25% of participants reported a personal or parental experience of

informal adoption. Informal adoption has been a feature of the Black family since

slavery, when the separation of families was a staple of the plantation economy (Gillum,

2011). Consequently, children were often raised by kin or strangers (Riley-Behringer &

Cage, 2014). Washington et al. (2013) stated that Black families are more likely to

experience informal kinship care than other ethnic groups in the United States. Gillum (2011) indicated that parental issues such as teenage pregnancy, single parenthood, separation, drug abuse, serious illness, and incarceration often precipitated the need for kinship care.

Black grandparents often serve as caregivers to their grandchildren and other young family members (Washington et al. 2013). Riley-Behringer and Cage (2014) noted that Black grandparents tended to engage in kinship care. Older Blacks assert that welfare workers are too hasty in removing children from kin care, or hostile to family reunification, unsupportive, intrusive, and judgmental (Riley-Behringer & Cage, 2014). In contrast, informal kin care arrangements among Black families do not result in loss of biological parental rights, as the surrogate family is acting temporarily on behalf of the parent, often with no time limit in view (Gillum, 2011, Scott et al., 2013).

Involuntary childless couples experience parental status while offering altruistic support to a young relative (see Washington et al., 2013). This parenting role may assuage their inability to conceive, and mitigate the social appearance of unfruitfulness. However, informal adoptive parents will not derive the feeling of permanency and legitimacy that formal adoption could better provide (see Testa, 2017).

The bias perception. Blacks generally regard formal social systems as antagonistic to their interests (Brooms & Perry, 2016; Moore et al., 2013; Vaterlaus, Skogrand, & Chaney (2015). Smith-McKeever and McRoy (2005) surveyed Black families who adopted privately from two Black-owned adoption establishments. Eighty nine percent of study participants reported previous unsuccessful attempts to adopt

through the child welfare system because they had not met one or more mandated

requirements (Smith-McKeever & Roy, 2005). Eaves (2013) reported mistrust in the

child welfare system as an emergent theme and significant barrier in an adoption study.

Participants suggested that African American would-be adopters may experience

discomfort with intrusive questions, particularly when information sought may be used to

disqualify rather than enhance their adoption efforts (Eaves, 2013).

Blacks are less likely than Whites to meet the required housing standards, and

less likely to show financial ability to support a new family member (Eaves, 2013). For

instance, older adults are active in providing guardianship for children in the Black

community (Eaves, 2013). However, the child welfare system is not generally favorable

to older adult adopters, and states impose varying age limits (Riley-Behringer & Cage,

2014). Grandparents and other kin caregivers who have an interest in formalizing an

adoption may also find the licensure and home study process too long and cumbersome;

and may either not apply for licensure or fail to complete the process after starting out

(Riley-Behringer & Cage, 2014).

Ecological View of Adoption

Bronfenbrenner (1977) posited that each individual is impacted in a reciprocal

interaction with different levels of environmental influences, ranging from proximal to

distal contexts. The person seeks to make meaning of the links between and among

various influences to derive healthy connectedness (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Successful

resolution of different ecological influences is called competence, but failure to resolve

apparent disconnectedness among ecological influences, or to navigate the environment,

or to effect change in the environment can lead to dysfunction (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). The ecological systems topology involves four levels: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

The microsystem represents the most proximal level at which the person engages in direct and immediate interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1977); for example, with a family member at home, or school mate in the classroom. A combination of two or more microsystems or interactive settings forms a mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Bronfenbrenner used the example of an interaction between home and school in which the subject is directly engaged (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The subject's shifting from one context to another is also regarded as mesosystemic, as in a change of jobs or promotion from one grade level to another, with all its developmental implications (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The exosystem is operative in the absence of the person, but affects or influences the developing person in important ways (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The exosystem would involve policy changes, for instance, an agency deciding to replace an adoption worker, or a committee making decisions that would ultimately impact the subject. It involves social institutions and structures at work (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The macrosystem represents formal and informal social and cultural norms and expectations, (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Human ecology perspectives on adoption. Several researchers have studied adoptive parenting through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, and how these parents resolve the paradoxes and difficulties attendant to their adoption consideration (Goldberg et al., 2012; Klevan, 2012; Riley-Behringer & Cage, 2014).

Riley‑Behringer and Cage (2014) studied barriers to prospective adoptive and foster care parents during the long and tense prequalification process, and found that study participants reported difficulty at every level of the ecological system. Riley-Behringer and Cage envisaged the microsystem as a direct contact between two parties, for example the adoptive parent and the home study worker. An example of the mesosystem at work is the home study worker engaged with the prospective adoptive family, whereas the exosystem is exemplified in the home study worker reporting to the Child and Family Services Department concerning findings about a recent home visit. The prospective parent has no direct interaction with the exosystem but is influenced by it. Riley-Behringer and Cage viewed the macrosystem as the theoretical assumptions that influence policies enacted by regulatory agencies as Family Divisions and child welfare bodies. These policies ultimately affect the prospective parent's qualification for adoption, as well as how the prospective parent views the adoption system. Riley-Behringer and Cage found barriers in the macrosystem, in that there was no clarity on the licensing agency's philosophy on kinship care. At the level of the exosystem, miscommunication between Child and Family Services departments ended in misinformation that led some study participants to abort their adoption or foster care attempts. At the microsystem level, some participants reported dissatisfaction with the home study worker's service delivery and attitude. Multiple system barriers to participant qualifications included low income, unsatisfactory housing condition and home dynamics, and age and health liabilities.

Klevan (2012) applied Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to narrative research on how adoptive parents rationalize and resolve their inner conflicts over choosing the race of their adoptee. Multiple influences inform the decision-making process on adoptee race choice, including conflicting social policy and practice and other macrosystem considerations such as the value that the family culture and social influences place on racial resemblance. Klevan concluded that prospective adoptive parents, conflicted about their adoptee race choice through individual, family, and social considerations, often resolved their conflict by what she called a "parental renegotiation of self" (p. 110). Klevan described this renegotiation in terms of an emotional and intellectual integration of a person's racial choice into the person's sense of self, or rejecting a prior sense of self to accommodate or justify a particular racial choice.

Goldberg et al. (2012) applied Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory in studying Child Welfare adoption experiences of same-sex and heterosexual parents. Study participants reported being impacted by multiple influences at various levels of interaction, while also dealing with their own personal issues (Goldberg et al., 2012). Goldberg et al. identified systemic, social, cultural, familial, and individual elements that influenced participants in significant ways. The study focused particularly on how participants perceived their experiences with the legal system, social service agencies and workers, and the birth family (Goldberg et al. 2012). Participants shared how they resolved the multilevel conflicts to which they were subjected as they sought to elevate their parental status from foster to adoptive parents (Goldberg et al., 2012).

Application of human ecological systems theory to the present study. Whereas participants in the studies referenced above largely represented a different demographic from that of my proposed study, ecological systems theory can provide a profound platform for exploring how involuntarily childless Black males in a relationship considering adoption perceive and interpret their adoption considerations. Relevant elements in the literature would include Black distrust of formal social institutions as well as White authority figures, and the Black tradition of informal adoptive parenting (Washington et al., 2013).

Black distrust. The notion of Black distrust is an important macrosystemic factor in considerations of ecological influences on adoptive parenting perceptions (Brooms & Perry, 2016; Moore et al., 2013). Vaterlaus et al. (2015) found that married African American heterosexual men were more likely to seek marital counseling from a religious leader or family member than a marital professional. More men than women preferred to work through the problem without external help, as the issue of trust was more salient for men than women (Vaterlaus et al., 2015). Many Black men report incidents of being profiled and humiliated by law enforcement (Brooms & Perry, 2016), bypassed for job positions, promotions, or reward (Mosley, Owen, Rostosky, & Reese, 2017), treated as invisible on the job or in the classroom (Brooms & Perry, 2016), stigmatized as beneficiaries of affirmative action in positions of professional practice (Wingfield & Wingfield, 2014), or underserved in health and medical contexts (Murray, 2015; Watson, 2014). Therefore, Blacks live with institutional racism as an integral element in the ecology that circumscribes them.

The preference of educated Blacks for pursuing an adoption through a Black-operated private adoption agency is partly explained by a distrust of visibly White-dominated institutions (Smith-McKeever & Roy, 2005). This tendency of Blacks to rely on their own subcultural system within the larger social system of adoption may result from, and provide resolution to, the dysfunction Blacks experience in navigating their environment. Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) suggested that when a person is unable to effect change in the environment, or feels unable to successfully navigate the environment, the person becomes susceptible to dysfunction, whereas competence is the preferred outcome.

Informal adoption. Many Blacks regard formalized adoption of kin as an unwelcome effort of the exosystem to deprive a biological parent of their inalienable right to family reunification (Eaves, 2013; Gillum, 2011). Despite the favorable arguments for the MultiEthnic Placement Act of 1994, the Inter-Ethnic Adoption Provision (IEP) of 1996, and the stated intent of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997, some scholars and practitioners asserted that these provisions harbored unfavorable or discriminatory outcomes toward Black families (Hollingsworth, 1998; Jennings, 2006). Iyalomhe (2016) viewed these three federal legislative actions as sequential attempts by lawmakers to resolve the disproportionate numbers of minorities that populated the child welfare system. Jennings (2006) perceived the same statutes as evidence of institutionalized White privilege prioritized over considerations of the Black child's best interest.

Notwithstanding the language of ASFA expressing favorability to legal guardianship that allowed for the formalizing of kinship care, it did not temper the fear that Black caregivers may be disqualified for not meeting housing, economic, and other requirements (Gillum, 2011). Scott et al. (2013) asserted that although legal guardianship received favor on the strength of AFSA, more financial support was being given to non-kin caregivers than kinship caregivers in some jurisdictions. Legal guardianship became part of the formal family structure in adoption policy, but it seemed a second-class option.

The US Congress mandated that "reasonable efforts shall be made to preserve and reunify families," (AFSA, section 102, p. 2), but the key intent of the law was child permanency (ASFA, 1997). The emphasis on child permanency also led to the irreversible dissolution of many biological parent-child ties in the interest of placing the child with what was considered a safe family (Iyalomhe, 2016). Iyalomhe opined that the legislators did not allow adequate remedial time to parents who had substance use or economic issues, and that many minority children who were legally severed from their parents continued in the foster care system without permanent placement.

Whereas formal kinship care or legal guardianship is now widespread among the Black population, with many parents losing their parental rights to close relatives, informal adoption still exists among the Black population, side by side with its formal counterpart (Washington et al., 2013). Many families accept formal or informal kinship care because it generally allows biological parents to retain sentimental and familial connection with the child (Iyalomhe, 2016). In fact, Black children in informal kinship

care were assessed as more likely to be competent socially and academically if a relatively healthy relationship existed between biological parents and child (Washington et al., 2013).

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory is relevant at all levels of human functioning and addresses the tension between competence and dysfunction, and trust and distrust. The dynamics of both formal and informal adoption present multiple challenges at every level, and heterosexual Black men in childless relationships must resolve the many influences impacting their decision-making considerations on adoption.

Summary

Researchers are clear that expressed favorability toward adopting is not a reliable indicator of future adoption pursuit (Petersen et al., 2015). Involuntarily childless couples are overwhelmingly more favorable to biogenetic options than to adoption, hence the latter is the least valued option for family formation, and becomes the next recourse when all else has failed (Jennings et al., 2014). Involuntarily childless couples are exposed to social, emotional, and psychological difficulties that could potentially affect their relationship (Vizheh et al., 2015). In their adoption considerations, they may have to confront adoption stigma, both perceived and internalized (Goldberg et al., 2011).

In comparison to female perceptions, research regarding male views on involuntary childlessness and on adoption is scant (Gillum, 2011). I have also found little research on the topic in relation to Black men. However, studies report multiple barriers to adoption, including financial difficulty, time management issues, sudden change in circumstances, failing housing requirements stereotypes, family structure issues, and

mistrust of the welfare agency (Eaves, 2013; Riley-Behringer & Cage, 2014; Weissinger, 2013).

Prospective Black adoptive parents were excluded from the adoption system up until the 1950's (University of Oregon. n.d.-c.). Informal adoption, particularly kinship care, was common among Blacks, and is still very much a part of their cultural practice (Eaves, 2013). Along with informal adoption, Black mistrust of formal social structures and authority figures may partly explain the reluctance of some Blacks in involuntarily childless relationships in considering an adoption (Eaves, 2013). However, there are gaps in the literature pertinent to Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship on adopting, and the influences that inform their adoption considerations. In the following Chapter 3, I will detail a methodology for examining the phenomenon of interest.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to discover the perceptions of, and influences on, Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship in which adoption was under consideration, and in which the couple may or may not have started the process by contacting an adoption agency, facilitator, or attorney. Most research on adoption involves participants who have already completed the adoption process as parents (Dance & Farmer, 2014; Foli, South, Lim, & Hebdon, 2012; Stover et al., 2015), and few studies include participants in a preadoption context.

The inclusion of childless persons who were at various levels of the preadoption phase allowed participants to share their experiences and perceptions that largely historical perspectives did not involve. The participants reported significant depth of material that provided lucid and fresh detail. For those who had not yet initiated contact with an adoption service, their early perceptions of the adoption system provided a sense of the extent to which stereotypes may have influenced their worldview. Conversely, participants who had already begun to reach out to adoption professionals might have formed impressions arising out of their personal experiences that could provide material on their perceptions of the adoption environment. Furthermore, the social dynamics of being in a relationship facilitated participants' discussion of their experiences that provided social contexts for their adoption considerations and perceptions.

In this chapter, I describe the research methodology and design. Subsections include theoretical propositions, data sources, interview and observation contexts,

participants, research questions, measures, ethical considerations, and validity issues. The section on procedures includes a guide on participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Methodology

The qualitative researcher values interpretive reality as opposed to the quantitative counterpart whose worldview is set on an objective, descriptive reality (Lopes, 2015). The qualitative inquirer seeks to make sense of subjective data drawn from one of various qualitative approaches (Mantzoukas, 2004). My study method was qualitative, as I explored perceptions, personal experiences, and private views, which were all subjective matter.

The qualitative method has several strengths. It allows the researcher to perform in-depth inquiry about the problem from the participant's perspective (Hood, 2016). Qualitative researchers answer questions arising from quantitative inquiry, but undiscoverable by that method (see Barnham, 2015). Qualitative researchers do not conduct experiments, and they favor naturalistic settings, allowing for direct engagement with participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This kind of research also allows for data gathering from multiple sources.

Research Design

Yin (2014) defined a case study as an in-depth study of a current phenomenon in its natural context, with use of multiple data sources. These sources may include observation, interviews, documents, and records. However, data for this case study were

chiefly drawn from each participant's subjective world, so that physical location and observation were not deemed relevant to my data collection.

According to Yin (2014), there are three salient conditions for employing a case study design: (a) the type or intent of the research question, (b) the control the researcher assumes over participant behaviors, and, (c) the contemporary occurrence of the phenomenon. Case study research questions are how, why, and what queries that engender exploration as opposed to discovery of numerical values. In a case study, scholars conduct an in-depth investigation. To qualify as a case study, the research plan must allow the researcher no control over participant behaviors. As indicated in Yin's definition, the phenomenon must be contemporary to qualify as a case study, or the context for a case study is lost.

I drew primarily from Yin (2014) in formulating my case study design. The study was guided by a theoretical proposition, which is discussed in the next subsection. Data were drawn from various sources, but excluded observation, hence obviating the need for a naturally occurring setting. The data sources for this study were semi structured interviews of the primary participants and adoption professionals and a literature review of data found in research.

Theoretical Propositions

Yin (2014) viewed theoretical propositions as foundational to case studies, providing assumptions through which each case is to be studied. Through ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner (1977) proposed that the human organism's views, perceptions, and decisions are impacted by environmental forces on multiple levels,

including cultural and subcultural expectations and assumptions, direct interpersonal interactions, and impersonal conditions. The theoretical assumption of this study was that participants may be externally influenced in how they view their childlessness, how they perceive adoption, and how favorable they were to adopting.

Data Sources

Yin (2014) proposed that when the phenomenon to be explored is a participant's perspectives, it is necessary to conduct data triangulation to ensure data trustworthiness. Data triangulation is the use of multiple sources of evidence to corroborate research (Hamel et al., 1993). Golafshani (2003) presented triangulation as multiple, parallel ways of reconstructing reality and suggested that it is a strategy in legitimizing qualitative research. For this study, my data sources were in-depth, face-to-face, semi structured interviews of Black heterosexual males in an involuntarily childless relationship (Group A); semi structured telephone interviews of adoption professionals (Group B); and a targeted review of scholarly sources found in the literature.

Face-to-face interview of Black heterosexual males (Group A). The interview is regarded as one of the most important data sources in case study (Yin, 2014). My interview questions were primarily open ended (Appendix A), affording participants an environment in which they could share in-depth material, which is an indispensable aspect of case study (Hamel et al., 1993).

I conducted individual interviews, based on research findings that the male partner often may not self-disclose at will in the presence of a female partner whom he may see as his duty to protect (Herrera, 2013), or that he may feel his socialized gender

role forbids him from showing weakness in her presence (Hanna & Gough, 2015). To meet the contextual setting requirement integral to the case study design, I explored each participant's description of his influential social contexts, including partner relations, family, work, community, culture of origin, and church. Inquiry into contextual influences was of importance to this study given the ecological systems theoretical lens I used for this study.

Face-to-face contact with each Group A participant in an individual interview setting allowed access to data from each participant's verbal responses to my questions. Moreover, I employed what Stake (1994) described as an instrumental approach, in which each case was a means to derive greater understanding of the problem, thus allowing for insight into the perceptions and influences that inform the adoption considerations of Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship.

Semi structured telephone interview of adoption professionals (Group B). I interviewed three adoption professionals to ensure the inclusion of data from personnel who had interfaced with Black male heterosexuals in an involuntarily childless relationship, and I noted some of their experiences, perceptions, and influences that would provide a source of data triangulation. As in the case of Group A, questions for this group were primarily open ended (Appendix B).

Targeted literature review. Documentary sources are used in case study research, partly because of the application the term spans and the potential to use any number of legitimate sources (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Documents may include press reports, legal reports, government documents, newspaper- and magazine-based

sources, diaries, progress reports, calendars, and letters (Finnegan, 2014). The

documentary source for this study was verbatim and summarized participant comments

on adoption perceptions and influences found in current, scholarly research, where either

Blacks, heterosexual men, or involuntarily childless men were the study participants. The

basis for drawing data from these three subgroups was the paucity of adoption research

targeting childless Black heterosexual men as a singular demographic. Hence, relevant

sources that apply to any, and all, of Blacks, heterosexual men, and involuntarily

childless men were employed in comparing my data with what has already been

established. The collected data reflected patterns and divergences of adoption perceptions

and influences that previous study participants had expressed and had been recorded

verbatim or in summarized form in recent publications.

Participants in the Study

There were two participant groups in this study. The first group consisted of seven

Black, heterosexual men in involuntarily childless relationships in which adopting was

being considered. This group was identified as Group A, the primary research

participants or primary research group. According to Yin (2014), two to three cases will

not yield a robust argument for research findings. There is no formula to predetermine

data saturation threshold in multiple case studies. Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and McKibbon

(2015) asserted that qualitative researchers should not assume that they have prior

knowledge of the exact number of participants required for saturation. A sample size is

estimated for pragmatic, not scientific, reasons.

I determined that six to eight was a reasonable initial sample size, as it fell within

the range of several recent multiple case study dissertations (Cooper, 2011; Haug, 2015; Kane, 2013; Lovejoy, 2014; VonHof, 2016). When new interview data ceases to produce new codes and themes, but confirms already compiled data, the collected data are at saturation point (Fusch & Ness, 2015; van Rijnsoever, 2017). However, Cooper (2011) suggested that although the sample size should yield data saturation, it should not be so large that data management gets out of control and the researcher refocuses away from depth exploration to expansive data coverage. After collecting data from seven primary participants, I determined that the data had attained saturation.

The second group of participants (Group B) consisted of three adoption professionals who had had multiple professional experiences with the researched demographic (Black heterosexual males in involuntarily childless relationships). The adoption professionals represented a rich breadth of exposure, in that all had experience with domestic adoptions, and at least one with international adoptions. One had worked predominantly with foster care adoptions.

