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DISSERTATION

GROWING UP ADOPTED: AN EXAMINATION OF
ADOPTEES' SOCIALIZATION EXPERIENCES

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Spring, 2001

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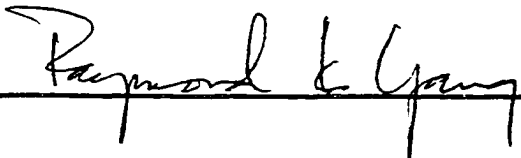
Spring, 2001

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY JILL A. KUHN ENTITLED GROWING UP ADOPTED: AN EXAMINATION OF ADOPTEES' SOCIALIZATION EXPERIENCES BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

Committee on Graduate Work

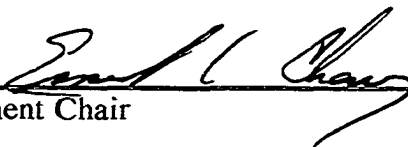








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ABSTRACT

GROWING UP ADOPTED: AN EXAMINATION OF
ADOPTEEES' SOCIALIZATION EXPERIENCES

This study examined, in an exploratory fashion, the self-reported positive and negative remarks made to adult adoptees' while growing up as an adopted person in our culture and their attitudes towards adoption. Our current understanding of adoption adjustment is based on unsupported opinion emanating primarily from theory, which tends to frame adoption as an inherently negative experience with loss and is pathology based.

Furthermore, although numerous authors' point to the harmful nature of the current thinking, which stigmatizes adopted individuals, empirical research has failed to provide cogent findings to support this notion. Participants were 50 adopted undergraduate students who volunteered to participate for research credits or a chance to win 25 lottery tickets. Adopted individuals were administered an Adoption Experiences Questionnaire (AEQ) and an Attitudes Towards Adoption Questionnaire (ATAQ). Overall, adoptees reported both negative and positive remarks and experiences. However, adoptees reported more positive experiences and gave more examples of these types of experiences.

Furthermore, positive experiences were more likely to correlate with positive attitudes towards adoption, while negative experiences were more likely to correlate with negative attitudes towards adoption. Clinical implications are discussed with a particular focus on intervening with adoptive parents since their importance in the lives of their adopted

children has been delineated in this study. Also, the importance of increasing positive images associated with adoption and impacting responsible media portrayals are discussed. Finally, a brief discussion of overall societal reactions to adoption is discussed along with future research directions.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my parents Doreen and Irvin. They taught me the true meaning of family as I **grew up adopted!** To my mom, who gave up a beloved and successful career to stay home with me; and who accepted me into her arms, and her heart (as my biological mother handed me to her in the lawyer's office) and as she has so steadfastly done to this day! To my dad, for teaching me to work hard and play hard and for his wonderfully corny sense of humor (I think I must have "inherited" that from him)! And to both my parents who taught me about honesty, integrity, and respect and the unconditional gift of love. Only now that I have my own family am I beginning to understand the depth of their love. Thank you mom and dad for my life!!!

"How can blood be thicker than water when the people who gave me water for my thirst were not my blood relatives?"

--Kimberlea Ameling, adopted child (Roche, 2000)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Approximately two to four percent of American families include one adopted child (Stolley, 1993). Although data on exact numbers are unreliable, due to numerous methods for adopting a child, and poor data collection, there are approximately 5-7 million adopted individuals in the United States (Schulman & Berman, 1993). According to recent Census data (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992) approximately 1.4% of all married-couple homes have only adopted children while 1.3% have one or more adopted children and one biological child. Adoption is generally defined as a, "personal, legal and social act which provides for the transfer of the rights, responsibilities and privileges of parenting from legal parent(s) to new legal parent(s)" (Cole, 1990, p. 43).

Some people suggest that adoption is "a positive alternative to biological parenting," (Bartholet, 1993) while there are others who oppose the practice of adoption. Such groups suggest instead that adoption, "is a pathology...that genetics is the basis of identity, and that adoptees are amputees" (Nelkin & Lindee, 1995). There have been several cases brought to the attention of the media where an infant was adopted by a family, but later "returned" through court order, to the biological family. Such cases involve "expert testimony" whereby one side claims that "biology doesn't make the parent," and the other where parenthood is a biological classification (Nelkin & Lindee, 1995). These attitudes can translate into, and may be reflective of, societal notions of

adoption in which a higher importance is placed on consanguinal ties at the expense of other relationship variants. Wegar (1997) notes that the central cultural view of adoption sees adoptees as different and that different is denoted by pathology and deviancy. She further suggests that to claim adoptees are different also demands an exploration of the social construction of family, kinship, and difference. That is, rather than assuming that "adoption issues" are individual failings, there is a need to explore the larger cultural experience of adoption and its impact on the socialization experience of adoptees (Wegar, 1997).

