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THE TIES THAT BIND  
An exploratory study into the relationships in open  
adoption

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I have come to discover that adoption impacts on many people. It seems everyone I speak to has a story to share of their experience be it directly or indirectly. There are two conflicting emotions often fought to the fore. Pain and Joy. There are many narratives behind these emotions. I feel blessed that I was able to hear a portion of these

Mā te Atua me te wāhi ngaro tātou e tiaki e manaaki.

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# ABSTRACT

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After 30 years of using closed stranger adoption practices, a societal shift in adoption protocols has evolved where open adoption has become the preferred adoption practice. One of the implications to come from open adoption is a new type of parental relationship where there is the possibility of two parental bodies (birth parent and adopted parent) being involved in an adopted child's life.

This differs from the socially constructed 'norm' of a family unit, where the parent – child relationship is dyadic. Because this newly evolved triadic relationship is not strongly role-modelled in society, a new set of rules and norms has needed to be constructed by the adoption triad as they negotiate and define their family unit.

This qualitative research employed a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experience of those involved in an open adoption. Three adoptive parents, three birthparents and three adoptees were interviewed with the purpose of exploring the dynamics in their open adoption relationships.

Through these interviews the research reveals insights into how triadic relationships of the participants are maintained, highlighting the rewards and challenges of this type of family relationship.

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