Primary participant selection. For Group A, I sought participants who were Black, male, heterosexual, and in a biologically childless relationship in which adopting was under consideration. The participant could have been married or single, living together or separately, attempted unsuccessfully for at least 24 months to have children biologically with his current partner, and had no known mental health diagnosis. Prospects had to be able to communicate in and read English well enough to participate. They also had to demonstrate ability and willingness to explore and articulate their perceptions. Palinkas et al. (2015) asserted that researchers who employed purposeful

sampling should seek participants who were knowledgeable and could "communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner" (p. 534). Emmel (2013) suggested that purposeful sampling allows the researcher to handpick participants who can provide meaningful information (p. 34). Consequently, my selection method was purposive.

The source of the involuntary childlessness was not a determining factor in participant selection for the researched demographic (Group A), nor was it consequential which partner had the reproductive incapacity. I sought participants who had a current experience of adoption consideration, as it becomes easier for participants to recall, explore, and articulate their emotions and perceptions if their experience is within easy recall. A case study requires an existing phenomenon as compared to a historical viewpoint (Yin, 2014).

Group A participants who had biological or adoptive children in a previous relationship were excluded, because prior success could have mitigated the dynamics of the present problem and compromise the ability of such participants to focus their emotions and perceptions on the present experience. It did not matter whether the couple had formally started the process by contacting an adoption agency, facilitator, or attorney. To recruit Group A participants, I sought on-site permission from owners or managers to locate an 11" x 17" poster and/or flyers (5" x 8" versions of the poster) and detailed eligibility summary flyer at strategic points in several shopping centers, eateries, and barber salons in three cities in Northern New Jersey. One prominent person, working with a certain municipality in New Jersey, said that there were "too many buzzwords" in

the poster to have one located on governmental property. I also delivered the same material to five churches, including three of the largest majority Black churches in Bergen County, New Jersey. I received letters of cooperation from two pastoral fraternities in Northern New Jersey, allowing me to present my study at a monthly pastoral meeting of each of the two bodies. However, when both fraternities failed to meet within 4 weeks of the start of data collection, I proceeded to e-mail a cover letter along with poster and eligibility summary flyer to approximately 25 pastors in North New Jersey, to request their assistance in promoting my research flyer with their members. Ten weeks into data collection, I made a presentation to one of the clergy groups whose leader had signed a letter of cooperation. I left messages with the other fraternity to obtain information on its meeting schedule but did not receive feedback.

I also received verbal commitments from approximately 17 persons, consisting of clergy, friends, and acquaintances, to distribute invitation flyers and to ask potential candidates to call me. Of the seven participants recruited, five were referred by some of the acquaintances referenced above. However, I initiated the calls. Of those five recruits, I had previously served as church pastor for one of them. In addition, I had a past pastoral relationship with the sixth participant and knew that he was a qualified candidate for the study. While sharing my study with a mental health counselor over the phone, he volunteered his participation. Only one prospective candidate called to express an interest in participating, but he did not fully meet the requirements. The paucity of responses received may be a function of a flawed recruitment plan, issues of privacy and trust for

the prospective participant, and typical male resistance to sharing information that could compromise his sense of manhood.

Adoption professionals (Group B) selection. I contacted approximately 16 private adoption agencies and Child Welfare agencies starting with the Northern New Jersey-New York City area then extending nationally when recruitment was not yielding positive responses. Along with a cover letter, I attached two files, interview questionnaire for adoption professionals (Appendix B), and informed consent for adoption professionals to recruit professional participants. Most agencies commonly responded that they did not recall having prospective adoptive parents who fit the primary participant demographic of childless, Black heterosexual men. One adoptions official at county level said that due to privacy issues, he could not participate without clearance at the state level. Nonetheless, after several weeks of phone calls and e-mails, I ultimately obtained three yes responses, and I interviewed all three to derive greater data triangulation.

For Group B, there were no demographic delimitations, whether by race, gender, or region. The only criteria were that they had repeated interaction with the researched demographic and they lived and operated within the United States. However, among them, the three professionals represented experience in both the private and public adoption environment, including international adoption. This balance was important, as I could not assume that the experiences or perceptions of prospective parents were the same in both settings. As with Group A, the sampling was purposive.

Research Questions

Case study research questions are primarily how or why inquiries. However, what questions that infer depth investigation as opposed to basic fact finding are pertinent to case study methodology (Yin, 2014). The following research questions invited in-depth exploration.

RQ 1: What are the perceptions of Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship on adopting?

RQ 2: What are the experiences of Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship in which adopting is under consideration?

RQ 3: What are the influences on Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship in deciding whether to adopt?

Measures

I formulated a list of interview questions (Appendix A) that would assist Group A participants in an exploration of their experiences, influences, and perceptions on the topic. Questions were asked in a semi structured format, meaning that although the questions provided a guide, I was flexible in the order in which they were asked; the use of discretion in reframing or omitting questions; adding questions; and asking participants to rephrase, restate, or expand responses. Murphy and Dillon (2008) recommended prompts in the form of brief statements or questions of inquiry that are in effect requests for further elaboration from the interviewee. Useful examples include "Please continue', "Say more about that," "Uh huh," "And then" (Murphy & Dillon, 2008, p. 161).

I also formulated a list of specific interview questions (Appendix B) for the adoption professionals to share their findings concerning the experiences, influences, and perceptions of the researched demographic. In one instance, due to an oversight on my part, I omitted to e-mail the list of questions to one participant before the interview. However, I also informed all participants that I would administer the interview in semi structured fashion, with questions being asked in no particular order, and with the possibility of follow-up questions. I informed them that the interview duration would be approximately 40 minutes

A panel of experts reviewed all proposed data collection protocols prior to my conducting interviews with participants. This panel consisted of two experts in qualitative research methodology. They evaluated the protocols for appropriateness, understandability, and adequacy. Their recommendations were examined and applied in consultation with my dissertation committee chairperson.

Ethical Protection of Participants

The 2014 American Counseling Association [ACA] Code of Ethics stated that the researcher is ultimately responsible for the welfare of the study participants (ACA, 2014). It enjoined adequate precaution in safeguarding the emotional, physical, and social wellbeing of each participant (ACA, 2014). The code highlighted ethical principles of confidentiality, informed consent, nonmaleficence, autonomy, and respect (ACA, 2014). I received approval by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before starting participant recruitment. The IRB approval number for the study was 01-17-18-0606521.

Primary participants (Group A). Since I was dealing with participants whose involuntary childlessness and adoption considerations could potentially create anxiety and other forms of distress (Kissi et al., 2013; Petersen et al., 2015; Ying et al., 2015), I sought to minimize emotional and psychological risks to participants by asking in my initial phone interview if a prospect had a formal mental health diagnosis. The deeply personal issues that formed the basis for the interview required cautious consideration as to how participants were likely to experience the study.

Due to sensitivities and stigma attached to childlessness and adoption, and given the fact that participant views had implications for the other partner in the relationship, I assured prospective Group A participants via the recruiting poster that their right to confidentiality was protected (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I e-mailed an informed consent document to each prospect to be read and signed before scheduling the research interview. This form contained comprehensive information on rights, procedures, safeguards, and responsibilities.

Adoption professionals (**Group B).** The emotional wellbeing of this group of participants and the need for researcher safeguards were not as acute as for the Group A participants who were experiencing childlessness and attendant family formation issues. However, all research participants merited the same assurances of ethical discipline. Accordingly, I e-mailed an informed consent form, specific to Group B participants, assuring them of confidentiality, and proper security of their personal information.

I exercised strict adherence to the requirements of informed consent, ensuring that all participants knew the research purpose, the nature and focus of the interview, the

attendant risks, their rights, what would be done with their information, the security and privacy plan that would protect them and their information, et cetera. The American Psychological Association [APA] (2010) asserted that research participants' rights and welfare merit priority. I communicated to my research sample that their participation was voluntary and that they could discontinue participation at any point in the process. I e-mailed the research participant packet to prospective Group A participants. It included a participant eligibility summary, the informed consent guidelines, and biographical information form (Appendix C). I followed up with a call to review the documents and field their questions. Group B participants also received their letter of invitation and informed consent document via e-mail.

I formulated a pro-bono debriefing plan for Group A participants to alleviate undue distress that the interview process may have triggered. I enlisted a mental health clinician whose contact information I shared with each participant after the face-to-face interview, in which the study phenomenon was explored in detail. Each participant was entitled to one debriefing session available up to 30 days after the face-to-face interview session. The participants could have scheduled the debriefing session with the clinician at their convenience.

I stored participants' files using randomly designated initials instead of their formal names (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), and blacked out formal names. I secured all participants' files in a locked file cabinet, and I retained sole access to them.

Validity Issues

A validity issue can arise if participants turn out to be poor representatives of the phenomenon and are unable to provide rich information (Palinkas et al., 2015). Marshall (1996) suggested that a researcher may not know whether the interview location or participant's immediate state of mind has affected the quality of the participant's responses. I have addressed Marshall's (1996) comments in the limitation section of the concluding chapter of the dissertation.

Another validity issue involves the relatively small sample. Yin (2014) indicated that the use of theory in case study research legitimizes analytic generalization as opposed to statistical generalization. Therefore, sample size is not fundamentally critical to case study. To treat concerns about validity, I employed audit trail (precise chronological recording of my research process), and other forms of triangulation, namely member checks (reviewing interview transcripts by calling participants to clarify any nebulous data, and e-mailing my research findings to interviewees), and peer review, performed by one of my group cohorts engaged in dissertation completion at Walden University. The peer reviewer studied interview transcripts, coding files, and my research findings, evaluating intellectual rigor and trustworthiness.

Procedures

Before implementing the procedural steps outlined below, I formulated an external panel of experts, in consultation with my dissertation chairperson, to review my data collection protocols. VonHof (2016) implemented an external panel of experts in her case study to ensure content validity. The panel for this proposed study, consisting of

two experts in qualitative research methodology, assessed for appropriateness, understandability, and adequacy of the questions. Their recommendations were examined and applied in consultation with my dissertation committee chairperson.

After obtaining an informal commitment from prospective panel members via e-mail, I e-mailed a cover letter and attached protocols for their perusal and comments. Pursuant to the responses received, I made adjustments in consultation with my dissertation committee chairperson. The following guidelines provide a detailed sequence of the steps I took in executing the research plan, upon final acceptance of the proposal.

Recruitment

Two groups of participants were recruited for this study, namely, Black heterosexual males in an involuntarily childless relationship (Group A), and adoption professionals (Group B). The recruitment approach and process for each group are described below.

Primary participants (Group A). I prepared an informational letter to pastors and civic leaders, 11" x 17" posters and 5" x 8" flyers, and participant eligibility summary flyer for participant recruitment. I provided a phone number and e-mail address as contact information on all three documents. I sought on-site permission from owners or managers to locate a poster and/or flyers, and eligibility summary flyer at strategic points in several shopping centers, eateries, and barber salons in three cities in Northern New Jersey.

I also e-mailed the materials to six officials from civic organizations and local Family Services and Health and Human Services authorities in Northern New Jersey, and

followed up with phone calls. I received three responses, all negative. A municipal

official felt there were "too many buzzwords" in the poster to have one located on

governmental property. Another said that her endorsement of my study could hold health

privacy issues for the said county. I also hand-delivered the same material to officers of

five churches including three of the largest majority Black churches in Bergen County,

New Jersey. I received letters of cooperation from two pastoral fraternities in Northern

New Jersey, allowing me to present my study at a monthly pastoral meeting of each of

the two bodies. One was e-mailed to me and the other was e-mailed directly to the IRB.

However, when both fraternities failed to meet within eight weeks of the start of data

collection, I proceeded to e-mail a cover letter along with poster and eligibility summary

flyer to approximately 25 church leaders in Northern New Jersey, to court their assistance

in promoting my research flyer with their members. Ten weeks into data collection, I

made a presentation to one of the clergy groups whose leader had signed a letter of

cooperation. I left messages with the other fraternity to obtain information on its meeting

schedule but did not receive feedback.

When responses from church leaders were not forthcoming (only six clergy

responded to my e-mails and committed to disseminating my research material), I

approached 17 acquaintances for help in disseminating invitation flyers within their

sphere of influence. I delivered materials to all except two of those acquaintances by

hand. Those two lived in another state and committed to sharing the study by word of

mouth.

Five of the eventual seven study participants were referred by some of those

acquaintances who were disseminating the information on my study. However, I initiated the calls to all five. I had previously served as church pastor for one of them. In addition, I had a past pastoral relationship with the sixth participant, and knew that he was a qualified candidate for the study. The seventh was a mental health professional with whom I was discussing the study when he said that he fit the participant profile. Only one prospective candidate called to express an interest in participating, but he did not fully meet the requirements.

The plan for sequential contact with prospective primary participants was one screening session by telephone lasting approximately five minutes; one interview preparation telephone discussion lasting up to 10 minutes; one face-to-face data collection interview of about 60 minutes; and a contingency post-data collection telephone interview. This last interview was to clarify any nebulous data arising from the interview. Finally, a courtesy post-data analysis e-mail contact was meant to share my findings with each participant, and to solicit feedback. In actuality, face-to-face interviews ranged from 20 to 46 minutes.

Research candidate telephone screening. I received a total of 10 referrals and contacted each prospective candidate via phone for a screening. The initial requirements were for a Black heterosexual male in an involuntarily childless relationship; at least one partner had been considering adopting; the couple had not yet begun the adoption process; the prospective participant did not have a formal mental health diagnosis; the prospective participant could communicate and understand English well enough to participate; and had not been my counselee or church parishioner within the last 5 years.

Two did not initially meet the criteria because they had previously contacted an adoption agency. Subsequently, I requested and obtained IRB approval to include prospects who had previously contacted an adoption agency, lawyer, or other professional in their preadoption research. One of the two affected persons later consented as a participant. Three other persons did not meet the initial criteria of 5 years lapse between my study and my relationship with them as their church pastor. Again, the IRB consented to reduce the limit from 5 to 3 years. Of the three affected persons, two consented and completed the study. One other person also did not meet the criteria because he had been married for less than six months.

Delivering the participant packet. Following the research candidate telephone screening, I asked each successful participant for an e-mail address, so I could send the participant eligibility summary , informed consent guidelines, and biographical information form (Appendix C) to them for review and completion. I also asked that they read carefully and sign the statement of consent found on the last page of the informed consent document, which I would collect on the day of the face-to-face interview. I also indicated I would call them within the next 72 hours to review the e-mailed files and schedule the face-to-face interview.

Interview preparation telephone discussion. I contacted the prospect within 3 days of e-mailing out the participant packet; verified that it was received; clarified any lingering questions; reinforced information on research purpose, participant rights, confidentiality and security; and queried whether the prospect had already signed or planned to sign the statement of consent. Only three persons required the interview

preparatory discussion of about five minutes, because the other participants had signed

their consent form by the time I contacted them.

Adoption professionals (Group B) recruitment. The initial aim was to recruit

two adoption professionals, however I eventually interviewed three**.** To recruit adoption

professionals, I first compiled a list of private adoption agencies and Child Welfare

agencies in the Northern New Jersey-New York City region that operated in areas with

significant Black residency. I contacted these adoption organizations first via recruiting e-

mail correspondence containing two attached files, interview questionnaire for adoption

professionals (Appendix B), and informed consent for adoption professionals. I followed

up with a telephone phone call within 24 hours, where a phone number was available.

Where a phone number was the only known contact, I called to explain the study and to

obtain an e-mail address and name of a pertinent contact.

I sought to develop a relationship with someone in the agency who might have

been able to recommend a qualified professional to be a research participant. Upon

receipt of an e-mailed response of consent, I called within 24 hours to schedule the

telephone interview. I anticipated 40 minutes duration for interviews, but they ranged

from 19 to 54 minutes.

Data Collection

There were three data collection sources, including interviews of the primary and

secondary research participants. The third source was verbatim and summarized

participant comments on adoption perceptions and influences found in current scholarly

research. The scholarly research participants had to be Black individuals, or involuntarily

childless men, or heterosexual men. There was no prescribed order of data collection among the three data sources.

Face-to-face interview with primary research participants. I conducted face-to-face interviews at neutral locations convenient to the participants, such as in a private room in a public library, a church office, a neutral home, and rented office space. I recorded the interviews via audiotape and note taking. For note taking, I used a modified version of Laureate Education's (2016) field notes guide to help me record the research process and organize and document my thoughts and feelings.

I first collected the signed statement of consent and completed demographic information form before proceeding with the interview. In four instances, participants had completed and e-mailed their consent forms prior to the face-to-face interview session. I initially expected interviews to last 60-70 minutes, however interviews ranged from 20 to 46 minutes, as some participants were either more efficient or restricted than others.

After each face-to-face interview, I gave the participant a card with contact information for a mental health clinician. I reminded him that I had made a one-time debriefing service available at my expense, and that the service would expire in 30 days. I recommended that the participant follow up with his medical insurance carrier to verify if he was covered, in case he needed more follow-up care. In conclusion, I gave each participant a $25.00 gift card incentive for participation in the study and thanked him for his contribution to my research project.

Contingency member-checking post-interview telephone call. After transcribing audio recordings verbatim, I called three participants to clarify nebulous responses, and to

court further clarification where I thought necessary. Whereas I had intended to call for such clarification within 7 days of data collection, in two cases I sought clarification while I was doing data analysis, during which time I became cautious about how I viewed some of the data.

Courtesy member-checking post-data analysis contact. Upon completion of the data analysis, I contacted participants by e-mail with an executive summary of my research findings. I invited comments on my findings, to be turned in by email within 7 days of receipt of the executive summary. I received a response from one Group A participant and applied his response in finalizing my data analysis.

Telephone interview with adoption professionals. At the time scheduled for the interview, I initiated the call. This interview was recorded via audiotape and note taking. For note taking, I used a modified version of Laureate Education's (2016) field notes guide, to help me record the research process, organize my thoughts, and monitor my inner experiences, so I could be alert to my emotional reactivity.

The protocol for obtaining responses from the adoption professional participants was the interview questionnaire for adoption professionals (Appendix B). I restated questions where deemed necessary for further clarification and asked relevant follow-up questions. I anticipated using various prompts to draw more thorough responses, and summarization to ensure I understood each interviewee's responses in the way intended.

At the end of each interview, I thanked the participant for taking the time to share in the study. I also sought permission to contact the participant in the event of any need for further clarity, and to e-mail an executive summary of my findings, with an

accompanying invitation to respond to those findings within 7 days. As planned, upon completion of the data analysis I contacted adoption professionals by e-mail with the executive summary of my research findings. I received one response, which I applied in finalizing my data analysis.

Targeted literature review. The documentary source for this study was a literature review of verbatim and summarized participant comments on adoption perceptions and influences found in current scholarly research, where either Blacks, heterosexual men, or involuntarily childless men were the study participants. Relevant sources that applied to any, and all, of the three categories cited above, were employed in comparing my collected data with what had already been established in the literature. My basis for drawing data from sub-groups was the paucity of adoption research targeting childless Black heterosexual men as a singular demographic. Whereas I had found sparse adoption perception literature on the three segmented demographics, cumulatively it far exceeded what I had found for Black heterosexual men in a childless relationship. I sourced all data from peer-reviewed and reputable sources and was focused on verbatim or summarized comments from research participants pertinent to the research problem.

I systematically reviewed multiple research papers and dissertations, having used relevant keywords. I scoured each title, research problem, or methodology to discover whether the research was in any way relevant to my study population, and whether data was being drawn from participants, and whether the article contained verbatim and/or summarized material, which could both provide useful information. I also checked

databases over the course of my dissertation project to identify any new sources for data collection.

Altheide and Schneider (2013) suggested that a protocol is a list of questions or categories that steer data collection from documents. I formulated a categorized document review spreadsheet as my protocol for documenting author, title, research problem, theoretical orientation, research questions, methodology, participant demographics, specific question or context for the verbatim or summarized participant comments, participant's verbatim or summarized comments, author's assigned themes, and further data analysis. This system facilitated my ability to conveniently compare data entries within and across various studies and compare my research data with the documented sources.