A Brief History of Adoption and Adoption Law

Although an in-depth exploration of American adoption law is beyond the scope of this paper it is relevant to briefly examine the historical thought that has impacted adoption laws and provide some illustrations. Historically, adoption has not been viewed in the most positive light. Four thousand years ago if an adopted person openly proclaimed that they were adopted their tongue would have been cut out; if they searched for their biological family they would have had their eyes gouged (Sorosky, 1978). In a comprehensive discussion on adoption law, Presser (1971) indicated that adoption laws in the 19th century were impacted by both the belief that adopted children were of the dregs of society and that being born out of wedlock forever altered the disposition of the child borne out of such an immoral union. Thus, in discussing adoption law in 1876, Whitmore (as cited in Presser, 1971) suggested that adoption be time-limited in order to allow the adoptive parents the opportunity to forego additional parental responsibilities if the child turned out poorly.

Considering the fact that the subjects of adoption are so largely taken from the,

waifs of society, foundlings or children whose parents are depraved and worthless; considering the growing belief that many traits of mind are hereditary and almost irradicable; it may be questioned whether the great laxity of the American rule is for the public benefit. (Whitmore, as cited in Presser, 1971)

In spite of past negative attitudes towards adoption, a slightly more positive sentiment began making its way into societal thinking. Presser (1971) noted that in the late 1870's a religious movement, begun by religious leader, Reverend Brace, held that prospective adopted children were equal to children of the rich and could be benefited by, rather than at risk for corrupting, the adoptive home. However, Brace also indicated that adopted children were of "bad habits" thereby making the connection of some inherent pathology that is somehow created by their biological parents poverty or act of pre-marital sexual behavior. His prevailing belief was that in spite of their prenatal and birth history adopted children could benefit from loving homes and should be valued simply because they were children.

Although Brace made some strides, negative opinions made there way in to adoption legislation and even when laws were made to protect adopted children, courts often did not abide by them. Court decisions at this time also demonstrated the overall significance of "blood ties" by referring to adoptees as "alien in blood" and thus having fewer rights to property even if wills bequeathed otherwise. Presser (1971) noted court decisions in which property and/or inheritance were given to biological children over adopted children or where adopted children were granted inheritance equal only to that of a non-heir. Presser (1971) also found that several different laws stated that adopted children are not brothers/sisters of the biological children of adoptive parents, that adopted

children must pay "collateral inheritance" tax (even though biological children do not have to pay), and that biological parents, not adoptive parents, would inherit from the adopted child if they died intestate. In spite of an 1855 act giving adoptees the same property rights as biological children, a Pennsylvania ruling in 1867, regarding an adopted child seeking their inheritance, denied them on the court ruling that, "...adopted children are not children of the person by whom they have been adopted" (p. 505). Presser (1971) suggested that it is possible that 19th century court decisions favoring "blood" over adoption were a reaction to the changes in the "American family" and thus were an attempt to return families back to the stability and wholesomeness of previous eras. Thus, honoring "blood ties" in the courtroom may have been attempts to preserve tradition.

The first sealed record law was passed in 1917 in Minnesota and by the late 1940's most states had similar laws in place (Wegar, 1997). It is believed that adoptees records were sealed (i.e. an amended birth certificate was created with the adoptive parents names and the adopted child's original birth certificate, with their biological parents names, was sealed) to secure the stability of the adoptive family home, to protect adoptees from the stigma of illegitimacy and to protect the rights of the birth parents (Prager & Rothstein, 1973). In other words, adoptees were placed in a double bind of being told that genetic and blood history were all important, while also being told that they now had a new family and thus must put the past behind them (i.e. sealed record). Triseliotis (1991) suggested that because adoption was not popular in the 1920's and 1930's many thought that promising secrecy would increase adoptions nationally. These attempts and the low adoption rate both led to adoption laws incidentally ceding attitudes of secrecy and shame. Wegar (1997) suggests that adoption in the United States has been significantly impacted

by the cultural taboo against illegitimacy as well as infertility (Miall, 1986). Kirk (1985) further adds that research on societal beliefs regarding adoption demonstrate that negative attitudes, up till the mid-1960's were, "most closely associated with disparaging attitudes towards illegitimacy..." (p. 23). Thus, societal beliefs of disdain against children of unwed mothers have not only impacted the mother's of these children, but have continued to have deleterious effects on the children of these pregnancies. In addition, adoption has been seen as a "welfare service" and thus not on par with more traditional definitions of family or family building (Kirk, 1985).

In spite of the fact that these laws, rulings and ideologies were pronounced several decades ago similar attitudes, in which consanguinity is valued and secrecy about adoption and difference is translated into pathology, continue to pervade the empirical and theoretical adoption literature. Even in the late 1990's Americans noted conflicted feelings about adoption (Meckler, 1997). In spite of the fact that 90% of Americans had a favorable view of adoption overall, when asked further, 50% disagreed (or didn't know) that adoption is better than being childless. Furthermore, 76% disagreed (or didn't know) that it is sometimes harder to love an adopted child.

Current Thinking: A Model of Loss

Current thinking, that inundates the extant adoption literature, conceives of adoption as a less than desirable choice wrought with losses (Berman & Bufferd, 1986; Brodzinsky, Schechter & Henig, 1992; Lifton, 1990; Partridge, 1991; & Reitz & Watson, 1992). The majority of the adoption literature, both in the past and more recently, has tended to view adoption as "a psychological trauma which is associated with psychiatric illness" (Brodzinsky, 1987, & Simon & Senturia, 1966, p. 867). Brinich and Brinich

(1982) suggests that, "adoption occurs when something has gone seriously wrong...The tragedies, inability's and failures of both the biological and adoptive parents are reflected in the adopted child and his psychological development" (p. 107). Brodzinsky's (1990) stress and coping model of adoption adjustment is a theoretical model, which assumes adoption results in loss and stigmatizing experiences. Although Brodzinsky, et al. (1992) indicate that there are "resilient" children who are better equipped to cope with the, "stressor of being adopted" (p. 85), for most children adopted at birth there is still loss involved, that is pervasive in nature, and that occurs gradually as a child's cognitive understanding of adoption unfolds.

Lifton (1990) and Kirschner (1990) in theoretical papers, also support the notion of loss. They have indicated that 100% of adopted individuals evidence the "Adopted Child Syndrome" or "Post Adoption Trauma." This syndrome includes a variety of symptoms (e.g., lying, stealing, running away, low frustration tolerance, fire setting and impulsivity) that are all pathology based. Lifton (1990) further believes that it is unnatural for an adopted child and an adoptive mother to be together because it is outside of "nature's jurisdiction." In a discussion of the adoptive family, Severson (1991) also notes that, "they (the adoptive family) believe themselves to be second best...an inferior way of family building" (p. 15). Similarly, Partridge (1991) states that, "all adoptees face particular challenges" (p.197). These challenges she calls losses and include feeling invisible, divided identities, sense of differentness, feelings of being unloved or not good enough, and feelings of invisibility. These losses she believes put adoptees into a "denial" stage which she indicates is the beginning stage of mourning. Hoffman-Riem (1989) talks about the "structural peculiarities of adoptive families" and that it is an incredible struggle

to incorporate the adopted child into the normalcy of family. Since adoption and pathology are often inextricably linked, it is not surprising that therapists have definite notions when working with adoptees.