Data Analysis

Yin (2014) expressed the view that a general analytic strategy, in which the data is linked to some concept or proposition, is fundamental to case study data analysis. Yin's recommended approach lent a deductive element to my otherwise inductive study. My umbrella analytic strategy was to initially examine the data through the lens of ecological systems theory. However, I also explored competing theoretical explanations in analyzing the data to ensure academic rigor and rule out bias. The technique I used was pattern matching (Yin, 2014), also called categorical aggregation (Stake, 1995), in which correspondences and patterns among cases are identified. A comparison among interview transcript data could demonstrate congruence and satisfy research credibility expectations, or alternatively, could show inconsistencies and differences among data

units.

Interview-based data. My first activity toward analysis was to promptly organize each interview transcript I had collected and not wait for an accumulation of material. I used MAXQDA 2018 QDA transcription software to manually transcribe the audio recordings onto a Word document, then reread the transcript a few times to identify initial codes. Initial codes for any data set were drawn both deductively, by use of recurrent codes in published literature, and inductively, from my initial reading of the data.

Next, I defined my initial codes within MAXQDA 2018 QDA software to determine frequency of occurrence. I reviewed transcripts to identify other codes that I might have missed and repeated the process of identifying frequencies, again using MAXQDA 2018 QDA software. Then, at Level 2, within each transcript, I identified themes and subthemes among codes. Next, I streamlined themes under the broader categories of adoption perceptions, childlessness and adoption consideration experiences, and adoption consideration influences.

Level 3 of pattern matching was a process of comparing influences, perceptions, experiences, etc., for replication and differences among participants. I created a matrix of categories using an Excel spreadsheet and juxtaposed all interview data for easier identification of replications and patterns between and among data sets (Yin, 2014). Parallel with Level 3 pattern matching, I reviewed all data for ecological theory evidence as I engaged an ecological systems lens, so that my purview retained a theoretical perspective.

At Level 4 of my analysis, I assimilated common concepts and sought to make analytic generalizations where relevant. At this level, I addressed apparent theoretical contradictions and proposed competing ways of viewing the data. Level 4 considerations are reported in Chapter 5.

Targeted literature review. The document review spreadsheet, introduced in the data collection subsection above, contained the protocol to be followed. The columns particularly relevant to data analysis were: Application of ecological systems theory to the data (with accompanying rationale), then conceptual coding of participant perceptions and influences (including indication of where I concur with the author's coding), identifying within-study themes, divergences, and theoretical generalizations (within each study).

The entire data analysis sequence was as follows. I reviewed the specific interview question (if included) or context for each unit of data, to understand the basis for each participant's comment. Next, I reviewed each verbatim or summarized participant comment that revealed participant perceptions and/or influences in adoption decision-making. I then reviewed the assigned themes and conclusions, following which I contextually evaluated each data unit through an ecological systems lens, conceptually coded the perceptions and influences communicated by the data, and compared with the researcher-assigned themes.

Subsequently, I reviewed my assigned codes for themes and patterns. I repeated this sequence within and across all studies that evidenced relevance to this study, then entered all themes and patterns into a matrix of broad categories using an Excel

spreadsheet. Then I compared this coding matrix spreadsheet with the spreadsheet from

the interviewee groups, using two different computer screens simultaneously, while

searching out common themes and divergences. I reviewed divergences while

considering if and what optional theoretical explanations might better circumscribe the

research results. I decided to forego use of a computerized data analysis program for the

targeted literature review analysis, because an Excel spreadsheet allowed me ample

flexibility and portability to manipulate the data as described above.

Verification of Findings

The goal of verification is credibility (Golafshani, 2003). There are some

fundamental mechanisms through which research can be deemed as trustworthy,

particularly the element of triangulation. Triangulation is a system used by a researcher to

improve the credibility of the study findings (Yeasmin, & Rahman, 2012), and data

triangulation is achieved by drawing data from multiple sources (Golafshani, 2003). In

this study, I employed individual interviewing of two distinct groups, and current

verbatim and/or summarized adoption perception comments from published research. I

facilitated research rigor through cross-verification of findings. This was done by peer

review and member checking. Clarification of researcher bias was important in the

proposed study. The peer reviewer and future researchers were entitled to know my

positionality in relation to the study (see Klevan, 2012). Peer review, member checking,

and researcher bias are discussed below.

Peer review. Peer review is one means of providing assurance of trustworthiness

(Lovejoy, 2014). Trustworthiness is the extent to which a study manifests evidence of

rigor (Cope, 2014). Apart from the panel of experts who reviewed the proposed data

collection protocols, a colleague enrolled at Walden University provided peer review.

This process was meant to uphold academic rigor, ruling out researcher bias, and

ensuring confirmability of findings. I selected the peer reviewer in conjunction with my

dissertation committee chairperson, and e-mailed all interview transcripts, coding files,

and my findings. I kept participants identity confidential, as previously described within

the subsection titled Ethical Protection of Participants.

Member checking. In the event I needed to clarify any nebulous matter from a

participant's completed interview, I planned to contact such participants. A courtesy

contact, via e-mail, at completion of my data analysis, was designed as a member

checking exercise. I shared my conclusion with each research participant and allowed

them an opportunity to react to my findings. Only two participants responded: one Group

A, and one Group B participant.

Researcher bias. I am in a biologically childless relationship with two adopted

children, a 28-year-old female, and a 9-year-old male. We adopted for the first time, after

5 years of failure to conceive, and after one round of artificial insemination and one cycle

of IVF treatment. Having experienced the researched phenomenon, I could be a biased

researcher. Morrow (2005) suggested that the researcher needs to strive for objectivity to

minimize bias (p. 251). I avoided expert or experiential advice giving, or fielding

questions from the participant that would have compromised my singular role as a

researcher. I am also a former church pastor of two of the persons who I interviewed for

this study. The risk of bias is a relevant issue as our past relationship could have effected some measure of bi-directional interference in objectivity.

The field notes guide included areas for journaling issues of reflexivity. I employed that document as the basis for my memo writing and journaling throughout the research experience. On occasions, I documented in the notepad feature on my iPhone. However, on such occasions, I did not document any person's name or private information. My memo writing included audit trail recording, encompassing chronological information on the entire research process. Qualitative interviewing is intrusive by nature, but is exacerbated by the researcher's inherent biases that may unwittingly be central to both interview and data analysis processes (Hewitt, 2007). Boulton and Hammersley (2011) asserted that qualitative researchers can influence or affect the data they collect (Boulton & Hammersley, 2011). I reviewed my memos surrounding each interview, while asking myself the following: In what ways did I influence this participant's response? To what extent has this participant's response been motivated by a desire to please me? What was my experience of reactivity during this interview?

Summary

This was a multiple case study on the perceptions of, and influences on, Black heterosexual men in involuntarily childless relationships in which adopting was under consideration. In harmony with Yin (2014), this study met the three basic criteria for application of the chosen method: (a) the research questions were *how*, *why,* or exploratory *what* questions that required in-depth investigation that a survey would not

satisfy; (b) the researcher had no control over participant behaviors as in a controlled experiment; and, (c) the investigation was conducted on a current phenomenon, as opposed to a past circumstance.

Case studies typically require use of multiple data sources, and this study enlisted two groups of interviewee participants: Black heterosexual men who were in a relationship experiencing involuntary childlessness, and adoption professionals who had interacted with this demographic. I targeted published research data on adoption perceptions and influences among Blacks, heterosexual men, and involuntarily childless men. I employed relevant sources that applied to any, and all, of the three categories cited above, in comparing my collected data with what had already been established.

I used a multipronged approach to recruit Group A participants, but narrowed my Group B recruiting to private and public adoption agencies. I also followed a best practice protocol to ensure ethical considerations were accorded participants throughout the research process. Finally, I applied various forms of triangulation to data collection and data analysis to ensure academic rigor and trustworthiness of findings.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to discover the perceptions of, and influences on, Black, heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship in which adoption was under consideration. In most adoption research I had found, heterosexual female representation disproportionately exceeded that of the heterosexual male. Also, most research on adoption involved participants who had already completed the adoption process as parents (Dance & Farmer, 2014; Foli, South, Lim, & Hebdon, 2012; Stover et al., 2015). Few studies included participants in a preadoption context.

The three research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ 1: What are the perceptions of Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship considering adoption?

RQ 2: What are the experiences of Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship in which adopting is under consideration?

RQ 3: What are the influences on Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship in deciding whether to adopt?

This chapter is a presentation of the results of the study. I also provide the groundwork for conclusions and recommendations addressed in Chapter 5. The following topics are addressed: study setting, participant demographics, data collection, evidence of trustworthiness, data analysis, results, and chapter summary.

Study Setting

Most case studies involve observation of study participants. However, because I prioritized self-reporting, the main source of data was face-to-face interviews. Participant convenience, privacy, and neutrality were the factors in determining the interview venue. A variety of settings were used, including library, neutral home, rented office space, and neutral church office. A challenge that arose with one of the interviews in a neutral home had to do with privacy. I initially waited for one participant outside of an eatery, as prearranged, but he called five minutes later to redirect me to the nearby home of a person he described as a good friend. His friend was asleep in the home, so I did not feel totally comfortable as I had privacy concerns. However, the participant appeared at ease as he talked and laughed loudly during the interview. Apart from that incident, there was no evidence of known occurrences during any of the interviews that would influence the integrity of the study.

Demographics

Study participants consisted of the primary participant group (Group A), Black, male heterosexuals in an involuntarily childless relationship in which adoption was under consideration; and adoption professionals (Group B) who have had multiple exposure to the primary population. Only four Group A participants identified their ethnic roots as African American. Two persons checked Afro-Caribbean, variously referenced in the literature as Afro-West Indian or Caribbean Black (Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014). One person who identified as Guyanese said during the interview that he was of Caribbean background by both parents. Guyana is culturally, linguistically, and associatively

Caribbean, but geographically South American. Similarly, one person who identified as

African American indicated during the interview that his roots were West Indian, a term

synonymous with the Caribbean. Consequently, in performing data analysis, I described

four persons as Afro-Caribbean and three as African American. All (*n*=7) in the primary

group were married, and all except one were adherents to the Seventh-day Adventist

religion. Six were employed, and one was self-employed. Five of this group were in the

35-49 years age group. One was under 35, and one was in the 50-64 age group. Three

participants were college graduates. An identical amount had some college exposure, and

one had a postgraduate degree. One participant worked for an annual salary of over

$90,000, two ranged from $70,000 to $89, 900, one for $$50,000 to $69, 900, and three

participants had an annual intake of between $30,000 to $49, 900. Group A biographical

data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants' Biographical Data

	Adam	Bakari	Caleb	Harvey	Peter	Terry	William
Marital Status	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Age Group	35-49	35-49	35-49	35-49	Under 35	35-49	50-64
Educational Level	Some College	College Grad	Some College	College Grad	Some College	Post Grad Degree	College Grad
Employment Status	Employed	Employed	Self-employed	Employed	Employed	Employed	Employed
Annual Income	$70,000-$89,900	$30,000-S49,900	$30,000-S49,900	$90,000 plus	$50,000-$69,900	$70,000-$89,900	$30,000-$49,900
Religious Affiliation	Protestant	Seventh-day Adventist	Seventh-day Adventist	Seventh-day Adventist	Seventh-day Adventist	Seventh-day Adventist	Seventh-day Adventist

Ethnicity	African American	African American	Afro-Caribbean	African American	Guyanese (Caribbean)	Afro-Caribbean	African American

Participant Descriptions

Group A consisted of seven participants. Three adoption professionals comprised Group B. All participants were designated with pseudonyms. Participant descriptions included age group as entered on their biographical information form.

Adam. Adam was a 35-49-year-old African American who had been married for over 5 years and considered himself a Protestant. He was an employed college dropout with an individual income of $70,000-$89,000. Adam said his wife was anxious to have children and had consulted with doctors about artificial options for conception. He did not state which party had the reproductive issue, but he rated the importance he placed on having a child as a 5 compared to 8 for his wife. He said his wife initiated a brief discussion about adopting, but he responded that if they did not conceive, that is how it was meant to be.

Bakari. Bakari was a 35-49-year-old African American of Caribbean parentage, who had been married for over 5 years, and he was affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist religion. He was a college graduate with an annual income of $30,000 to $49, 900. Bakari and his wife had been growing anxious about a pregnancy over the last year, particularly because her family had a history of reproductive issues, and she was already 35 years of age. The couple had talked about adoption only in passing, because they were working toward a pregnancy.

Caleb. Caleb was a self-employed, 35-49-year-old, Afro-Caribbean immigrant, married for over 10 years, with an annual income of $30,000-$49,000. His highest level of education was some college and vocational training. His religious affiliation was Seventh-day Adventist. Caleb admitted that he had infertility issues for which he has had unsuccessful intervention. He had initiated discussions with his wife on foster care, in the hope that they would subsequently complete an adoption. However, his wife had not shown any interest. He was apprehensive about approaching her again.

Harvey. Harvey was a 35-49 -year-old, married, African American college graduate earning over $90,000 a year. He had been married for over 15 years and adhered to the Seventh-day Adventist faith. Harvey's wife experienced reproductive issues early in their marriage, and she subsequently initiated discussions about ART and adoption as optional means of procuring a child. Harvey rejected both options.

Peter. Peter was an under 35-year-old, married son of Guyanese immigrants, had some college, and earned $50,000 to $69,000 a year. He had been married for 7 years and was a Seventh-day Adventist. Peter's wife was experiencing reproductive issues, and the couple had discussed ART and adoption but had not yet come to a decision on their next step. Peter felt his wife was stressed about not giving him a child and wanted to adopt a child to make him happy. He expressed relief that he had several nephews-in-law in the home and that he was a father figure to them.

Terry. Terry was a 35-49-year-old, married, Afro-Caribbean immigrant with a postgraduate degree, earning between $70,000 to $89,900 annually. He had been married for over 10 years and was affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist religion. Terry did

not share which party had the reproductive issue but indicated that the couple attempted unsuccessfully to conceive via IVF intervention before trying for an adoption. However, their home study was also unsuccessful. Terry and his wife planned to adopt from their home country, but he was not as driven as his wife.

William. William was a 50-64-year-old, married African American with a college degree, earning $30,000 to $49,900 annually. He had been married for over 12 years and was affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist religion. William never had a child, but his wife had had a son through a previous relationship. William regretted that he never had a biological son whom he could mentor and who could perpetuate his name. The couple had wanted children for several years, but his wife was now past her child-bearing years. She initiated discussions about adoption, but William had recently been prioritizing getting his finances in order before addressing his desire for a son.

Professional 1. Professional 1, a Caucasian female, was a phone support worker for a one-stop adoption resources agency in the Greater New York area. She was, at the time, a home study and postplacement social work specialist for another organization, and she was simultaneously on contract with another prominent adoption agency.

Professional 2. Professional 2, a Black female marriage and family therapist, was working with a private agency in the Greater New York area. She was providing preadoptive counseling to families who were preparing to foster or adopt a child from the public adoption system. She also engaged in postadoption family counseling..

Professional 3. Professional 3, a Black male, was a licensed clinical social worker who had his own private practice as a therapist and was also a member of the

clergy. He had formerly worked for 8 years with a private child welfare agency based in the Greater New York area. With the latter agency, he worked as an advocate for foster children and as a counselor in helping them to stability. He also interacted with foster care parents and prospective adoptive parents. As a therapist, and as a pastor, he had interfaced with the study population on a professional level. He also reported being an adoptive parent.

Data Collection

I drew data from multiple sources, including semi structured, face-to-face interviews with seven primary participants and semi structured phone interviews with three adoption professionals. I also reviewed verbatim and summarized participant comments on adoption perceptions and influences found in current scholarly research, where either Blacks, involuntarily childless men, or heterosexual men were the study participants. I located only 10 studies that met the criteria. Additionally, I derived data from my memo notes that included my observations, experiences, and perceptions throughout the data collection process.

Interviews. My face-to-face interviews with primary participants occurred in different locations, including a public library, a church office, a neutral home, and a rented office space. Interview duration ranged from 20 to 46 minutes. The most concise interview was with a participant who said he had accepted his childless status; had no emotional distress or social pressure; was uninterested in pursuing an adoption; and was not conflicted about it, even though his wife had brought up the topic previously. Each participant was interviewed once, except on three occasions when I contacted participants

to clarify and/or augment comments they made during the face-to-face interview. I interviewed the adoption professionals once, with one session of 19 minutes, another 38 minutes, and the other 54 minutes. The 19-minute interview session was conducted with a professional who indicated she had not noted striking differences among clients based on physical features, so she was unable to explore many of the questions relating to patterns of thought and perceptions she might have noted with the primary study demographic. I recorded all interviews with a small handheld audio device, and on occasions also used the Voice Memo app on my phone, as back up.

Targeted literature review. I reviewed multiple research papers and dissertations using the keywords shown under the Research Strategy heading in Chapter 3. I scoured each title, research problem, or methodology to discover whether the research was in any way relevant to my study population, and whether the article contained verbatim and/or summarized comments derived from the participants, which revealed their adoption perceptions, experiences, or influences of any of the following: Blacks, heterosexual men, and/or involuntarily childless men. I entered data in the document review spreadsheet on author, title, research problem, theoretical orientation, research questions, methodology, participant demographics, question or context for the verbatim or summarized participant comments, actual participant's verbatim or summarized comments, author's assigned themes, and further data analysis.

Variations from original design. There were some variations from my original data collection design. I had planned to present to a particular fellowship of Black pastors in Northern New Jersey, from which I had received a letter of cooperation. However, the

body had not met since I started data collection. Another pastors' ministerium had cancelled two consecutive monthly meetings, so I proceeded to e-mail the documents for distribution to all 25 pastors in that ministerium, requesting placement of an announcement in their weekly bulletin. The secretary of that ministerium communicated by text to all members asking for support on my behalf. Subsequently, I presented to the area ministerium, fielded questions from the clergy in attendance, and asked their continued support in announcing the study from their pulpits.

Due to constraints of time and communication issues, two participants received and signed their informed consent forms just before the interview, whereas the design stipulated that they should have perused the consent form before the interview was scheduled. Moreover, I asked and received IRB clearance to lower the requirement restricting the participation of past counselees and parishioners of mine from 5 years of separation to 3 years. I also received IRB clearance to remove the exclusion of prospective participants who had previously been in contact with an adoption professional, lawyer, or agency. I had anticipated that most prospects would have initiated the contact. Only in one instance did a would-be participant call. In every other case, I initiated the call to the potential participant, primarily after someone phoned in or texted a referral or offered the referral in person.

In my original design, I had not specified that I would handpick friends and acquaintances to assist me in distributing flyers and in identifying persons who were Black men in childless heterosexual relationships. I enlisted 17 persons who were

instrumental in identifying five of the seven persons who ultimately served as primary

participants.

Data Analysis

My first activity at this stage was to analyze each peer-reviewed article I found

that met the requirements: verbatim and/or summarized adoption comments derived from

participants who were Blacks, heterosexual men, and/or involuntarily childless men. I

also began to analyze interview data once I had completed transcription.

Interviews

I transferred each audio recording to a computer and manually transcribed it with

the aid of MAXQDA 2018 QDA transcription software, frequently backing up my work

onto a Word document. Using the MAXQDA 2018 QDA interface, I reread the transcript

a few times and manually identified initial codes. During this Level 1 exercise, I

formulated initial codes for all data sets deductively, by use of recurrent codes in

published literature, and inductively, from my initial reading of the data. Next, I defined

my initial codes within MAXQDA 2018 QDA to determine frequency of occurrence. I

reviewed data sets to identify other codes that I might have missed and repeated the

process of identifying frequencies, again using MAXQDA 2018 QDA software.

Then, at Level 2, within each transcript, I identified themes and subthemes among

codes. Next, I placed themes under the broader categories of adoption perceptions,

childlessness and adoption consideration experiences, and adoption consideration

influences.

Level 3 of pattern matching was a process of comparing influences, perceptions,

experiences, etc., for replication and differences among participants. I created a matrix of

categories using an Excel spreadsheet and juxtaposed all interview data for easier

identification of replications and patterns between and among data sets. Parallel with

Level 3 pattern matching, I reviewed all data for ecological theory evidence as I engaged

an ecological systems lens, so that my purview retained a theoretical perspective. For

instance, the participant Peter was influenced by his wife's arguments and his love for

her, so he began to consider the benefits of adoption. In the lingo of ecological systems

theory, this dynamic occurred at the level of the microsystem, the immediate environment

in which the organism lives and operates on a consistent basis (Bronfenbrenner & Evans,

2000). Then there are wider spheres of influence including the adoption agencies at work.