Mental Health Treatment. Therapists have been working on the assumption that it is possible to experience a loss and not recognize it. That is, adoptees bring several losses to therapy including loss of blood ties, loss of birth parents and loss of identity. McDaniel and Jennings (1997) in their examination of therapists recommendations for adoptive families, indicate that if an adopted child or adoptive family presents for therapy, therapists should recognize the adoptive status and gear treatment to address underlying and unresolved adoption issues. Katz (1980) further adds that a counselor's role is to focus the adoptive family on the meaning of adoption regardless of the presenting issue(s). Similarly, Helwig and Ruthven (1990) suggest that, "counselors must be aware of the sources of stress and other factors that influence clients dealing with adoption issues even when the presenting problem does not appear to be adoption-related" (p. 25). In a book written specifically for clinicians Reitz and Watson (1992) indicate that, "Little definitive, formal research on adoption and family therapy has been done...(and) More research will be urgently needed in the decades ahead" (p. v). They then suggest that, "The harsh reality is that adoption is a second-best plan," and that there is an, "inherent pain of adoption" (p. 4). They also propose that adopted children may find dealing with such developmental issues as self-esteem, loss, and identity as more difficult and that adoptive families share in the experience of loss which is beyond what other families normally experience.

In an attempt to examine the notion that treatment of adoptees must regularly focus clients on adoption issues several authors have proposed alternative viewpoints.

Wampold, Casas and Atkinson (1981) note that in the cognitive psychology literature that therapists may hold biases that are, "beyond consciousness" and thus make it difficult to simply become aware of and rectify. Similarly, Winkler, Brown, van Keppel, and Blanchard (1988) state that professionals in dealing with adoption often respond to stereotypes. Cook (1995) explains that, "people's experience of loss is greatly affected by how they perceive and interpret it-in other words, the meaning they ascribe to it" (p. 113) and that, "existing public and professional attitudes are certainly a confounding factor" (p. 106). In other words, treatment modalities may be modeled after societal and personal beliefs about the meaning of adoption. For example, Nickman and Lewis (1994) and Janus (1997) have suggested that professionals stigmatize, or label as inferior, adoptive families, which often results in the worsening of normal family problems. They recommend then that mental health professionals be trained, "about common biases and stigmatizing beliefs." (p. 750) Janus (1997) also recommends that counselors not only be willing to ask sensitive questions related to adoption, but to also not overemphasize adoption as the root of all an adoptees problems. She also indicates that therapists must also be aware of their biases relating to adoption and as such have an awareness of their vocabulary or word choices (e.g. using the word "birthparents" rather than "real" parents.) Thus, a person who was adopted and is seeking mental health treatment may or may not need to have treatment geared towards adoption related issues. As discussed, unrecognized beliefs about adoption can impact theory and thus may also impact research conducted.

Adoptees and Adjustment: Empirical Research

The data are mixed regarding adoption and adjustment. Mainstream research has found that adoptees are more likely to evidence a number of problems including problems

in personality adjustment, social adjustment, behavior problems and academic performance (Bohman, 1970; Lindholm & Touliatos, 1980; Seglow, Pringle, & Wedge, 1972; Brodzinsky, 1984; Brodzinsky et al. 1992 & Brodzinsky, Smith & Brodzinsky, 1999). Additionally, researchers have found a higher prevalence, as compared with the general population, of adoptees in therapy (MacIntyre & Donovan, 1990) and in psychiatric hospitals (Simon & Senturia, 1966; Wilson, Green & Soth, 1986). It has been further found that adoptees were younger at admission to psychiatric hospitals (Weiss, 1985). However, other research studies have found that adoptees do as well, if not better than non-adoptees (Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998; Singer, Brodzinsky & Braff, 1982; Marquis & Detweiler, 1985; Sobol, Delaney, & Earn, 1994).

Findings however vary based on whether adoptees are drawn from clinical (e.g., mental health clinics) or non-clinical (e.g., school or community based) samples and the methodology utilized (e.g., control groups, age at adoption, blind rating procedures). Hersov (1990) conducted a comprehensive review of the literature regarding the generally held belief that adoptees are at an increased vulnerability. He found that when examining clinical studies adoptees were twice as likely, than expected, to be represented when compared to nonadopted children. Zill (1985), utilizing a non-clinical sample, found that adolescents adopted after infancy were more likely to have been seen by a psychologist or psychiatrist and to have repeated a grade in school than children adopted during infancy. He found moderate differences in mental health treatment rates between children adopted during infancy (13%) and children raised by both biological parents (5%). However, rather than concluding that this higher proportion of adoptees needing mental health services is indicative of pathology, other researchers provide alternative explanations for this higher

incidence. Weiss (1985) suggests that instead of indicating a higher and earlier incidence of pathology, adoptive parents may be more sensitive to their children's needs and adoptive parents may be more able to procure professional help through awareness of mental health services available and solid financial resources. Additionally, Glidden (1994) explains that it is also plausible that in addition to being more aware of resources adopted parents are more open to seeking help than non-adoptive parents. Thus, according to Glidden (1994) adoptees may not truly be more at risk but more likely to be identified as such. Other studies find no such increased risk. Brinich and Brinich (1982) examined the adoptive status of 5,135 patients in several mental hospitals and found that only 1.6% was adopted. This number is less than expected based on their estimate of 2.2% of adopted children in the general population.