This is the level of the exosystem, outside of Peter's influence and existing totally apart

from him, however influential in his final decision about completing an adoption. The

regulations and protocols to which all adoption agencies are beholden would represent

the macrosystem. This ecological systems perspective will inform further discussion and

interpretation of results in Chapter 5.

At Level 4 of my analysis, I assimilated common concepts and sought to make

analytic generalizations where relevant. At this level, I addressed apparent theoretical

contradictions and proposed competing ways of viewing the data. Level 4 considerations

are reported in Chapter 5.

Targeted Literature Review

During the data collection phase, I had identified verbatim and summarized

participant comments on adoption perceptions and influences found in current scholarly

research, where either Blacks, heterosexual men, or involuntarily childless men, were the study participants. I had placed these comments within the framework of the document review spreadsheet. During the data analysis phase, I populated the document review spreadsheet columns particularly relevant to data analysis. Those columns are: (a) application of ecological systems theory to the data (with accompanying rationale), (b) conceptual coding of participant perceptions and influences (including indication of where I concurred with the author's coding), (c) identifying themes, (d) divergences, and, (e) theoretical generalizations.

The entire data analysis sequence for this targeted literature review was as follows. I reviewed the specific interview question (if included) or context for each unit of data, to understand the basis for each participant's comment. Next, I reviewed each verbatim or summarized participant comment that revealed participant perceptions and/or influences in adoption decision-making. I then reviewed that researcher's assigned themes and conclusions, following which I contextually evaluated each data unit through an ecological systems lens. Then, I conceptually coded the perceptions and influences communicated by the data, and compared with the author's assigned themes.

Subsequently, I reviewed my assigned codes for themes and patterns. I repeated this sequence within and across all studies that evidenced relevance to this study. Then I entered all themes and patterns into a matrix of broad categories using an Excel spreadsheet, as a convenient way to aid in summarizing of my findings. Then I compared this coding matrix spreadsheet with the coding matrix spreadsheet from the interviewee groups, using two different computer screens simultaneously, while searching out

common themes and divergences. I reviewed divergences while considering if and what optional theoretical explanations might better explain the research results. I did not use a computer-assisted document analysis program for the documents analysis stage, as an Excel spreadsheet provided ample flexibility and portability to manipulate the data as described above.

Codes, Categories and Themes

To align all data with my three research questions, I sequenced data analysis to flow from codes to themes to one of three broad categories. Those categories are adoption perceptions (RQ 1), childlessness and adoption consideration experiences (RQ 2), and adoption consideration influences (RQ 3).

I formulated codes by a combination of initial coding and a priori codes that are recurrent in childlessness and adoption studies. Examples of a priori codes are shame, guilt, emotional pain, disagreement, and questioned manhood. All a priori codes were replicated in the data I collected.

I also identified several themes and subthemes during data analysis. For instance, female partner as adoption discussion initiator and prime mover, male silence, and male procrastination were each coded and themed across transcripts as patterns of the adoption experience among study participants. In a subsequent reiteration, I settled on each of those concepts as subthemes of gender nuances in the adoption decision-making journey. The theme of social pressure represented data that reflected participants' experiences of direct or indirect efforts by others to influence participants' perceptions, views, or choices concerning biological childlessness or adoption. One example is Adam's experience of

being accosted by another person with, "You're a Black guy, or you're a male, you have a wife. Why you don't have any kids?" On the other hand, the theme of social and cultural expectations represented participants' engrained perceptions over time of what is required, expected, or assumed by the culture or society in which they existed.

I folded the preliminary theme of major adoption considerations into barriers to adoption. I reconfigured the themes of social support and perceived strengths as subthemes of coping with childlessness. For instance, four participants referenced their religious faith as strengths, and two others referenced social supports as strategic allies in their childlessness. Under the Results subsection, all identified themes will be addressed at length in relation to the three research questions.

Discrepant Cases

Where discrepant cases arose in analyzing the data from primary participants, I addressed the discrepancy within the framework of the related theme. For instance, Harvey's reported experience of no social pressure was discussed alongside of, and in comparison to, the experiences of other participants. Among the adoption professionals, where one professional shared an unendorsed perception of influences impacting on the primary study population, that perception was themed under *divergent influences* and discussed. Moreover, I discussed the hesitancy of Professional 1 to make generalizations concerning the primary research demographic, in contrast to Professionals 2 and 3 who held perceptions of typical attitudes and challenges for the study population. Where the targeted literature review produced discrepant findings in relation to data for the primary participants, such findings are discussed under *Themes divergent from the primary*

participants (Group A) Study. Such themes include mistrust of the adoption system, and adoption as a long and drawn out process. However, the latter theme was highlighted as an adoption barrier because it triangulated with unanimous findings from the adoption professionals' participant group.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the extent to which a study manifests evidence of rigor (Cope, 2014). Qualitative research, in general, and particularly case study, come under scrutiny from quantitative researchers who prioritize objectivity (Yin, 2014). To meet the demands of scientific rigor, qualitative experts cite the need for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004).

Credibility in qualitative research is analogous to internal validity in quantitative inquiry (Stewart, Gapp, & Harwood, 2017), and has to do with accuracy of data, and trustworthiness of a researcher's procedures, measures, and findings (Yin, 2014). Triangulation of data collection methods and data analysis are significant steps toward credibility. As previously outlined, data has been collected from two participant groups: the primary participants, and adoption professionals. I also employed current verbatim and/or summarized adoption perception comments from participants in published research. I compared participant comments gathered from this study with participant comments found in targeted data in scholarly research.

I also conducted member checking, in that I contacted three participants after the face-to-face interview for clarification on responses given, where vital information was missed, or where the recording was distorted. Member checking was also implemented

through communicating researcher findings with participants, and courting feedback from them. Another vital aspect of the credibility process was memo writing. I took notes throughout the process that allowed me to recall observations, dialogue, and my own thoughts. Therefore, I derived multiple nuances and increased triangulation. Finally, I employed a peer reviewer to scrutinize my data, analysis and findings to evaluate for credibility.

Transferability is the qualitative counterpart of quantitative research's external validity or generalizability. This is the extent to which study findings could be generalized outside of the study group (see El Hussein, Jakubec, & Osuji, 2015). Whereas qualitative research is non-generalizable, due mainly to non-random sampling, relatively small sample size, and use of subjective data, it is considered important for the qualitative researcher to provide adequate information concerning study design. This would include precise information on sample demographics, sample size, sample exclusions, and stakeholders. Those elements are clearly outlined in my data collection section in this chapter.

Dependability is synonymous with reliability. Is this study replicable? The researcher is to render a clear step by step outline of procedures that can be easily replicated by another researcher (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). I have sought to outline my study procedure in great detail in Chapter 3.

Confirmability has to do with objectivity, which is not the stated aim of qualitative research. However, confirmability is mainly concerned with researcher disclosures of self-interest, bias, and influences that impacted his research viewpoint

and/or preferences (Dunn, Margaritis, & Anderson, 2017). Whereas I had initially determined to share with participants my own experience of childlessness and adoption, the IRB mandated that I maintain the singular positionality of researcher, to avoid being regarded by clients as an expert on what I was researching. However, two of the study participants had been my parishioners 3 years before, when I worked elsewhere. They, therefore, would most likely have known that I had adopted my now 9-year-old son.

I also found it challenging at times during interview sessions to maintain objectivity. This was particularly true during my interview with Caleb. When he shared his own infertility issue, which was similar to what I had experienced, his expressed struggles stirred up some emotional reactivity within me, and might have contributed to my failure to follow up on some important cues to ask relevant follow-up questions. Moreover, after completing another interview 3 days later, during which the participant seemed in anguish over his childlessness, I felt so emotionally drained that I memoed the following, "I feel oppressed emotionally and drained by these last two interviews of painful childlessness experiences. I want it to end."

A matrix of categories, themes, and subthemes derived from all data sources is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Matrix of Categories and Themes

CATEGORY ONE	ADOPTION PERCEPTIONS
	Data Sources

Group A THEMES	Group A SUB-THEMES	Targeted Lit Review THEMES	Group B THEMES
1. Making Meaning of Adoption	1a. Altruism	Altruism	Altruism
	1b. Personal or Partner Need	Personal or Partner Need	Personal or Partner Need
2. Social & Cultural Expectations			Family Tradition/Culture
3. Adoption Barriers	3a. Financial Cost	Financial Cost	Financial Cost
	3b. Holding out Hope for Pregnancy	Holding out Hope for Pregnancy	Holding out Hope for Pregnancy
	3c. Adoption Stigma	Adoption Stigma	
	3d. Adoption as Third Option	Last Resort	Last Resort
	3e. Fear of Adoptee Liabilities	Fear of Adoptee Liabilities	
	3f. Cultural Legitimacy of Informal Adoption		Cultural Legitimacy of Informal Adoption
		Long & Drawn-out Process	Long & Drawn-out Process
		Systemic & Relational Issues	Systemic & Relational Issues

CATEGORY TWO	**CHILDLESSNESS & ADOPTION CONSIDERATION EXPERIENCES**
	Data Sources

Group A **THEMES**	Group A **SUB-THEMES**	Targeted Lit Review **THEMES**	Group B **THEMES**
4. Experiences of Social Pressure	4a. Family Boundaries		
	4b. Belittling and Insensitive Comments	Belittling and Insensitive Comments	
	4c. Manhood under Scrutiny	Not a Real Man	
	4d. Dealing with Scrutiny	Avoidance	
	4e. Sensitivity toward the Female Partner's unique Distress	Sensitivity toward the Female Partner's unique Distress	Sensitivity toward the Female Partner's unique Distress
5. Coping with Childlessness	5a. Strength or Minimization? -5a 1. "It does not bother me much"	Male Strength/Partner Support	Male support
	5b. Social Support	Social Support	Lacking Support
	5c. Fate or Faith Rationalization	Fate or Faith	Faith
	5d. Keeping Busy	Keeping Busy	
	5e. Emotional Distress -5e 1. Overt Expression -5e 2. Reported as Past Experience -5e 3. Deflecting attention to Partner's Emotional Distress	Emotional Distress Overt Expression Deflecting attention to	Emotional Distress

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Group A THEMES	Group A SUB-THEMES	Targeted Lit Review THEMES	Group B THEMES
		Partner's Emotional Distress	
	5f. Informal Kinship Care as Distraction	Informal Kinship Care	Informal Kinship Care as Distraction
6. Gender Nuances in the Adoption Decision-making Journey	6a. Couple Difficulty in Resolving Adoption Differences		
	6b. Female Partner as Initiator & Prime Mover	Female Partner as Initiator & Prime Mover	Female Partner as Initiator & Prime Mover
	6c. Male Silence, Inaction, or Procrastination	Male Inaction or Procrastination	Male Silence
	6d. Pragmatism Vs Desire		Pragmatism Vs Desire
	6e. Self-Assigned Male Roles	Self-Assigned Male Roles	Self-Assigned Male Roles

CATEGORY THREE	ADOPTION CONSIDERATION INFLUENCES		
	Data Sources		
Group A **THEMES**	Group A **SUB-THEMES**	Targeted Lit Review **THEMES**	Group B **THEMES**
7. Positive Influences	7a. Needy Children	Altruism	
	7b. Role Models		Role Models
	7c. Religious Faith	Religious Faith	Religious Faith

	7d. Black Immigrant International Adoption Option	Black Immigrant International Adoption Option
	7e. Legacy Concerns	Legacy Concerns
8. Negative Stereotypes & Competing Influences		Negative Stereotypes & Competing Influences
	Mistrust of Adoption Agents & System	Issues with Agencies and Worker

Results

Results from the three data sources are presented in three separate sections: primary participants (Group A), adoption professionals (Group B), and verbatim and summarized participant comments located in a targeted review of the literature. In all three sections, I categorized themes under adoption perceptions, childlessness and adoption consideration experiences, and adoption consideration influences, in line with the three related research questions. The three research questions provided the platform for identifying and streamlining major themes and patterns found in the data.

Primary Participants

On occasions, participants did not respond directly to the question at hand, but were focused on expressing their views or feelings. Sometimes, I chose not to redirect the

interviewee, allowing him to share and not feel too heavily managed. As it often turned out, participants answered one question while responding to another. Additionally, I interpreted participant perceptions, experiences, and influences throughout the transcribed file.

Adoption Perceptions

RQ 1: What are the perceptions of Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship considering adoption?

I identified multiple perception-related themes. Most themes had accompanying subthemes which further illuminated the umbrella theme while grounding each thematic concept in the varied responses of the study participants. Major perception-related themes unearthed from a careful study of each transcript were: making meaning of adoption, social and cultural expectations, and adoption barriers.

Making meaning of adoption. I pointedly asked participants to explain what adoption meant to them. This question was not meant to explore their intent to adopt, but to discover how they viewed adoption in principle. In some circumstances, participants rendered their perceptions of adoption in other comments apart from their response to the prearranged question. Participants rationalized the value of adoption in terms of altruism and satisfying a personal or partner need.

Adoption as altruism. All participants, including those who expressed personal reservations about pursuing adoptive parenting rendered positive impressions of adoption in general. Most viewed adoption partly in altruistic terms, expressing caring sentiments toward the need of adoptees.

Adam: Adoption means…choosing a child that you can take care of, or come live with you to love, to raise. That's basically in a nutshell…But the parties have to want or be committed to do it.

Caleb: Adoption is caring. Adoption is care for others. You see a need out there, that kids are in need, and if you have a caring heart and you see that you can...I believe in adoptions and I believe that it means, it means a lot…Giving back.

Harvey: Adoption means for parents who can't have children through the natural ways, or through in vitro, they may say, "I want a child so badly, that I will look for a child who needs that parental support." That's one aspect of it. But then adoption is also having a kid in a bad situation who needs that parental support.

Peter: I think of it as a huge responsibility but a joy. As I said before, you are being put in a position where you are caring for a life, so that's a huge responsibility. But at the same time, it's a joy to watch that child grow up to be involved, to grow.

Adoption to satisfy personal or partner need. As evidenced by Harvey's response above, altruism was not the only perceived motivation for adoption. Setbacks in childbearing rendered adoption consideration a likelier step for such couples in their quest to resolve their personal or partner's desire for a child.

Terry: You know I wish I could have a little boy when I'm going out, especially when I am going out to some of those functions; social functions….When I move on, when I get old, and if the Lord delay his coming, if I, you know, if I die, I will love to have somebody to carry on the legacy. The legacy of some of the things

that I have done, and, some of the family achievement and heritage to carry on the

family lineage and heritage.

William: I would be happy that we have somebody in my life.

Caleb: I'm the one without child, 'cause my wife, she has kids. So, more likely,

I'm the one who 'd bring the issue up, because, like I was saying, I'm the one that's

feeling less of a man in the image of friends and follies that I associate with, so it

impacts me to want the child; look for a namesake, as we put it.

Social and cultural expectations. Native African American participants reported

varying perceptions about social and cultural expectations. Adam said there were

expectations of biological childhood for a Black male who had a wife, and that

childlessness was either a signal that there's "something wrong with you," or that you are

"selfish" in not wanting kids. "It's a whole lot of expectations." On the other hand,

Harvey said that being without child is socially acceptable.

Harvey: And I think it has just become a pretty common thing that, listen, it's a

choice that people make, and if they choose not to have children, everybody

seems to be fine with that.

Participants with Caribbean roots presented overwhelming social expectations of

child bearing. Terry, a Haitian immigrant, said:

From a cultural standpoint, it is expected in my culture that it's important to have

a male child to carry the heritage. That is very important in my culture. Somebody

to carry on the legacy of the family, the heritage of the family.

English-speaking participants with Caribbean roots all communicated strong social and cultural expectations of biological fathering of a child. Expressing exasperation over the weight of those expectations, Peter exclaimed: "Coming from a Caribbean background; Dear God, man!" Bakari emphasized the high expectations of biological parenting to which he and his wife were subjected, succinctly explaining it with, "Especially with the two of us coming from West Indian [Caribbean] backgrounds."

> Caleb: As a male, Black man, especially from the Caribbean, it's like a male ego image has always been there that, you know, you have to have a child to be a man, so that has been portrayed, especially for our Caribbean men, you know. So, at times I, in the past, you know, I feel inferior, as less of a man. Especially when you're around your other friends, and the boys talking about their kids.

Adoption barriers. Participants recited numerous issues, with varying levels of significance, that served as deterrents to deciding on adopting, including financial cost, holding out hope for a pregnancy, adoption stigma, adoption as the third option, fear of adoptee genetic and environmental liabilities, and cultural legitimacy of informal adoption/kinship care.

Financial cost. Peter, William, Terry and Bakari all viewed costs as a major consideration in deciding to adopt.

> Bakari: And I have a friend of mine who, she and her husband have really gone full steam ahead with adoption. And one of the things she is constantly journaling about is the exorbitant cost to paperwork through to...I think the child they are looking to adopt is overseas and I haven't done much extensive research into cost,

but that's one thing that I keep hearing…

Peter: There's a couple. Financial stability. More than a couple. There's a lot. But I guess it's more of your mind trying to figure out, I don't want to say, if you're capable. But your mind kinda delves into a number of places. How is this going to work? How is everything going to be situated? What it's going to cost?

William: All I'm trying to do now is to be financially stable. That's the main thing; financial. I did think about adoption, back then, but then I just like say, I'm willing to adopt but right now I got to, you know, kinda put that aside for a moment to start focusing on rebuilding myself again.

Terry: Also, there is a financial aspect, because it's more costly. Because international adoption is more costly than domestic adoption, you know. For now you're talking about international costs and expenses. The expenses are more to adopt, when you adopt international versus local. Once you have a child, every thing, the dynamics in the family will change, there is more financial need, there is more investment.

Holding out hope for a pregnancy. Although Terry and his wife, married for 12 years, had tried ART and briefly engaged in the required home study for prospective adoptive families, he had not given up hope in natural conception. He mused soberly about *"if the Lord gives us a natural birth."* Bakari, Peter, and Adam were young adults, each married for between 5 to 8 years, and were each at a different stage, along with their partners, of researching ART, while still hoping and praying for a natural conception.

Peter: And it's more for us a thing of like where does your faith lie. Because, I feel like, a lot of times, we forget God's value, and his actual Word, because we, we put... we box a man in that can't be boxed. We put him in these limitations and create… and the fact that we are here is a testimony, period. You know? So, it's like, "Are you going to half step, or you just going to fully trust?"

Adam: But, I mean, from here now, like I said, it's still a chance that she can have a child, and in the end, like I told her...if she's not able to have a child, like I told her, it's not going to make me love her any less.

Bakari: In passing we have had conversations that in the event that, you know, natural conception was not available, or was impossible on either end, we could always look into it [adoption]. Obviously with modern science now, you have in vitro, you have surrogates, you have all these other options, outside of it…

Adoption stigma. Participants recited various negative connotations and unhealthy feelings surrounding adoption that they, their partner, or associate had experienced, or had noted as a social or cultural phenomenon. To Bakari, his wife saw adoption as an admission of failure. Harvey described it as the third option, and Adam could not get past the notion that "in the end, you still did not birth the child." Caleb, Terry, Peter, and Bakari all noted the cultural Caribbean expectation of biological childhood as a test of manhood. Hence, when Peter hinted that he and his wife would likely begin the adoption process within the next year, he added a comment that showed he was anticipating negative reaction from onlookers, "From the outside, I will deal with that foolishness that may come, but I think it will be fine."

Bakari: I would anticipate myself, because in the time of knowing my wife, both from courtship to now, I know natural childbirth, or carrying the child is something that she really wants to do. And though she has not outright said this, I feel if adoption was the last resort, she might almost feel like she's failed as a woman.

Adam: When I thought about adoption before I was married, I always would see stuff, like maybe TV or hear about certain things, that someone would give the baby up for adoption, but they would want the baby back...cause it's always, like it's always going to be the underlining [sic] thing that in the end you still didn't birth the child, so you may have the rights right now but, I just felt conflict. Maybe that's why I never thought about adoption.

Adoption as the third option. Most participants described adoption as either a last option or non-option for acquiring a child. Terry reported having tried ART before resorting to the adoption route. Bakari, Caleb, Peter, and Adam all shared that they and their partner had researched some form of ART or artificial insemination. Bakari and his wife appeared to be leaning toward ART as the first alternative, and Caleb indicated that money issues derailed their consideration of ART.

Harvey: Yea, I think that's kind of the third option in the conversation…You talk about trying to do it naturally, and you talk about in vitro, and I think adoption just becomes like a far third.

Caleb: Society will accept it [an adoptee] after a while and embrace it. But at first, especially me as a Jamaican male, you're still looked upon to seed of your seed, flesh of your flesh, that's still, that is still an expectation.

Bakari: I would anticipate myself, because in the time of knowing my wife, both from courtship to now, I know natural childbirth, or carrying the child, is something that she really wants to do; and though she has not outright said this, I feel if adoption was the last resort, she might almost feel like she's failed as a woman.

Fear of adoptee genetic and environmental liabilities. Terry and Peter expressed the need to know the child's parental background and other influences impacting the child*.*

Terry*:* These are some of the concerns, like I said, parental background, of the adoptee. We will like to know about the parent of that child and the family. At least, we will like to have some background. Give some brief background about who the parents.

Peter: You have to consider a number of things, when you're going into adoption. It's not that "O this is a beautiful little child, and we're going to raise them, and take care of them." You don't know the backstory, what their parents did, what their parents' parents did, you know, how they'd been raised, what the environment, you know, has been like.

Cultural legitimacy of informal adoption/kinship care. Initially, Peter did not see himself as having a childless experience, even if it was biologically true, because his wife's nephews spent most of their time in the home.

> Peter: I am technically the father. I'm the person that disciplines them, takes care of them, you know, I'm the protector. I won't say a provider. Well actually, to some extent, that as well. So, having those kids almost in my life from the time that… even before my wife and I got married.

> Adam: But being around my family, I have a lot of nieces and nephews. So, it's not like we're alone, or designated on a certain place where there's nobody around. So that could be much what gives me comfort.

> Bakari: Seeing we don't have children right now, [we] are very close to our niece and nephews.

Childlessness and Adoption Consideration Experiences

RQ 2: What are the experiences of Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship in which adopting is under consideration?

Several common themes were identified across interviews, including experiences of social pressure, coping with childlessness, and gender nuances in the adoption decision-making journey

Experiences of social pressure. The level of social pressure experienced by participants and their partners varied mainly based on the boundary culture inherent in the particular family. The following subthemes were identified: family boundaries,

belittling or insensitive comments, manhood under scrutiny, dealing with scrutiny, and sensitivity toward the female partner's unique distress.

Family boundaries. Caleb said that the primary source of social pressure in matters of childlessness was his family. "They would say, 'You don't have a child yet? Who you going to leave your inheritance for?'" Harvey, one of the three African American participants with no Caribbean background, reported that his family respected his autonomy and privacy, and never once asked about children. He said that for him social pressure was non-existent. "Yea, there hasn't been any scrutiny, honestly. Our parents have been great, our family members have been great." The contrasting account of Adam, another African American participant, suggested that family boundary issues can be more family than ethnically related:

> Adam: Yes! It's a whole lot of expectation that come from friends, family 'You're a Black guy, or you're a male, you have a wife. Why you don't have any kids?'
>
> Peter: It's really just been like the family. That's been the main thing as far as the social experience. From my family. But society, outside, not too much really has been directed in that area. I mean, you hear things, you hear conversations or on the TV, but not really directed at me. It's mainly been the family, especially when you get around.

Some participants with Caribbean roots thought that their families' profound boundary issues may have to do with their Caribbean upbringing and cultural expectations.

Peter: But, you know, my family, Caribbean people out there: "When you, when you're having children? Wha' you waiting for? Wha' you're shooting blanks?" You know, like man, they are terrible…. Some people think that because they know you or they are in direct line with your family, there is...I don't want to say there is respect lost, but they just think they can say anything to you and you're supposed to be okay. Especially with, unfortunately, the older Caribbean generation.

Although Terry reported awareness of the entrenched Caribbean expectation of biological parenting, he said that his family did not place any direct pressure on him, but that they respected his boundaries and privacy. "I don't feel they put any pressure on me, or I don't feel the fact that I don't have a child, or children. I don't feel like I'm at a disadvantage."

Belittling or insensitive comments. An aspect of the social pressure reported by some participants was the crude or insensitive language that accompanied the inquiry. Inquirers asked Peter if he was "shooting blanks," and teased Adam with, "Is it broke?"

Adam: Sometimes, they don't say, "Hi." They'll see you, "Where your kid?"…

Adam: The most insensitive comment? Like, "Is something wrong with you? Is it broke?" I got that from men and women.

Manhood under scrutiny. Caleb said, "You know, you have to have a child to be a man, so that has been portrayed, especially for our Caribbean men." When I asked Bakari what societal issues he thought men faced without children, there was a distinct sigh before he gathered himself.

Bakari: Societally, you can look at it as well, I guess, from a male side, that you're not really a man, because you're not….One of the chief responsibilities for men in society is to bread-win and procreate.

Dealing with scrutiny. Caleb's approach to unwanted scrutiny was avoidance, and Adam's was to either ignore the person or laugh along with them, even when feeling irritated. Peter's approach was to give a smart answer that would embarrass the other person.

Adam: And it's the people that I know, so sometimes you could take it as, you know, it's just a joke, but at times you're like, "Huh!"… To be honest, maybe if I feel even though they're not being malicious, if it's coming from a person I don't really have a relationship with, I'll tend to push away, or we won't have many conversations in depth from that person.

Caleb: There was a person who I hadn't seen in a long time, you know, came to church and visit. And you know, when the conversation of your kids come up, you know, I tended to back away, you know. I don't want to get into that.

Peter: And see, I'm the person though, while I'm respectful, I also know how to handle things with people who are ignorant. So, I'm the type of person that will turn it around, or the type of person that will kind of shut it down. I'm not for that long talking. "What's going on?" (*talking in low tone, mimicking an inquisitive person*). "Are you okay? La La La. I'm like, "I'm fine. Is there something that you can do for me?" You know, I bring it to a point where...and they always just like..."Wait, what are you saying?" I was like, "Exactly. Alright, so when it

happens, I will call you, I will let you know. Or, even better, I will put it on Facebook, cause you love to live there."

Sensitivity toward the female partner's unique distress. Many participants opined that the female partner experienced more social pressure and harassment concerning childlessness than they themselves were. These participants expressed empathy in diverse ways, including Peter who informed me that when persons grill his wife over her reproductive status, he would run toward her and "shut it down."

> Bakari: So, I find it at least in our culture, more of that shift falls on the women than it does on the men…I personally haven't felt a lot of that pressure, whereas, I've seen my wife deal with a lot of that. That's something we've discussed on numerous occasions.

> Terry: I feel that my wife, based on what she said, based on how, based on her encounter with others, based on her interaction with others, I feel that sometimes she feels, it seems to me based on my observation, that she feels that she is missing out. When she's around her relatives, my siblings, my sisters, and her friends who have kids, I think, I see that that affects her, that has a negative impact on her more than me.

> Peter: I feel it's kind of the same, but I feel it's way harder for them… Man! (*Sighs*). And my wife, because my wife, my wife goes through it. She's told me multiple times. I've actually been there to experience it too. And she knows the way I am, because I am that quick; run to her and, "What? What'd you...?" And shut it down.

Coping with childlessness. Participants described their coping experience in diverse ways. Some articulated their deep feelings, and some revealed themselves unconsciously through non-verbal cues. Some made conscious effort to communicate successful coping. They used expressions that appeared to reflect stoicism, male strength, minimization or denial of hurt or disappointment. Additionally, they rationalized their childlessness as a consequence of fate or God's plan.

*Male strength, or minimization***?** Harvey, Adam, Terry, and Peter all gave assurances that they had been dealing well with their childlessness. When they expressed delicate feelings toward their childlessness, they qualified their emotions in mitigating terms, as if careful to signal their emotional control. For Harvey, childlessness "hasn't been too bad." Peter said that with him, "there's not too much [emotion]". Terry said, "It does not bother me much." These four participants were very expressive in communicating their emotional strength, but often in comparison with their partner's comparative fragility.

> Adam: It's...it's not challenging but it's one of those things where, I guess, when you have trouble having [children], or you think there's something going wrong, it's more as you try not to be so sad about it, for my wife…Yeah, when I feel, if she feels bad about it, I feel as though I have to, I still have to remain a little stronger, or a little optimistic about it.
>
> Harvey: It doesn't bother me. And so, looking back on it now, I say: "Not having children, I'm totally fine with it…If I would have had children, I think I would be happy. I'm very happy now without children, right, so I don't think it has impacted

me in any way.

Peter: I would say, my response, as I said before, isn't, there's not too much...I'm the type of person that is, I won't say cut and dry, but at the same time, I have an understanding of how things work. And so for me, I'm not going to beat myself up, or stress myself out over something I know is not my decision or my choice…

Terry: It does not bother me much as my wife but there are times, you know I wish I could have a little boy when I'm going out, especially when I am going out to some of those functions, social functions, reception maybe, I could have a little boy to mentor, a little guy to mentor, with me, so it's not like a burden but every now and then I…I say well it probably would have been okay to have a little boy or a little girl...but it doesn't, I'm not depressed or feeling sad, because I don't have child, but, I know sometimes my wife does.

"*It does not bother me much*." *Bother* was one of the more common terms among participants for communicating their emotions surrounding childlessness. Concerning how he was coping with childlessness, Terry said, "It does not bother me much as, you know, my wife," and Harvey said, curtly, "It does not bother me." Caleb said, "I used to, used to; it bothers me a lot…" Peter: "Not having my own isn't, honestly isn't a constant bother for me."

Social support. The experience of, and dependence on, social support varied broadly among participants. Peter did not think he needed a support system because his nephews-in-law "filled the void." Adam had two buddies with whom he shared his childlessness issues, and Terry similarly had two persons in whom he confided. William

simply said, "No one right now." Caleb was more articulate in admitting that he had no social support, and Bakari said it was himself and his wife "against the world."

> Caleb: I most likely internalize it, keep to myself, and just move on. You know, there's not really anyone that I sit down and talk to. Because it's a very thin margin of someone to be like myself that I... It's rare you could find someone of the same situation that I'm in... you know, that can relate. For most males are father to some child, you know.

> Bakari: Sometimes it's just the two of us against, I should say, against the world. Because a lot of our friends are married with children. And you know there's always, for me personally, I ...I prefer to, you know, discuss certain things me and her, as opposed to seeking the opinion and insight from every Dick, Tom and Harry.

> ***Fate or Faith Rationalization.*** Participants explained their condition of childlessness from a religious viewpoint that God was in charge and had the last word, and also that what was meant to happen will happen. This attitude variously influenced their attitudes to other assisted reproductive interventions and display of emotions throughout the process.

> Adam: And I shared with her, I mean, I was like "I never really thought about it, or it never crossed my mind to adopt. I feel as though, maybe if we weren't able to have a child, it's just meant to be." That was really my take on it. My honest take.

> Harvey: With the luxury of hindsight, I can look back and say, you know there could have been a lot of challenges in having children. Right? So, God leads us

into, you know, the direction he wants us to go, so I trust whatever direction he has for me, and so looking back on it now, I say: "Not having children, I'm totally fine with it…So I have no ill feelings toward my wife about it; I have no ill feelings that "God, why did you do this to me? I should have had children."

Peter: [We] definitely discussed…insemination. But tried anything? I haven't tried any medical routes or anything of that nature. But, you know, that has definitely been discussed and thought about. And it's more for us a thing of like where does your faith lie. Because, I feel like, a lot of times, we forget God's value, and his actual Word….So, it's like, 'Are you going to half step, or you just going to fully trust? 'Cause he does what he wants. You know? He does what he wants. And I think a lot of people, like, forget that.

Terry: Number one, I believe in the Creator. I believe my faith in God dictates a lot of my mental and psychological disposition. What I'm saying is that my faith in God, my belief in the Scripture helps me to accept and to be content with whatever that I am facing. So. I will say my religious conviction. And my understanding of God's sovereignty. That God is sovereign, and He is omniscient and omnipotent. My awareness of these things pretty much provides the inner fortitude, the strength to not only carry on, but to accept life as it comes. And to accept the reality as it is.

Caleb: A closer relationship with God is what keeps me going, you know… that is what keeps me going and also takes my mind off "woe is me", or, you know, I

don't have, you know. Because God is there, and God doesn't make mistakes and

just about the mindset of "show me the way; order my steps, dear Lord."

Keeping busy. Bakari and Caleb both said that they kept busy as a means of

coping with childlessness; Bakari with volunteer work at his church ("that's kinda been it

for me...the keeping busy within the context of the church"); and Caleb with making a

living ("I find stuff to do to keep me busy, so I don't sit around, to torture my mind").

Peter suggested that involvement with his nephews distracted him from the reality of

biological childlessness. "They literally like filled the void. Like almost completely."

Experiences of emotional distress. Some participants overtly displayed or

expressed emotional distress in the present. Others reported that their emotional distress

was a past experience in the earlier stages when they first became aware of the gravity of

the fertility issue.

Overt expression. William and Caleb, whose wives had children prior to their

present union, each presented himself as the partner with the emotional hurt, and

displayed their emotional distress in verbal and non-verbal ways. William appeared to be

in emotional pain, as he looked crestfallen and his voice broke, while expressing his deep

regret at not having a child. However, he appeared unable to find feeling words to share

his emotions. In Caleb's case, the pain in his tone and pauses were palpable. His voice

broke during the interview as he paused during a response. Twice, Bakari sighed deeply

before responding to questions concerning social pressure for childless men. When asked

at what times he feels the need for a child, Adam sighed deeply, grew silent, then

responded. Asked how important it was for him to have children, Peter's chest heaved,

and he took a deep, long breath before responding.

> Peter: (*heaves chest; takes deep breath*) Hmmm. Man, everything is going to tie
>
> right back into having those boys [his nephews-in-law] …. Just having them
>
> around, it changes a lot…. As I said before, that they are there, you know, it
>
> changes a lot, it's taken out a lot, it's covered a lot, you know what I mean?
>
> Caleb: For me, the experience of not having a child... [*silence, then painful shrill*]
>
> to put it in …straightforward talk here, has not been a comfortable feeling…. I
>
> used to, used to; it bothers me a lot, and sometimes causes conflict between me
>
> and my wife, at times when I bring up the issue.

Reported as past experience. Adam, Caleb, and Terry indicated that their

emotional distress was primarily in the past.

> Adam: I felt sad about it earlier maybe in the relationship. But it does not make
>
> me as sad anymore.
>
> Terry: We tried one cycle of IVF actually…and, you know, at first I was
>
> somewhat sad, temporarily, but you know, it faded away quickly within weeks,
>
> within a couple weeks.
>
> Caleb: So, I've come to accept life for what it is, and, you know, do not let that
>
> really impact me as it used to in the past.

Deflecting attention to partner's emotional and social distress. Some appeared

more articulate or forthcoming in divulging their partner's feelings than theirs, and some,

more than others, communicated empathy for their hurting partner, whereas others

seemed to suggest that their partner's emotional reactions caused them (participants) deep pain. Adam, Peter, and Terry reported that their partner's emotional distress was more pronounced than theirs.

Adam: So in order for both of us not to feel bad, it sorta like I have to not, you know, be as sad, 'cause it will be like, maybe she will think it's all her fault…

Adam: She openly looks sadder, cause she's more emotional in my eyes. Even as sometimes when I think she's not sad, I think she's sad. Or, she will say she's not sad, I could see something.

Terry: It does not bother me much as my wife… And I don't feel they [his siblings] put any pressure on me… I don't feel like I'm at a disadvantage, whereas I feel that my wife, based on what [she] said… based on her encounter with others, based on her interaction with others, I feel that sometimes she feels, it seems to me based on my observation, that she feels that she is missing out.

Peter: I'm not going to beat myself up, or stress myself out over something I know is not my decision or my choice, you know? But, being that women are more emotional, not all of them, but are more emotional, created in that nature, I would say for her it is completely different. It's something that she holds to her heart, something that she may not fully express all the time, but I know, you know, I know how, how her mind is, and how she operates with her emotions.

Informal Kinship Care as Distraction. Three of the participants reported healthy, consistent engagement with nephews and/or nieces as significant aspects of their coping regimen as they dealt with childlessness.

Peter: So, I kind of have the experience of not having a direct child of my own, but those six boys are pretty much my kids… because like I said, everything that you would experience with a child of your own, I have with them.

Adam: Being around my family, I have a lot of nieces and nephews. So, it's not like we're alone, or designated [sic] on a certain place where there's nobody around. So, it, that could be much what gives me comfort.

Bakari: And both of us seeing we don't have children right now are very close to our niece and nephews.

Gender Nuances in the adoption decision-making journey. I noted a cluster of dysfunctional routines that complicated adoption discussions between the participants and their partners. Other subthemes identified were: couple difficulty in resolving adoption differences; female partner as initiator and prime mover; male silence, inaction or procrastination; pragmatism versus desire; and, self-assigned male roles.

Couple difficulty in resolving adoption differences. Most participants reported adoption discussions in passing, or one brief discussion cautiously raised by one partner with limited or guarded engagement by the other. In these instances, there seemed to be a pattern of assumptions about the other person's views after a single brief discussion. Bakari said, "We've never had full blown adoption discussions," yet he ventured to assume that "though she has not outright said this, I feel if adoption was the last resort, she might almost feel like she's failed as a woman." Adam too, was sketchy about his wife's true feelings. He felt she was "sorta in agreeance" with his opinion that if they did not conceive then it was "meant to be." William said his wife suggested they do an

adoption and all he said was, "Okay." To the question of whether his wife could tell

whether he was interested or not, he simply answered, "I dunno."

> Caleb: I think my approach was on that at first [foster care]. "We should consider
>
> fostering, you know, because at this present time, we're pretty much empty
>
> nested." …I brought that up...but, I don't think…It probably just blow over, you
>
> know. It wasn't like a follow up on it and seriously sit and talk about it… I really
>
> do not know how strongly she feels, you know, versus how I would feel about
>
> that because we have not really had that straight talk, so to speak.
>
> Terry: She would like for us to go forward. I think she is more motivated to go
>
> forward fully than I. Sometimes I'm motivated, sometimes I'm not, sometimes I'm
>
> interested, sometimes I'm not. But her, I think she is always...
>
> Adam: I don't know, it hasn't reached far, because when we briefly discussed it, it
>
> was like "how do you feel about it?" And, you know, it was like, "Why do you
>
> ask?" It was more an answer like, "I dunno, just, just outta conversation." And I
>
> shared with her, I mean, I was like " I never really thought about it, or it never
>
> crossed my mind to adopt. I feel as though, maybe if we weren't able to have a
>
> child, it's just meant to be." That was really my take on it. My honest take.
>
> Interviewer (I): *What do you remember as her take on it*?
>
> Adam: Her take on it was basically like, "Ok, I could understand that. And I sorta
>
> agree the same way. " Like I feel, it was so like we were on the same page; it was
>
> no rebuttal or different type of question like "Well what if, it's this." It was sorta
>
> in agreeance [sic].

[Interviewer to William]:

I: *Now, is that something you and your spouse have discussed together, and if so, who is the one who brought it up*?

William: My wife.

I: *She's the one who brought it up. Okay. Were you surprised that she did, were you blindsided? What will you say?*

William: I just said, I was like, "Okay." Just like my normal self.

I: *But do you think she got a sense that you were interested? From your response*?

William: I dunno.

I: *I'm understanding you to say, therefore, that when it was brought up, you did not make a conversation out of it.*

William: Just general talk. That's all.

Female partner as initiator and prime mover. Who initiated the adoption discussion and in what context showed up as an important element in adoption consideration, and in every instance proved to be a difficult conversation for at least one of the partners to either initiate or pursue. Bakari, Adam, Harvey, and Peter all shared that their wives had reproductive issues, and in the case of the latter three, the female partner-initiated discussions on adopting a child. William's wife was also the one introducing the topic of adoption. In Bakari's case, he said they had talked about adoption briefly, in passing, but viewed himself as the one who would be more likely to broach the topic in discussion, because his wife viewed adoption very negatively.

Male silence, inaction, or procrastination. William's entire contribution to the discussion about adopting was: "Okay." Harvey and Peter were deliberate in avoiding a couple's discussion of their wife's reproductive issues, and adoption in particular. Silence was a calculated choice. Moreover, they both claimed noble intent. Adam, Harvey and Peter indicated that they deliberately did not initiate discussions concerning options to resolve childlessness, because they did not want their partners to feel pressured in any way.