Another set of studies have found that adopted children, adolescents, and adults have demonstrated average or above average adjustment when compared to non-adopted peers (Marquis & Detweiler, 1985; Singer, et al. 1982; & Sobol, et al. 1994). Unfortunately, studies that find average or above average adjustment are often downplayed or ignored. For example, in a non-clinical study examining children's attitudes towards adoption Singer, et al. (1982) found that younger adopted children perceived other adopted children as being better adjusted than nonadopted peers. However, Singer et al. dismissed these findings by indicating that these high self-attributions as, "an unrealistically positive-view of adoption" (p. 292.). Furthermore, they also found that adoptees self-perception decreases as they get older which Singer et al. suggests is due in part to negative feedback from peers. Whereas they make the link between a decrease in self-perception and stigmatizing by others they also argue that such a decrease is "more

realistic." Although the authors suggest that there is a clear need to educate the public in order to decrease stigmatizing, it is also clear that they believe it is not realistic for adoptees to feel very positive about themselves.

Additionally, in a study on stress and coping in adopted children (see stress and coping model, Brodzinsky, 1990) Smith and Brodzinsky (1994) found that older children expressed more ambivalence about adoption than younger children while younger children had more intrusive thoughts related to adoption. They further suggest that as children mature they have an increasing awareness of what it means to be adopted. That is, they are more likely to understand the implications of losing their biological family members, losing cultural/ethnic connections and thus they lose pieces of themselves. It could be argued that these conclusions are heavily value laden and imply that blood-ties or genetic heritage are the essence of identity formation. Furthermore, Brodzinsky (1987) found that adopted children are well within the normal limits in regards to behavioral, academic and emotional adjustment. Additionally, Brodzinsky et al. (1992) found that there is no increased risk for children up to the age of 5 or 6 and that problems begin to occur in the elementary school years. This is the very age that socialization typically begins for children and hence the possibility arises that they will encounter negative attitudes towards adoption.

Furthermore, Mueller and Gibbs (1999) suggest a shortcoming of Brodzinsky's (1990) stress and coping model in that it fails to delineate variables that result in either an increase in adoption related stress or in a decrease of adoption problems.

In fact, as noted by Shaw (1984), physicians and teachers may be more likely to see adopted children as having more problems and be more likely to refer them to professionals based on their adoptive status. Additionally, Hoopes (1982) found that

researchers as well as teachers rated adopted children as less confident and more fearful than their non-adopted peers did. However, in these studies, the raters were aware of the adoptive status of the children prior to making their ratings. This could certainly confound the ratings.

Regarding the notion that adoption correlates with poorer adjustment, Singer, Brodzinsky, Ramsay, Steir and Waters (1985) examined, in a non-clinical sample, whether adopted children were at greater risk for socioemotional, behavioral, and/or academic problems than non-adopted peers. They suggest that adoptees may have a “psychological vulnerability” which could be due to a more problematic prenatal/reproductive history, difficulties with being told of their adoption, search for identity, late adoption placements and complications associated with the social stigma surrounding their adoption. Utilizing Ainsworth’s Strange Situation paradigm they found no differences in mother–infant attachment relationships between intraracial adopted children and their mothers (interracial adoptive families demonstrated a higher number of insecurely attached infants than non-adopted infants) when compared with non-adoptive mother-infant pairs. They also found that mothers of intraracial babies rated their level of emotional support from husbands, friends, and extended families as higher than non-adoptive mothers. Furthermore, Ternay, Wilburn and Day (1985) in a non-clinical comparison of adopted parents and biological parents found that there is no difference in regards to personal adjustment and parental behavior. Additionally, Schoborg-Winterberg and Shannon (1988) found no differences in level of adjustment between adopted and non-adopted adults. Finally, Marquis and Detweiler (1985) found that 13-21 year old adoptees, recruited from a private high school and private college, perceived themselves as being more in control of their lives and as

having more confidence in their judgment(s) than non-adopted individuals. Thus they concluded that adoptees had a higher level of adjustment than non-adoptive individuals and that the stereotypic view that adoptees are necessarily at-risk was unsupported.