> Harvey: I was standoffish about the whole thing. I didn't want to push any agenda or anything, yea, so ultimately we just kinda let time pass by and never ended up having kids, but I think over time, I realized that it was something that probably was not going to happen, and, you know, you resolve yourself to that.
>
> Peter: It [Adoption] wasn't something I wanted to bring up myself, because I think it would have been taken in the wrong way, but I knew it had been on her mind… and I wanted her to be able to feel free to bring it up or to talk about it herself. And based on my knowledge of my wife and her emotions…that it would have been viewed as this is something I wanted or was pushing for.

Terry confessed to being bogged down by inaction and procrastination, in contrast to his wife's persistence in pursuing the goal of adoption.

> Terry: It seems that sometimes I will be a little bit negligent to follow through...in terms of getting whether paper work, making phone calls, or, you know, reaching out to somebody…whereas my wife will be very extremely focused to make sure

that we follow through…to get whatever we need to get done, but I will be more

laid back. I will be more laid back in the process.

Pragmatism versus desire. For many of the participants, even those who seemed

serious about considering adoption, they placed adopting within the context of other

practical objectives and demands of life, and often ended up deprioritizing an adoption.

Terry expressed concern about financial cost, adoptee health and genetic liabilities, but

above all, having to "make a lot of sacrifice and adjustment to my current lifestyle." Just

about five minutes after lamenting, "I wish I would have had a child," William shelved

his sentiments and began to reason from cause to effect, "All I'm trying to do now is to be

financially stable. That's the main thing; financial."

> Peter: Your mind kinda delves into a number of places. How is this going to
>
> work? How is everything going to be situated? What it's going to cost? What is...a
>
> lot of different questions pop into the mind,
>
> Harvey: Right now, it's not important [to have children] because I'm going to be
>
> 45 this year, and I'm like, if we were going to have children, it would have been
>
> nice to do it before, because you know, maybe in our 30's, because now we're
>
> talking about retirement, and things like that. I know, if we have children
>
> involved, that changes the plan.

Adoption Consideration Influences

RQ 3: What are the influences on Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily

childless relationship in deciding whether to adopt?

Participants reported a wide range of influences in their response to the question of who or what are the main influences on how you see adoption. Along with positive adoption influences, there was also evidence of negative adoption stereotypes and competing influences that provided ambivalence for some participants.

Positive influences. Positive adoption influences among participants were diverse. Peter's was his wife who won him over to serious consideration of this alternative means of family addition.

Needy children. Caleb said the felt neediness of unfortunate children was an important factor apart from his infertility issue, and William reported a similar influence: "Seeing kids need someone in their life." Terry spoke about poverty among Haitians and a desire to mentor a boy child as influences in his journey toward adoption.

Role models. Adam's positive view of adoption had to do with successful experiences he had witnessed, and Bakari's main influence was a female friend who was in process of completing an adoption.

Adam: I've seen people who have been adopted or have adopted children, and it's good. Like they were…the kid was able to grow up, they had a place to live, they grown to love the family. So, there's still some good in it.

Bakari: I can see the fervor and joy as she moves further along in the process, almost to the point where now, it's clear that it's no longer, "Well this is a last resort." It's, "I'm ready to mother a child." In any form or fashion. And I also take note of...she also makes it known how supportive her husband is...throughout the

whole endeavor. So that, that has played a role in my view of it, 'cause again, for

the most part... when you would hear adoption [it's] almost like a taboo thing.

Black immigrant international adoption preference. Both Terry and Bakari,

first and second generation Caribbean immigrants, expressed a preference for an

international adoption, but revealed differing influences for their preferences. Bakari's

view of adoption was primarily informed by the experience of a female friend who was in

process of adopting from Ethiopia. "So it's like, oh, ok, typically anytime you hear

adoption, it's from overseas, so, yea, that's typically where my mind goes, when I hear

adoption." Terry said that he and his wife have preference for adopting from Haiti, both

because they have Haitian roots, and because of the widespread poverty there.

> Terry: Well, I'm from Haiti. My wife's parents are from Haiti…There is a cultural
>
> connection you know. Ethnicity connection you know. And we feel that also, you
>
> know, the rate of poverty, the rate of child poverty in Haiti is probably higher than
>
> most other places in the Caribbean.

Legacy concerns. Some participants expressed a desire to have children who

could carry on their heritage.

> Terry: If I die, I will love to have somebody to carry on the legacy. The legacy of
>
> some of the things that I have done, and, some of the family achievement and
>
> heritage to carry on the family lineage and heritage.
>
> Caleb: So, it [not having children] impacts me to want a child to...look for a
>
> namesake, as we put it...you know, carry on your name.

Negative stereotypes. A few participants referenced negative stereotypes of adoption that they had either witnessed or heard of. Bakari said that adoption initially sounded "like a taboo thing." Caleb said that in his culture of origin, men were expected to show their manhood through biological fathering. However, neither participant reported these stereotypes as active influences in their adoption perceptions. On the other hand, Adam said he had seen and heard so many negative things about adoption that he had never given serious thought to adopting.

> Adam: I always would see stuff, like maybe TV or hear about certain things, that someone would give the baby up for adoption, but they would want the baby back...cause it's always going to be the underlining [sic] thing that in the end you still didn't birth the child, so you may have the rights right now but, I just felt conflict. Maybe that's why I never thought about adoption.

Competing influences. Some participants sometimes expressed competing perspectives that revealed some hesitation or inconclusiveness, or lack of clarity in their decision-making. Terry shared his desire to adopt, and ended up admitting he was "concerned and somewhat afraid," that [his] lifestyle will have to be changed completely, and would need to "make a lot of sacrifice and adjustment" to his current lifestyle. Peter said he did not consider himself childless as he was "technically the father" of his wife's nephews; however, he later said of adoption, "That's something I'd love to do. You know? It, I can't ever see it being a burden or something that would cause me to backtrack. Caleb said, "I would like to consider the adoption program," however he

wondered whether he should start with foster care parenting, and whether he was not too old to do an adoption. Adam's ambivalence was echoed in the following:

> I've seen people who have been adopted or have adopted children, and it's good. Like they were…the kid was able to grow up, they had a place to live, they grown to love the family. So, there's still some good in it. But... [*Silence*]. Like I said, well, the way the mind works...you will always...would think about bad stuff, before the good.

Adoption Professionals

The three adoption professionals were designated Professional 1, Professional 2, and Professional 3. They held widely differing perspectives on the study population, based on their worldviews, cultural exposure, and work assumptions.

Adoption Perceptions

Professional 1 insisted that having worked with this population for 25 years, with 30% of her clientele being Black, she could not make "generalizations about Black males." At one point she said, "I mean I don't really look at it in a racial kind of recruitment angle." On the question of differences or similarities between Black male and female partners in their adoption considerations, she said, "You know, there's not really a general answer…I think each individual is totally different."

Female as lead partner. Both Professional 2 and Professional 3 shared the view that the female in the relationship typically seemed to take the lead in adoption considerations among Black heterosexual couples in childless relationships.

Professional 2: Well, I would, I would say it might...it would probably be the female. Because, if the male partner, I am not sure how much he will voice it...if he was ready to say, like, "No, I'm ready." But if they kind of bring up the conversation, I think the female partner would express her readiness, then he would definitely go along with her at that point.

Professional 3: The female. The women were making those decisions. The guys? I could tell you for the years I worked, there were one or two guys, who really were motivated to that extent or showed as the lead person.

Further, Professional 2's response on the question of how these males perceive adoption showed that a positive adoption response from the male cannot be taken for granted: "Well, honestly, I will probably put it in the context of, and I don't really have a better way to put it, but 'kind of a last resort,' in a sense."

Long and drawn out process. Contrary to their generally contrasting worldviews, the three adoption professionals were in agreement over their view that prospective adoptive parents generally perceived the adoption process as long and drawn out. Professional 2 said succinctly, "It can be a little long. The process itself."

Professional 1: Do they continue through and wait until they are placed with a child? Or, you know some families may decide in the waiting process that they are not ready to continue with it...at that point, because it's taking too long, and their lives have changed, or altered.

Professional 3: Whenever they were considering recruiting they had to go through six months to a year training, involving background check, home visits, and

approval…They had to demonstrate they understood the impact of society, understanding the situation that brought the children into the system…Even after being qualified, you still had to wait for the fit.

Adoption Consideration Influences

There was some congruity between the adoption professionals on their views of adoption influences surrounding the primary population under study. Commonalities included the importance of *religious faith, culture*, and *family tradition*.

Faith. The three professionals agreed that religious faith, or belief in a higher power, had typically salient roles in how Black males addressed the challenges they faced in resolving their adoption considerations.

Professional 1: I think that faith is definitely a huge factor and just that comfort in feeling that this is what they were called to do.

Professional 2: Faith is a big factor as well, if you're talking about like the Christian faith, and you know, believing for there to be...to address any infertility issues, there being supernatural intervention or healing in that sense. So that can be a factor as well in terms of the timetable for making certain decisions.

Professional 3: The other factor is that a significant percentage of these people were religious people…church going people… The religious piece became a significant piece in that they saw they were doing something godly and good

Family/Cultural tradition. Professional 1 and Professional 2 referenced family or cultural tradition as significant influences in the decision-making process for Black males in the relationship.

Professional 1: Culturally too, there definitely can be cultural, and depending on where they are from, and if they are adopting internationally and they are adopting from the country that they were born and raised in, and going back and, you know, helping a child from their country, at the same time, is a huge factor.

Professional 2: Tradition is a big deal in terms of how they feel it would affect their perceptions of their family of origin, or their spouses. There are some families who are not really aware of the way adoption is handled in general, but I find that especially in the Black culture, a lot of unofficial adoptions have happened, in a sense. You know, in terms of people just kind of being in one big household, and everybody helping to raise the children themselves.

Altruism. In the references cited above for Professional 1 and Professional 2, adoption for the sake of the adoptee is paramount in adoption consideration. However, Professional 2 is here relating to a form of informal adoption or kinship care. Professional 3 also noted altruism as an important motivation for adoption among Black childless couples, even though they got a stipend from the state for adopting children from the welfare system.

Professional 3: These were Black people, some professional, some not. It was a means to meet a need and get something to take care of yourself.

Systemic and relational issues in adoption completion. Professional 1 described the paperwork process as "very overwhelming" specifically for the study population but generally true for the wider adopting community. She also proposed

"more education prior to adoption," so these adoptive parents can have greater confidence in their ability to succeed in their new role.

> Professional 1: I think the reality is of adopting a child who may have gone
> through trauma prior to arriving at a home. I think there should be more education
> than that ["some online training"].

Professional 2 shared issues of adoption agency support for and timely and accurate communication as vital factors in engendering trust and retaining the ongoing interest of prospective adoptive parents.

> Professional 2: It would really be important to have certain communication and
> support increased or revitalized, or something. Because I think it's a real deterrent
> in the process, because you could really lose people.

Divergent views on adoption influences. Professional 2 and Professional 3 offered several other factors they singularly regarded as influential in a Black males' adoption decision-making.

Family member's personal history. Professional 2 suggested that even if a Black male was favorable to pursuing an adoption, another relative who may have had a negative experience could discourage the well-intentioned male from his adoption plan.

> Professional 2: It depends on if there is any personal history in the family, in
> terms of what their personal experience has been with interactions with the state
> in terms of adoption or foster care…then that may be a deterrent for pursuing it,
> because even if they are okay with it, a family member might not be okay with it
> because of their own personal history with it

Personal identity development. Professional 2 communicated that if a person was confident in their personal identity as a prospective adoptive parent, then that person would be able to exhibit autonomy in making an unpopular decision in pursuing the adoption.

Professional 2: Just depending on where people are, in terms of their comfort with their own selves, if they are okay personally with thinking this is an acceptable way to become a parent as opposed to it being more biological or natural ways. You know, so, depending on where you are in your own personal identity formation, you may not...it may not necessarily be a factor, or it may be a factor.

Kin adoption. Professional 3 said he found that men were more involved and motivated in the adoption process if the prospective adoptee was a relative, especially a niece or nephew. "Most of the time the initiative came, men will be involved if the child is a relative of theirs."

Competing influences. Professional 3 spoke about the ambivalence some Black men experienced with the competing influences of wanting to adopt through the public adoption system and to receive the financial incentive, but not wanting to risk a conflictual relationship with the biological parent, or to be exposed to the legal process with court appearances seeking to obtain parental rights at the expense of the biological parents.

Professional 3: The tension here was that if you're a parent wanting to adopt kids [whom you fostered], you got those kids from day three from hospital, you have

poured your life into these children, the children know you more than the

biological parent, but until parents' rights are removed, they still have rights.

Participant Adoption Comments from Targeted Literature Review

This stage involved identification of patterns and themes in the literature relative

to verbatim and summarized participant comments on adoption perceptions and

influences found in current scholarly research, where either Blacks, heterosexual men, or

involuntarily childless men, were the study participants. I located only 10 studies that met

the criteria.

Adoption Themes Consistent with the Primary Participants (Group A) Study.

I identified several themes in the present study that also appear in the targeted

literature review: female as lead partner in adoption; male adoption decision-making as a

process; adoption as a last resort; adoption stigma; adoption as altruism; the faith factor;

manhood under scrutiny; belittling and insensitive comments; self-assigned male roles;

and, sensitivity toward the female partner's unique distress; and, deflecting attention to

female partner's emotional and social distress.

Female as lead partner. Overwhelmingly, the female partner was the one to

initiate adoption discussions (Herrera, 2013, McCallum, 2013). Several males shared that

their female partner both initiated discussions, tried to keep the male in goal-oriented

mode, and were consistent in giving reminders and meeting engagements (Herrera, 2013;

McCallum, 2012).

Male adoption decision-making as a process. Not only did the females in the

prior studies generally initiate adoption discussions, but often needed to convince their

male partners over time to commit to adopting (Herrera, 2013; McCallum, 2012). One man initially met his wife's frequent talk of adoption with forgetfulness, deflection, and postponement (Herrera, 2013, p. 1071). Another relented only after his wife prodded him over time (McCallum, 2012, p. 59).

Adoption as a last resort. The view of adoption as the least desired means of child acquisition is coined in a variety of ways by participants in the literature. In McCallum (2012), one male participant said that he "ran out of options" (p.51). Another participant in Jennings et al. (2014) said, "When they [other options] didn't work out you sort of think well, what's left?" (p. 218).   Another male in McCallum's study said that adoption *"had not even crossed my mind"* (p. 52). A third study participant called adoption *"second choice"* (McCallum, 2012, p.66). In Felix (2013), one man expressed doubt about the satisfaction he would get with an adoption compared to his own child conceived by his wife (p. 69).

Adoption stigma. One prior participant worried that the child's traits would not correspond with his, and another expressed concern that in later life, the child would want to seek out its family of origin (Felix, 2013, p. 69). In McCallum (2012), several adoptive fathers worry about whether their adoptive child would be socially accepted and whether the adoptee would thrive in the midst of the potential social issues ahead (pp. 66-69).

Adoption as altruism. One interviewee (Felix 2013) viewed adoption as a gift to be given to a needy child (p. 70). In Jennings et al. (2014), a heterosexual male said he and his partner decided to skip IVF treatment and chose adoption so his child could know later on that he or she was not a last resort (p. 218). In Firmin, Pugh, Markham, Sohn,

and Gentry (2017), a male participant said that children need parents and "the church should be adopting all the time" (p.62).

The faith factor. In Firmin, Markham, Sohn, Gentry, and Pugh (2017), one man said, "If the Lord has called you to do this [adopt a child] then you can't question when it gets hard" (p. 22). He said it would be important for adoptive parents to know that God is not only working to shape the child but also the parent. Another person in Firmin, Pugh, et al. (2017) said that he learned in his adoption experience that one had to love the adoptee even when he or she had disappointed the adoptive parent (pp. 62-63). He suggested that adoptive parents should ever remember that God loved them even when they did not deserve that love (pp. 62-63).

Manhood under scrutiny. Many of the men in Felix (2013) had experienced insensitive remarks from others questioning their manhood. Some felt pressured because they wanted to have children just like their friends. In McCallum (2012), some men described their depression and shame on learning that they would not be able to accomplish a vital aspect of their male function, that of fathering a child. One participant in Herrera (2013) saw adoption as a means to prove he could be a father (p. 1071).

Belittling and insensitive comments. In McCallum (2012), one man commented on the insensitivity of a co-worker in asking if his adopted child had the same last name as himself (p. 66) Another recited different comments that onlookers made over the physical differences between him and his adopted son (p. 67). He said people at times asked embarrassing questions and challenged his simple retort that the boy was his son

(p. 67). In Firmin, Markham, et al. (2017), one adopted father said someone crossed a line in asking him if he loved his adopted children as much as his biological ones (p. 21).

Self-assigned male roles. In several targeted comments, male participants assumed the roles of protector and pragmatist. One protective male reported that he "put [his] foot down" (McCallum 2012, p. 55) and made a decision for adoption so that his wife would no longer have to go through any pain trying for biological offspring (McCallum, 2012). A participant in Herrera (2013) boasted that once he agreed with his wife to pursue an adoption, he made all the relevant calls in spearheading the adoption effort (p. 1072). In Felix (2013), one man shared that he avoided initiating conversation about their childlessness to protect his wife (p. 53). Another man, in the role of pragmatist, said he found it difficult to give feedback to his wife when the conversation about their status was about feelings (p.53). However, if the conversation "sticks to facts" (p. 53) like finance, he could make a contribution.

Sensitivity toward female partner's unique distress. In McCallum (2012), participants reflected on the difficult road their wives suffered through attempts at conception before eventually completing an adoption. A participant reported consoling his weeping wife through her conception struggles, even though he himself was distraught (p. 56). Similarly, another male empathized with his wife in their failed IVF attempts, and suggested they go the adoption route (p. 55). One participant reflected on his wife having to self-administer IVF related shots and imbibe so many drugs all because of his reproductive deficiency (p.55). In Felix (2013), several participants-felt

strongly that their childless experience was much harder for their female partners both from an emotional and social pressure standpoint (p. 50).

Deflecting attention to female partner's emotional and social distress. In multiple male comments in the literature, men highlight the emotional and social distress of their female partners, at the expense of theirs. In Felix (2013), several participants felt strongly that their childless experience was much harder for their female partners both from an emotional and social pressure standpoint. In Herrera (2013), one man said that while he had the infertility issue, his wife had to bear the greater burden throughout the process (p. 1069). In McCallum (2012) several men acknowledged that their female partner experienced greater emotional suffering and social pressure than they. Men generally appeared to easily shift the focus to their wife's challenges.

Themes Divergent from the Primary Participants (Group A) Study

Some themes in the literature either minimally correlate with findings for the primary participants in the present study, or simply do not arise in the primary participants' data, primarily because only one of the participants interviewed in the current study ever had a personal experience with the adoption process. That participant had begun the home study process, but never completed. The following themes found in current literature that meet the study criteria might hardly coincide with the present study participants because none of them has ever been through the process.

Adoption as a major achievement. In Herrera (2013), an adoptive father said that it was important for him to prove to himself and to others that he could be a father (p. 1071). Speaking out of his happy adoption ending, one man in McCallum (2012) said

that in the end, when you see your adopted child for the first time, then the struggles you have been through are of no consequence (p. 73). In Firmin, Markham, et al. (2017), an adoptive father said his greatest joy was when his new son did something that showed evidence of bonding with his new family (p. 19).

Mistrust of the adoption system and agents. In Pickering (2016), participants had varying experiences with their social workers. As many participants reported good experiences with their social workers as bad. One person expressed disappointment with the adoption judicial system (p. 37). In Eaves (2013), a church leader indicated that African Americans are often mistrustful of child welfare agencies who seek out sensitive information (p. 53). Another person suggested that too much "red tape" (p. 52) was a factor lending to the environment of mistrust among the Black population. In Goldberg et al. (2012), one man complained that the welfare agency needed to provide more accurate information about the child placed in his care on a foster to adopt arrangement (p. 303).

Long and drawn out process. A participant in Pickering (2016) opined that the agency made waiting more difficult by not communicating for months (p. 30). One participant in McCallum (2012) admitted that he apologized to the agency for his impatience, on the day the adoption was completed (p. 73). The process had been long, paperwork had been misplaced, and steps had to be repeated along the way. In Goldberg et al. (2012), one man in the foster to adopt program complained that after 3 years, he was still not allowed to adopt the child in his care (p. 304). Another male in Baxter et al. (2014) said that he and his partner completed the background check and paperwork and were on the waiting list after just over a year (p. 261). The wait felt long and they were

hypervigilant whenever the phone rang, as they were particularly anxious as to which birthmother would entrust her child to them (Baxter et al., 2014, p. 261).

Summary

The three data sources for this study included semi structured, face-to-face individual interviews with seven primary research participants (Group A), semi structured telephone interviews with three adoption professionals, and a targeted literature review of verbatim and summarized comments on adoption perceptions and influences involving Blacks, heterosexual men, and/or involuntarily childless men. Data analysis consisted of four cycles involving initial and a priori coding, identification of themes and categories, pattern matching and theoretical application, and analytic generalization. The theoretical application and analytic generalization aspects of data analysis will be presented in the concluding chapter. Results for each of the three data sources, Group A interview transcripts, Group B interview transcripts, and targeted literature review, were reported separately. Several categories, themes, and subthemes were identified and would form the basis for discussions and conclusions in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to discover the perceptions of, and influences on, Black, heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship in which adoption was under consideration. This chapter is a discussion on the interpretation of results as set forth in Chapter 4, study limitations, recommendations, implications, and conclusion. Two factors will provide contexts for the presentation and discussion of findings in this concluding chapter: the body of existing literature and whether Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory offered a viewpoint for addressing the study results.

Interpretation of Results

In Chapter 4, eight major themes were categorized under the three headings related to each of the three research questions: adoption perceptions, childlessness and adoption consideration experiences, and adoption consideration influences (Table 2). This section consists of a discussion of these eight major themes against the backdrop of related research and ecological systems theory: making meaning of adoption, social and cultural expectations, adoption barriers, experiences of social pressure, coping with childlessness, gender nuances in the adoption decision-making journey, positive adoption influences, and negative stereotypes and competing adoption influences.

Making Meaning of Adoption

All participants, including two who said that they had never felt the desire to adopt, identified positive value in adoption. Adoption favorability is not synonymous with personal commitment to completing an adoption (Eaves, 2013; Park & Hill, 2014).

However, six of seven participants spoke about the benefit to the adoptee, in terms as "giving this child a life," "a caring heart," "parental support," and "to love, to raise." The placement of a child in a nurturing, permanent home environment is a step in enhancing a child's healthy overall development (McSherry, Fargas Malet, & Weatherall, 2016; Simpson, 2016). According to the latest US Adoption Attitudes Survey (DTFA, 2017), 77% of those considering a foster care adoption indicated that they would do it to help a child in need. Comparative sentiments were not addressed for private and international adoptions.

Adoption is primarily motivated by the need of the adoptive family (Goldberg et al., 2012; Lizy, 2016; Serle, 2014). Mitigating the pain of infertility is still a factor in the adoption marketplace (McCallum, 2012). One participant in an adoption study by Jennings et al. (2014) was succinct in declaring, "I just want a family" (p. 220). One of the adoption professionals in my study cited that in her experience, the innate yearning to parent a child was the primary motivation for involuntarily childless men to adopt. Of the six participants in this study who saw adoption as a caring gesture, only one declared that if he were to adopt, it would be due to the child's need for parental support. In the process of seeking a person's own interest, another person's welfare is also served. Ultimately, self-interest may still be the preeminent motivator in adoption consideration, particularly for the involuntarily childless (Park & Hill, 2014).

Social and Cultural Expectations

Participants reported differing macrosystemic expectations: the conventional expectations of the overarching society or culture. Two African Americans who had lived

in the same general neighborhood and had many shared friendships held contrasting social and cultural expectations of biological fatherhood. One felt there was no normative expectation and that the social culture was one of respect for individual choice about fathering a child. He stated, "Everybody's fine with that." The other presumed "a whole lot of expectations." The disparity of perceptions among participants calls for caution in assuming racial, ethnic, or religious homogeneity in the perspectives of Black, heterosexual males in childless relationships. A third African American expressed internalized expectation of biological fatherhood and said that the question childless men asked themselves was, "Is something wrong with me?" He seemed to devalue and chastise himself for not having a child.

Felix (2013) found that many men viewed their experience of infertility in context of failed manhood. Men often feel challenged by their inability to father children, as fathering a child is a primary reason for being (Hanna & Gough, 2015). Bhaskar et al. (2014) asserted that childless men may suffer shame, social isolation and low self-esteem because they have not attained the cultural expectations of biological fatherhood. In not fathering children, men may reason that they have not only let down themselves owing to their innate desire for fatherhood (Hannah & Gough, 2015), but have also let down their families (Ning, 2013). Men, therefore, often have difficulty communicating their infertility to their families as they may perceive themselves as failures in their inability to contribute to the family legacy (Ning, 2013). Men may also avoid sharing with their families for fear of being judged, or being misunderstood (Felix, 2013).

Participants with a Caribbean background expressed awareness of demanding sociocultural expectations of biological fatherhood. One person said that in Caribbean culture, "you have to have a child to be a man." All Caribbean participants communicated that cultural expectation in emphatic terms. An expectation of biological fatherhood is held by many nationalities and cultures (Rouchou, 2013), and in this study, the intransigent Caribbean mindset described by participants was the single constant in their comments on sociocultural attitudes.

This expectation was so internalized that some of them appeared to be emotionally imprisoned by it, believing that others judged them as failures. One said, "I feel inferior, as less of a man, especially when you're around your other friends, and the boys talking about their kids." Whereas he could not recall anyone ever telling him that he was less than a man for his childlessness, he still condemned himself. This response characterized Dooley et al.'s (2014) findings that the stigma of infertility and low self-esteem are associated with infertility distress. The study participant's self-chastisement emphasized the power of cultural assumptions and norms referred to as the macrosystem, and the extent to which the organism could succumb to it (Patton, Hong, Williams, & Allen-Meares, 2013).

Adoption Barriers

Deterrents to adoption may exist at any of multiple levels. At the microsystemic level, it could be a personal issue. One participant did not care to have a child if he could not have one naturally with his wife. Some participants thought there was still a chance they would have a child biologically because they and their wives were still young.

Externally induced barriers may include what Professional 2 referred to as "personal experience in the family," in which a family member or other acquaintance who had a negative adoption experience could project their disappointment onto the member who was at the crossroad of decision-making. The decision maker may be challenged in deciding to ignore the other person's counsel, and their personal identity may run counter to the other family member's advice if they are confident enough to decide on their own. For instance, neither Bakari's nor Harvey's family culture embraced adoption, so that stigma may have been a barrier in their adoption considerations. This may occur in an environment in which adoptive children are stigmatized as fake (Park & Hill, 2014).

Exosystemic factors include decisions outside of the control or purview of the prospective adoptive parent. A factor in adoptions is the required adoption fees (Skidmore, Anderson, & Eiswerth, 2014). Financial unpreparedness was a deterrent cited by several participants and one of the adoption professionals and has been a deterrent identified in the literature (Scott, Bae-Lee, Harrell, & Smith-West, 2013; Weissinger, 2013). In the 2017 Adoption Attitudes Survey, the issue of finance was the highest deterrent to adoption (DTFA, 2017). The three adoption professionals touched on bureaucratic factors like the paperwork and drawn out process (Simpson, 2016), poor communication, and perceived lack of support (Eaves, 2013). Professional 2 opined that in neglecting timely communication or withholding communication, adoption agencies "could really lose people."

The macrosystem refers to overarching laws and regulations, cultural patterns, and expectations. There were macrosystem-level barriers to adoption relevant to participants' experiences, including adoption stigma; adoption as a third option; and Black cultural acceptance of kinship care, also called informal adoption. Bakari's thought that his wife would treat adoption as personal failure echoed Goldberg et al.'s (2011) findings concerning internalized adoption stigma. Many consider adoption when all else has failed (Baxter et al., 2014; Petersen et al., 2015). The macrosystem includes the longevity, reach, and mental control of a population's biases and beliefs, good or bad (Scholten, Velten, & Margraf, 2018).

Informal kinship care, as exhibited by Peter's, Adam's, and Bakari's derived sense of father fulfillment in their relationships with their own nephews, is a phenomenon in many Black heterosexual men's experience of involuntary childlessness (Washington et al., 2013). The familial attachment preempts the sense of urgency in needing to formally adopt, providing them with father relevance as they give nurture in the place of an absent relative (Gillum, 2011).

Experiences of Social Pressure

Many of the participants' experiences were in alignment with their social and cultural expectations. For some, their perceptions were partly shaped by their personal experiences. The three native African Americans had diverse experiences concerning their childlessness. One said that no one, including family members, had ever asked him why he did not have children. His friend, another African American, said that he was bombarded by family, friends, and others about his childlessness. A third African

American participant described low level pressure from work colleagues and friends. All childless African American couples in Griffin's (2011) infertility resolution study reported being frequently grilled by family members and friends about their child bearing intentions.

All participants with a Caribbean background reported similar social pressure concerning child bearing. The nexus of social pressure directed at childless relatives may come from other family members in an extended family experience. The extended kin family is a feature of Caribbean Black family life in the United States. (Best, 2014; Jackson, Forsythe-Brown, & Govia, 2007). Hunter (2008) found that first generation Caribbean immigrants were devoted to a family kinship worldview referred to as a vertical worldview, which points not only to in-group security and support but also has implications for in-group cultural expectations and the attendant pressures. Extended family arrangements can mean greater social pressure for childless couples, particularly with the boundary issues that may pervade such family structures.

The level of social pressure experienced by participants and their partners was mediated by the boundary culture inherent in the family. One participant's family culture was individualistic, with value placed on each member's privacy and autonomy. This participant said he had never been pressured over his childlessness. Most participants described collectivistic family cultures with privacy boundaries flouted. Fomby and Osborne (2017) stated, "Family boundary ambiguity is defined by a lack of clarity about who is in and who is outside of a family system and about the roles and responsibilities of individuals within a family system" (p. 77).

Participant reactions to comments surrounding their childlessness manifested in differing ways of dealing with the social pressure, including pained laughter, verbal aggression, and social avoidance. Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) suggested that a person's response to environmental tensions reveals ecological competence or dysfunction. The reactions of study participants suggest a need for social support, as it has a positive effect on management of stress events in both individualistic and collectivistic communities (Nosheen, Riaz, Malik, Yasmin, & Malik, 2017). However, only two participants indicated having confidants with whom they shared their issues. Given the level of negative branding to which some may be subjected ("shooting blanks," "not a real man," "is it broke?"), compounded by boundary issues in families and at other social levels, childless men may need social support to minimize emotional hurt and social isolation (see Hanna & Gough, 2016; Ning, 2013).

Coping With Childlessness

When heterosexual men have failed personal expectations of producing a child, they experience differing levels of distress, but the distress of failure is intensified when sociocultural expectations are considered (Bhaskar et al., 2014). The range of responses to the disappointment described or portrayed in the study indicated variety and male tendency. Coping strategies of the study participants included a communication of strength, negotiation of social support boundaries, fate or faith rationalizations, keeping busy, or pivoting toward a gynocentric view of the problem.

Five of the seven men communicated that they were coping well with their current status of childlessness, as in "It doesn't bother me," "It's not challenging," "I'm

not going to beat myself up," and "Actually, me, not at all." However, participants had a

pattern of minimizing aspects of the problem or their hurt in adverbial terms: "It does not

bother me much," "It hasn't been too bad," "I will be a little bit negligent [concerning the

adoption process]," or "We tried one cycle of IVF actually…and, you know, at first I was

somewhat sad, temporarily, but ah, you know, it faded away quickly within weeks, within

a couple weeks." After reading my findings concerning participants' apparent

minimization of their reality, one of the participants e-mailed the following: "While I feel

I am fine with being childless, I may not have fully resolved myself to the concept."

Hinton and Miller (2013) suggested that the social expectation of male strength

challenges men to assume a stoicism that does not show their own emotional deficits.

Hanna and Gough (2016) found that childless men were open about their hurt feelings in

the safe environment of an online forum. The male need to appear strong under public

scrutiny reveals the profound psychological demand on childless men to embrace

pretense as a social requirement (see Dooley, 2014).

Another minimizing strategy was relegating their hurt to a past experience. "It

does not make me sad anymore," "At first, I was somewhat sad," or "I'm very happy now

without children." One of the participants made efforts, unsuccessfully, to cloak his pain

in the past tense: "I used to, used to; it bothers me a lot." This participant admitted, "I

think this is a release as well [the interview] for things that I might have wanted to talk to

someone about." Denial is a subfactor of minimization and represents a dysfunctional

suppression of reality (Pierson & Goodman, 2014), in this case to deal with emotional

pain arising from a state of helplessness.

In the case of five participants, their nonverbal responses provided as much insight into their emotional experiencing as their verbal comments. Crestfallen looks, long periods of silence, heaving chests, and deep sighs were noted. Verbally, the participants assured me that their distress was either in the past or nonexistent. The pattern of contradictions between verbal assurances and other communicated cues reinforced the query of male strength versus male minimization as a means of coping and aligns with Friedrichs' s (2012) assertion that denial is often an instrumental means of mitigating psychosocial costs in a given situation. Men have been taught to act *male,* denying their emotions to adhere to their socially constructed gender role (Scharrer & Blackburn, 2018). However, the effort to act in socially constructed ways has implications for gender role strain, or the stress that results from the effort to live up to a person's socially constructed gender expectations (Adil, Shahed, & Arshad, 2017).

Study participants also negotiated social support boundaries, determined whether they needed social support, and whom they would allow into their private space. Consistent with the literature, social support experiences varied, with the most predictable patterns being little support apart from the female partner (Felix, 2013; Lawson, 2016; Ying et al., 2015). Only two participants had confided in anyone apart from their partner. For one participant, social support consisted in his extended family respecting his right to not discuss his childlessness. Two persons expressed gratitude for the opportunity to talk with me on the subject because they had no social support. One person said that he did not feel he needed any social support as he had his nephews to distract him from emotional pain. Some mentioned the uncertainty about whom to trust.

Ying et al. (2015) found that women experienced more stress reduction from the support of family than men did. Men achieved more significant stress reduction from the support of health care providers and their partner (Ying et al., 2015).

Keeping busy was a means of coping for at least three of the participants. Ning (2013) found that men coped through busy engagement. Felix (2013) noted that some men picked up extra work shifts. One issue in using activity as a diversion from the social and emotional fallout of childlessness is the risk of losing emotional and physical contact with the female partner. Dooley et al. (2014) found a correlation between marital relationship issues and high emotional distress for men in an infertile relationship. One of the participants in the present study had gotten so disconnected from his wife after long practice of busyness that he thought he needed external help to draw her attention to his unabated yearning for a child. Busy engagement may also be correlated to social avoidance as experienced by at least two of the participants. Ning (2013) suggested that avoidance was a gateway to subsequent mental health issues. Black men in childless relationships may benefit from intentional strategies that promise more productive outcomes.

The participants were all affiliated with a faith tradition, so it was not out of the ordinary for them to see their childlessness issues through their religious lenses (Park & Hill, 2014). Similar to some participants in Griffin's (2011) infertility resolution study, two persons viewed their circumstances in predestination terms: "If it's supposed to happen, it will happen." "If we weren't able to have a child, it's just meant to be." Not only were they skeptical about using some form of ART, they were also not planning to

adopt. Much of the literature on the intersection of religion and assisted forms of reproduction reveals a mixture of conflicted views, cautionary guidance, and emerging tolerance (Inhorn & Tremayne, 2016; Jones, 2014; Voss, 2015). However, foster care adoption is regarded in altruistic terms in religious circles (Belanger et al., 2012; Eaves, 2013). As demonstrated by the two adoption-averse participants, it cannot be assumed that religious affiliation predisposes to altruistic adoption (see Howell-Moroney, 2014). Apart from this perception of childlessness as a pre-ordained phenomenon, most participants talked in terms of submission to God who "doesn't make mistakes," "does what he wants," and is "sovereign." This is an extension of the passive view of fate embodied in one participant's expressed unwillingness to try for children outside of natural conception: "I don't want to play God." The rigid submission to fate, as a coping strategy, can have consequences in a relationship setting when the other partner holds more aggressive views of family formation, and does not want to simply, as one study participant said, "take life as it comes."

Finally, most study participants resorted to a gynocentric view of the problem, so that the issue was recast with the female partner as the center of focus. They seemed to have greater ease in articulating their partner's struggles and presented themselves as better managers of emotional pain. They noted that their partner was more challenged both emotionally and socially than they were. The partner's neediness highlighted their male strength and justified their male gendered role as protector. Lawson (2016) found that men with male factor infertility were overwhelmingly supportive of their wives as they went through the IVF process. McCallum (2012) cited male empathy in both male

and female factor infertility, and reported steps men took to shield their partners from social pressure.

Gender Nuances in the Adoption Decision-Making Journey

A decision on adopting is fraught with many collateral issues. These may include finances, extended family attitudes, home study with its accompanying privacy issues, issues concerning the biological parents, etc. This major decision would require clear, honest communication, adequate research, and agreement on core principles between the couple. Notwithstanding, I noted patterns of dysfunction in the role of study participants in the process of adoption consideration.

In most cases, discussions on adoption did not appear to have intentionality. They had been primarily brief, passing words exchanged. Only in one case was there full engagement. Consequent to these limited engagements, participants appeared subject to patterns of assumptions about the other partner's interest, issues, motivations, or desires. Participants who expressed opposition or skepticism toward adopting were more inclined to harbor these assumptions. Adoption seemed to have been a difficult discussion in which most of the participants did not feel prepared to engage. In fact, when viewed in the light of conception failure, adoption stigma, public scrutiny, and adoptee adjustment, adoption is often a dreaded conversation to have (see McCallum, 2012).

Most participants said that the female partner was the initiator of adoption discussions between them. A similar pattern is reported in the literature, along with a female tendency to be more driven throughout the process (Gibbons et al., 2006; Herrera, 2013). In the present study, the male reticence toward adoption seemed compounded by

the admission of male silence, inaction, and procrastination in pursuing adoption research and resource contacts. The generally indecisive response to adoption exhibited by most men in this study reflects the general perception of reproduction and family addition as primarily female issues (Culley et al., 2013; Honig, 2014). All study participants displayed an absence of active male leadership in adoption that had the potential to delay or derail the female partner's adoption desires, and to negatively impact the relationship.

However, some male participants seemed to view and value their role in the process as pragmatist and protector. Pragmatism was represented in many participants' authoritative clarity on priorities and the criticality of dealing with the financial demands of adoption. Some appeared lucid in their calculation that adoption could not be the first priority based on multiple other requirements, so that pragmatism was a higher priority for them than desire. To illustrate the protector role, I previously referenced Peter talking about running toward his wife "to shut it down" if someone asked her inappropriate questions about childbearing. The male protector role was on display when Adam tried to appear strong to inoculate his wife from another round of sadness. The male as self-assigned protector is in evidence in childlessness studies (Felix, 2013; Herrera, 2013; McCallum, 2012). The problem is that both roles can be perceived as gatekeeping positions that may be construed as positions of male power and not of family partnership.

Positive Adoption Influences

The major influence for at least three participants was based on altruistic concerns for needy children. One credited exposure to radio and television for his passion to rescue less fortunate children. An interviewee in Felix (2013) described adoption as a gift to

someone in need. All three adoption professionals referenced the salience of altruistic influences in adoption as borne out in the literature in which social responsibility provided impetus for adoption decision-making (Baxter et al., 2014; Jennings et al., 2014; Mohanty, 2014).

Some participants had been influenced by positive social modeling. They had seen others adopt, had observed the excitement of an adoptive parent, or had seen an adoptee thrive. Participants in McCallum (2012) gained confidence in adopting when they sat in informational sessions with prospective adoptive parents at agency orientations. Adoption is normalized in a nonjudgmental setting where common emotions and concerns are shared.

Religious faith is another prominent theme in adoption motivation that was highlighted by all three adoption professionals. In Baxter et al. (2014), some adoptive parents viewed their adoption experience as God's choice, and an answer to prayer. However, none of the present study participants spoke of adoption in stark religious terms as they did in relation to comforting themselves through their childlessness. That might have been due to the fact that, unlike childlessness, adoption is a choice. The widespread association between religious faith and adoption has more to do with altruism than personal or partner need, but in this study, the prominent concern expressed by most study participants is for a fulfillment of personal and partner need.