Interestingly, very few studies ask adoptees about their perspective or experience as adoptees. Brodzinsky (1984) examined children's understanding of adoption. They found that adopted children's (4-13 years old) knowledge unfolds in systematic ways and becomes differentiated, as they become older. Sobol, et al. (1994) examined young adult adoptees' retrospective depictions of their adoptive family relationships from infancy to adulthood and compared them to young non-adopted adults. They found that adoptive families saw themselves as closer and more flexible, closer to their fathers and engaged in less hierarchical relationships with their mothers than did non adoptive families. They also found that adopted adult females felt closer to their adopted parents than did adopted males when compared with non-adopted adults. Kowal and Schilling's (1985) study asked adoptees about their feelings of being adopted. They surveyed 100 adults, who contacted a search agency, and found that most adoptees were told of their adoptive status at an early age, and that they received little information about their biological history (although it is unclear whether the adoption agencies or the adoptive parents withheld this information). In addition, when asked about their feelings towards being adopted there was an equal breakdown of participant responses to positive, neutral and negative attitudes. Additionally, adoptees reported feeling several contradictory feelings at the same time (e.g. feeling special and insecure). Finally, they asked about reasons for searching or contacting their adoption agency and found that the majority of adoptees were wanting medical information and that the most common reason for searching was a pregnancy,

birth or adoption of their own. March (1995) found that 68% of adoptees did not perceive differences between adoptive and biological families, but that they felt that other's saw adoptive families as different. Wrobel, Ayers-Lopez, Grotevant, McRoy, and Friedrich (1996) examined self-reported perceptions of parental openness in discussing adoption issues (mean age = 7 years old). They found that girls, when compared to boys, were more interested in information about their birthparents and that providing children with information about their birthparents does not confuse them or decrease their self-esteem. Thus, there is a paucity of literature that asks adoptees about their perceptions of growing up adopted and to reflect on their socialization experience as adoptees.

Another problem in the research literature in general, according to Campbell and Stanley (1963); also observed in the adoption literature, is the "one-shot case studies." Numerous articles on adoption support their assertions through "convenience sampling" (Toedter, Lasker, & Campbell, 1990). Furthermore, the questions that must be asked are: are the problems discussed in the adoption literature specific to adoptive families or are they also applicable to non-adoptive families? Several authors use case studies in an attempt to suggest that certain problems are experienced only in adoptive families. Bartholet (1993) believes that research is informed by the bias that adoption is abnormal. Thus, case study conclusions utilize adoption as an explanation for the patient's problems. For example, Talen and Lehr (1984) suggest that unresolved issues on the part of adoptive parents have a negative effect on their relationship with their adopted children. However, could this also be the case with non-adopted families as well? Berman and Bufferd (1986) suggest that loss is a key issue in adoption and that adopted children must get past their denial that their birthparent represents a loss. However, they provide case studies that are

either confounded, for example, with past sexual abuse, or suggest that behavior, that is as easily observable in non-adopted individuals, is somehow the exclusive domain of adoptees (for example, testing limits with their parents).

Thus, as some of the research has demonstrated it is important to gain a better understanding of previously ignored variables (e.g., interethnic adoption, age of adoption, confounding histories of abuse or neglect, non-adoptive families), rather than extrapolating findings to all adoptees or drawing the conclusion that the state of *being* adopted necessarily results in problems. Additionally, Wegar (1997) suggests that until researchers, professionals, and activists see adoption within its larger social and cultural context, they will continue to stigmatize the individual adoptee and their family and will inadvertently carry out the same stereotypes and fallible belief systems that they originally intended to eliminate. Miall (1996) believes that it is paramount, "for researchers to theoretically normalize the examination of developmental issues within the adoptive family" (p. 316).