Professional 1 noted that some Blacks who had roots outside of the United States had a cultural preference for adopting from their country of origin. Adopting based on similarity of appearance and culture is a common occurrence in the literature (Ishizawa &

Kubo, 2013; Klevan, 2012; Skidmore et al., 2014). One of the primary participants said

that he and his wife were committed to an international adoption to lift a child out of

poverty. Another said it was his preferred adoption choice because he knew someone

who was presently in process of doing the same. Further study may give indication as to

the role of negative stereotyping of the public adoption system in helping to sustain

interest in international adoptions.

Negative Stereotypes and Competing Influences

Some participants were influenced by negative stereotypes alongside positive

signals they had seen in others' adoption experiences. Adam had witnessed successful

adoption stories, but just could not get past negative stereotypes, some unfounded,

including about parents returning for their children after the adoptive parent had

completed the adoption. Adam's comment, "In the end, you still didn't birth the child,"

carried a similar trepidation to the participant in Felix (2013) who feared that an adoptive

child would later disown him and reconnect with his biological family.

At least five study participants were ambivalent about an adoption decision,

showing how deeply conflicted a prospective adoptive parent could be. Fear of drastic

lifestyle changes, increased financial obligations, concerns about his age, and lack of

clarity on whether to upgrade his preference from foster care to adoption were some of

the issues that clouded participants' final decision on adoption. Moreover, five of the

participants or their partners had been engaged in researching the IVF process, so that an

adoption decision would therefore suffer delay. The challenge for couples after

unsuccessful ART treatment is the issue of if, or when, to transition to adoption

(Lockerbie, 2014; McCallum, 2012; Petersen et al., 2015).

Professional 3 described the ambivalence of some Black men who were incentivized to adopt through the public adoption system. They feared the risk of confrontation with a biological parent, either through the required court appearances or a chance meeting that could degenerate into a public altercation. All adoption professionals talked about the long adoption process that led to well-intentioned prospects vacating the process prematurely. The road to adoption is often a process of working through personal and relational considerations with social, emotional, and practical implications (Herrera, 2013). The positive experiences of other persons can influence a person's favorability toward adoption (McCallum, 2012) without necessarily convincing that individual to personally decide on adopting (DTFA, 2017). Adoption considerations could involve multiple concurrent concerns (Riley-Behringer & Cage, 2014), and lead to the postponement of, or decision against, the choice of adoption (Petersen et al., 2015).

Analytic Generalization

Gender based theories provide alternative ways of viewing study findings. Eagly's social role theory of gender differences may explain gender nuances in the adoption decision-making process, in which the partners assume different roles. The primary tenet is that gender roles are shaped by a combination of inner tendencies and social gender expectations (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Female hegemony in the reproductive and adoption discourse may have to do with the socialized role of women as the lead gender in those domains of family life. Men assuming the role of protector and pragmatist can be interpreted as the male pursuit of relevance in the family formation

enterprise (Herrera, 2013). Primary participants' role confusion may be evidenced in how they cast themselves as more emotionally strong than their female partners while at the same time accepting a secondary role in reproduction and adoption. However, gender role theories may hardly explain notions like the cultural basis of informal adoption among Blacks, altruism or personal interest, adoptee preferences, or religious faith as a factor in coping. There were variations of perceptions among the primary participant group that could not be accounted for by gender.

Being a more expansive theory, ecological systems may capture and explain themes outside of the reach of social role theory of gender differences. The concept of reciprocal interaction portrays the human person as an independent organism simultaneously impacting the environment and being impacted by it at its many layers (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Apart from the gender contribution to each participant's perspective, he is shaped by his own internal psychological environment and the external forces surrounding him (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). One participant had an internalized perception of adoption that remained intact even after his female partner suggested that route. Another participant reported becoming more amenable to it after his wife discussed with him. External environmental factors may variously inform or impact a person's view of childlessness and adoption. Periodic commercials of children in need of care awoke altruistic thoughts toward them in the experience of one of the participants. Religious faith was another such compelling force indicated by the adoption professionals that is better explained by ecological systems than gender roles.

Limitations

Notwithstanding the many findings of this study, limitations abound. Inherent in the design of a qualitative study is the presumption that findings cannot be generalized to any population other than to the study participants. The data for this study was strictly subjective thus unmeasurable. In addition, Group A consisted of only seven participants, with three in Group B. Whereas I assumed data saturation for Group A based on my assessment, that too can be considered subjective, as I cannot guarantee that the next person would not have shared new and significant material.

Adoption professionals in the study had varied exposure and experiences with the primary study population and therefore within-group triangulation was relatively minimal. Either a more homogenous group or a larger participant pool would have provided a more robust data cache and allowed for more meaningful data analysis and identification of patterns and themes. An attendant limitation of the study is that some participants were less conversational than others and had to be motivated to share more.

Moreover, Marshall (1996) argued that a researcher may hardly know whether the interview location or participant's immediate state of mind has contributed to the nature and quality of the participant's responses. This lack of awareness on my part as to the effects of external influences on participants' contributions to the study constitutes a study limitation as well.

Another study limitation arose from my belated inclusion of participants who may have already started the adoption exploration process by contacting an adoption agency. Having already started the data collection process before requesting and receiving the

said IRB clearance to include such participants, it was too late to start a potentially time-consuming effort to obtain a cooperation agreement with an adoption agency. Consequently, only one participant had first-hand experience interacting within the professional adoption framework.

My positionality on many accounts could have produced researcher bias. I am a Black male in an involuntarily childless relationship with two adopted children. My emotional investment in this study could therefore have influenced how I framed and asked questions, my follow-up comments, nonverbal communication, and my interpretation of the data. Moreover, I am a Seventh-day Adventist church pastor and two of my former parishioners were participants in this study. A total of six of the participants also identified as Seventh-day Adventists, and all were aware that I was a pastor. It is likely that those participants felt obligated to participate in the study and answered in ways to impress me as a member of the clergy. On yet another level, I am an Afro-Caribbean or Caribbean Black immigrant. Four of the participants were of Caribbean background.

My participants were native African Americans (*n=3*) and Afro-Caribbean (*n=4*). I was unsuccessful in recruiting any other Black ethnic group to achieve greater sample heterogeneity, in order to make comparisons between and among participant groups.

Recommendations

Only one of the participants in the study had experienced an adoption home study. Follow-up research is recommended with participants who have had interaction with the adoption system and can thus recount firsthand experience and render an informed

perspective of the process. Participants with this level of experience will allow the researcher to derive a better understanding of how prospective Black male adoptive parents view the adoption system. This is particularly relevant in the context of the notion of Black mistrust of social structures (see Eaves, 2013).

Since response to childlessness as well as adoption decision-making involve medium to long term processes, future researchers may want to conduct longitudinal studies to examine and identify variations in experiences, perceptions, and influences over time. In designing qualitative studies for men, researchers should consider the findings that men are likely to self-disclose more in the absence of their female partner (Seale, Charteris-Black, Dumelow, Locock, & Ziebland, 2008), as men are committed to protecting their partners in a dyadic setting more than truth telling (see Herrera, 2013). I have also found qualitative couple studies in which men are regarded as the lesser partner (Park & Hill, 2014).

Vizheh et al. (2015) found that type of fertility deficit (male factor or female factor) modulated marital and sexual satisfaction. However, for this present study, there was no intent to identify the infertile partner, or to examine related differences in impact on the male experience of childlessness, and on adoption decision-making. Nonetheless, further research on Black heterosexual men in a childless relationship should compare the influence of male factor versus female factor infertility.

Future researchers should engage the issue of male emotional distress signals in negotiating childlessness. Overwhelmingly, the literature reinforces the notion that female emotional distress exceeds that of the male (Cserepes et al., 2013; Kissi et al.,

2013; Ying et al., 2015). In this study, the men expressed emotional distress in multiple ways, but hardly in an emotion-based lexicon, or with easily recognized non-verbal cues as tears or sobbing. Men often express their inner pain differently than women (Deng, Chang, Yang, Huo, & Zhou, 2016), sometimes via silence or laughter as evidenced by some participants. Assessments employed in evaluating female distress might not be suitable in gauging the male partner's distress (Wischmann, 2013). Researchers should therefore address assessment tools that capture male emotional expressions. A critical presupposition in this recommendation is that it might be more meaningful to perform within-gender than between-gender comparisons particularly on matters of emotion and stress. Male distress has a saliency of its own and must not be given context only in comparison to female distress (Culley et al., 2013).

While the involuntarily childless Black heterosexual male population requires more focused and ongoing study, childlessness and adoption perceptions among Black males in general require research engagement and periodic replication. Peer-reviewed Black adoption studies have not been adequately and consistently replicated or advanced over time, leading to critical gaps in the literature for long periods.

Finally, future studies merit greater diversity among the participant pool. Black studies done in the United States should include immigrants from the continent of Africa, and involve greater belief diversity, including non-Christian representation. A more significant participant pool is also recommended.

Implications

Based on the findings of this study, the implications for social change are manifold. First, I am hopeful that this study will serve as a platform for discussions at male infertility support groups particularly on male distress, social and cultural expectations, social support, and the place of the male in the resolution process. It is necessary for such men to grasp the significance of their role as co-partners in matters of reproduction and adoption. As a result, I recommend men's ministry and men's club leaders host a series of discussions in church and community forums, with men talking with men on the many issues surrounding both childlessness and adoption.

Social Policy

Only one person had any experience in the adoption process, so most could not offer a personal perspective on the topic, but the theme of a long and drawn out adoption process was echoed by the secondary participants (Group B) and triangulated in the targeted literature. Federal and state regulatory procedures place an inordinate demand on adoptive parents to complete a burdensome process involving a prohibitive amount of paperwork and procedural hurdles. Potential adoptive parents can lose heart and drop out of the process. Adoption policy framers at state and federal level can use study findings to enact efficiency friendly policies that could expedite bureaucracy-laden aspects of the adoption process, thus limiting prospective parent burnout and ultimately lowering adoption waiting lists for every adoption type.

Moreover, child welfare and the court system can also use the study findings as motivation to strike a right balance between family reunification and child placement

permanency while not scaring off fostering- to-adopt parents who are never in full supply with so many children on waiting lists. Childless couples who had a long, unsuccessful experience with ART could feel particularly conflicted if they turn to adoption and find the wait is equally long and uncertain.

This study can provide heightened awareness to policymakers on adoption barriers besetting Black heterosexual men. For instance, two primary participants expressed the need for adequate information concerning whichever child they consider adopting. An adoption professional said outright that many agencies do not properly *vet* the children they adopt, so they would not have adequate information to share with potential adoptive parents. Policy makers might need to address the responsibility of agencies to provide a reasonable level of information to adopting parents, particularly concerning a child's medical history, mental and emotional health status, family background, and prior placements. In addition, deliberate withholding of information by agencies to secure the adoptive parent's adoption commitment to a particular child is malpractice that should incur more stringent state regulatory oversight and enforcement by local child welfare bodies. Adoption agencies should be required to provide documented guidance to prospective adoptive parents stipulating what information they have a right to know, and what grievance recourse they have.

Practice

Family counselors. Family counselors will have greater insight into the peril of family culture, boundaries and expectations in inflicting guilt, shame, and stress on childless Black family members. They will also have a greater awareness of the twin

issues of verbal and social restrictedness for the male as regard childlessness and adoption. Many participants had little to no social support apart from their partners, and most were either silent or dismissive in the couples' adoption discussion. The varied ways in which men cope with childlessness, whether functionally or maladaptively, has social change implications for couples counseling.

Family oriented organizations. Human services departments, churches and other family-oriented organizations can include preventative education on boundary issues in extended family dynamics as a factor in family formation. Young men's mentoring organizations can also host programs for younger men that focus on issues of social support and male involvement in all aspects of family formation.

Infertility therapists. Participants' reported various experiences and perceptions that would require intervention from infertility therapists. Infertility therapists can help Black male clients in managing social pressure in healthy ways, without having to resort to avoidance or verbal aggression. The population can also benefit from guidance in managing male distress in healthier ways than silence, denial, or simply getting busy. Infertility therapists can also offer intervention on issues of inadequate social support and male feelings of irrelevance in the fertility treatment process.

Adoption agencies. Several social change issues pertinent to adoption services have been unearthed in this study. That many childless men are taunted over time with derogatory stereotypes before turning to adoption has implications for social support intervention by adoption agencies. Helping the new client manage infertility distress and low self-esteem should constitute aspects of service delivery. Child welfare and private

agencies can use study findings to improve their communication frequency, clarity, and transparency toward prospective adoptive parents. An aspect of transparency is for agencies to instruct recruiters and orienting personnel that prospective parents must receive verbal and documented disclosure that the process is normally long and drawn out. On the other hand, one professional recommended that agencies should develop the practice of having successful adoptive parents interface with prospects whose wait may be prolonged, as a means of coaching and support.

The present study can have a positive influence on adoption agencies' commitment to research competency on the children in their charge, and to sharing their findings honestly, so that prospective parents can make informed decisions on their adoption choices. Adoption counselors can also derive enhanced insight into the gender nuances in the adoption decision-making journey for childless Black heterosexual couples. Counselors can thus be better equipped to formulate outreach programs to reach men and respond to their issues and queries in more informed ways.

Study findings suggest that most men are the secondary or silent partner in adoption, yet influential in decision-making. Adoption agencies may therefore want to consider hiring more men as counselors and social workers, to alleviate the perception of men as minority partners in adoption. Agencies can also formulate workshops for potential adoptive families in which assistance is given on how to complete various stages of the process, and particularly how to successfully manage paperwork protocols. Past researchers had suggested that Black men often experienced distrust in dealing with authority figures and formal social structures (Brooms & Perry, 2016; Murray, 2015;

Wingfield & Wingfield, 2014). However, none of the primary participants in this study expressed any reservations toward adoption agencies. Some expressed confidence that should they plan to adopt, they anticipated genuine guidance from the agency. This finding has social change implications in that agents of the system should avoid stereotyping the demographic as suspicious of, or intimidated by, formal social structures and agents of the system.

Theoretical Implications

The major implication for ecological systems theory in this discourse is that every layer of the systems topography has a stake in the resolution of issues surrounding childlessness and adoption. At the microsystemic level, maybe the most delicate layer for most men, couples have to embark on a discovery of the source of their childlessness. To do so, they will have to thrust their private concerns into the mesosystemic sphere where a physician and support staff are directly involved with the clients. Trust, curiosity, desire, or desperation may be important internal factors in getting the couple to this level. Trustworthiness becomes vital on the part of the clinical staff. Health privacy assurances and preservation of patient dignity are requirements at this level. Backdoor discussions among clinical staff about results and follow-up interventions reflect the exosystem in which the couple are not bodily present but can ultimately be impacted. If trust has been developed at the mesosystemic level, then the exosystem may not seem intimidatory or adversarial.

However, if for instance, results are delayed, insurance payments are withheld, and explanations are not forthcoming, the exosystem becomes a layer of distrust that can

impact patient relationship with clinical staff as well. The couple may ultimately have to decide on their options, and once they begin to wonder about their religion's beliefs about ART or adoption, and about the social and cultural expectations, to read up on success rates for ART, and to investigate the adoption marketplace, they are on macrosystemic terrain.

Ecological systems theory assigns a critical role to each level of the system if successful resolution is to be attained. No level is irrelevant because each is imprinted in varied ways, consciously or otherwise, in the experiences and perceptions of the individual.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to discover the perceptions of, and influences on, Black heterosexual men in an involuntarily childless relationship in which adoption was under consideration. Findings arose from the triangulation of data from semi structured individual interviews with primary (those experiencing the phenomenon) and secondary (adoption professional) participants, and from a literature review. Yin's (2014) view of a case study as requiring current occurrence, real-life setting, multiple data sources, and a theoretical proposition provided a platform for this study's design. Although no theory may precisely or comprehensively capture the human experience, ecological systems theory provided a viable and consistent worldview for interpreting and articulating the dynamics identified in this study.

Many of the findings coincided with similar findings for other populations. These included the description of adoption in terms of altruism and personal or partner

needs, social and cultural expectations of childbearing particularly by family members, social pressure, manhood questioned, adoption barriers of financial cost, adoption stigma, and adoption as a last resort; male emotional distress, adoption decision-making difficulty, coping with childlessness through busyness, religious rationalization, and inadequate social support, the effort to show manhood by comparing with female partner, female as initiator, adoption a difficult conversation, self-assigned male roles, and male silence or procrastination. Findings that synchronized with past Black studies include the cultural legitimacy of informal adoption, financial cost as an adoption deterrent, religious faith as a means of coping and as a motivating factor in considering adopting.

Findings that do not appear to mirror past findings include primary participants' minimization of liabilities, minimization of emotional distress, and distress reported as past experience despite no change in childlessness status. Hopefully, this study will add to the body of research on the study population and serve as a catalyst for future research on childlessness and adoption.

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Appendix A: Data Collection Tool: Interview Questions for Primary Participants

1. Describe for me your experience of childlessness.

2. What does being childless feel like?

3. Compare your response to childlessness with your partner's response.

4. How important is it for you to have children?

5. What is a man's role in adoption compared to his female partner's role? What is yours?

6. Talk about what adoption means to you.

7. What societal issues face men who don't have children?

8. What inner resources keep you strong throughout your experiences of childlessness?

9. What support system do you have?

10. What other options, apart from adoption, have you and your partner tried?

11. Tell me some of the things you are considering about adoption?

12. What will you say is your major consideration in firmly deciding on adoption?

13. What or who are the main influences on how you see adoption? How so?

14. How does your relationship partner feel about adoption? (And how does her thinking compare to your own)?

15. How would you describe the relationship between you and your partner during this adoption consideration period?

16. If you decide to adopt, what kind of services do you expect from social services organizations like Child Welfare, adoption agencies, etc.? (How important is it to you that you get such help)?

17. So, from here, what's next?

Appendix B: Data Collection Tool: Interview Questionnaire for Adoption Professionals

1. Please share with me your job function and what it entails.

2. How well do you think your agency is doing in recruitment of Black adoptive parents on a whole?

3. This study focuses on Black heterosexual males in an involuntarily childless relationship and their adoption perceptions, experiences, and influences. To what extent have you dealt with this specific demographic, and in what setting?

4. Are your professional experiences with this population limited to a private agency or public agency setting, or inclusive of both?

5. Tell me about any differences and similarities you have perceived between Black involuntarily childless male and female heterosexual partners in their adoption considerations.

6. Among Black heterosexual couples in an involuntarily childless relationship, whom do you find to be the lead partner in the adoption process? The male, or female?

7. Which one do you find to be the primary authority in adoption decision-making?

8. If you have to describe what perceptions Black heterosexual males in an involuntarily childless relationship have about adoption, what would you say?

9. Describe the comfort level you have seen in Black heterosexual males in an involuntarily childless relationship as they go through the adoption process?

10. What are their top expressed concerns?

11. What are their main motivations in decision-making?

12. In your experience, in what ways have Black heterosexual males in an involuntarily childless relationship been helps or hindrances to adoption?

13. What have you observed about the influence of socio-economic status, education, faith tradition or any other factor in the adoption considerations and perceptions of Black heterosexual males in an involuntarily childless relationship?

14. What policies or procedures may need to be addressed, if at all, to increase Black participation in adoptive parenting on a whole, and specifically to draw more childless Black heterosexual males toward adoption.

Appendix C: Biographical Information for Primary Participants

1. What is your marital status?

O Married   O Cohabiting   O Single

2. What is your age?

O Under 35 years old   O 35-49 years old   O 50-64 years old

3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

O Pre-High School   O Some high school   O High school graduate   O Some

    college

O Trade/technical/vocational training   O College graduate   O Some postgraduate

    work O Post graduate degree O Other (please specify)

    _____

4. What is your employment status?

O Employed   O Self-employed   O Unemployed

O Retired   O Homemaker   O Student O Other _____

5. What is your annual income?

 O Less than $30,000

 O $30,00 to $49, 999

O $50,000 to $69, 999

O $70,000 to $89,999

 O $90,000 plus

6. What is your religious affiliation?

 O Protestant: (please specify) _____

O Muslim

O Roman Catholic

O Other (please specify) _____

7. What is your ethnicity of origin?

O African-American

O African

O Afro-Caribbean

O Other: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____