Attribution Theory, Stereotypes and Stigma

Heider (1944, 1958) suggested that people, or "naive psychologists," search for explanations in other people's behavior in the world around them in order to reduce or avoid stress. That is, we utilize the "attribution process" to predict others' motives which we think make their behavior more predictable and hence less stressful to us as observers. Hansen (1980) indicated that perceiver's utilize a principle called cognitive economy to confirm rather than disconfirm their initial ideas. In essence, even though there are numerous explanations, observers will often ignore the available information and instead utilize "cognitive misering" (i.e. a shortcut) and thus rely on their long held beliefs. Long

held beliefs, not based on accurate information, can result in stereotypes. Stereotypes, according to social psychologists, are not necessarily negative or positive (Jussim, Nelson, Manis, & Soffin, 1995). Instead stereotypes are, generalizations "about a class of people," (Wampold, et al. 1981) that can result in stigmatizing. Such people, "by virtue of their membership in a social category are vulnerable to being labeled as deviant, [or] are targets of prejudice or victims of discrimination or have negative...personal outcomes." (Crocker & Major, 1989). Thus, stigma or prejudice is the endorsement of 'negative' stereotypes that result in behaving negatively towards a minority group (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996; & Krueger, 1996). Commonly utilized stereotypes result in a 'consistency effect' that are particularly resistant to change, even with disconfirming evidence (Corrigan & Penn, 1999; & Fyock & Stanger, 1994). Such "claims making" then impacts policy making, research and clinical practice.

Specifically regarding adoption, Stewart (1990) suggests that an emphasis is placed on situational theories of maladjustment whereby professionals, and by extension the lay public, make assumptions that causes are to be found in the adoption situation. The fact of adoption is a salient and relatively rare event which therefore results in mis-attributions. That is, often equally plausible variables are ignored for the more salient explanation that adoption, or adoptive status, answers the question being asked. Thus, the mere act of *being* adopted connotes meaning that may or may not be accurate.

Stigmatizing as a Precursor to Adoption Problems

Although viable alternatives to the findings of the pathology driven model of adoption were previously discussed it is important to further examine how a priori assumptions of the meaning of adoption can possibly be confounding the type of research

being conducted. For example, some theorists argue that historical construction of "the family" suggests that there is one static and sanctioned meaning for "family" and that, "families differing from the ideal are defined as deviant at best, pathological, at worst." (Andersen, 1991, p. 239). Although the previous stigma of illegitimacy has decreased to some extent, new stigmas of adoption have emerged (Nelkin & Lindee, 1995).

Traditional views on adoption utilize a psychodynamic, biological or individual perspective, but not a social perspective. That is, we need to gain a better understanding of how society views adoptions and how this perception in turn can impact how adoptees themselves perceive their socialization experience as adoptees. In an examination of adoption in the media, Reese (1999) suggested that although a recent New York Times article (October 25, 1998) focused on the positive aspects of adoption and for those whom it has worked, the media in general still stigmatizes adoption (e.g. focuses on problematic cases), rather than seeing adoption as a normal way to make a family. In fact, Nickman (1985) argues that adoptees do experience a variety of stigmatizing experiences in our society, due to their status as adoptees. Furthermore, if adopted children are labeled, as having something inherently wrong with them, it can be argued that a self-fulfilling prophecy is created. It is important then that we develop a better understanding of the adoption situation rather than relying on a stereotyped model of pathology.

In a research study on infertility Miall (1986) described the interplay between social reactions and self-labeling. She noted that self labeling occurs when people learn that society may label their situation as deviant and thus the individual may then also believe themselves to be deviant, a failure or somehow discredited. She found that infertile

women often isolated themselves from others following a self-evaluation of deviancy (i.e. unable to conceive). Similarly, it may be plausible that some adoptees are more likely to also self-label themselves as deviant in reaction to the possibility that other's may see them as different or pathological.

Social Perceptions of Adoption

Bartholet (1993) indicates that views on adoption are a "social construction" and not a universal fact. He suggests that many cultures look at adoption in a vastly different way and that to understand the effect of adoption we must examine the societal attitudes towards its construction. For example, Nelkin and Lindee (1995) discuss kinship as a "complicated cultural construction" and that some cultures do not use biological connections, but rather social agreements, as to what constitutes family. For example, oceanic societies regularly give their children to other families as a way of cementing friendships and fostering community (Terrell & Modell, 1994). Levy (1973) discusses a Tahitian village in which greater than 25 percent of the children were adopted. Similarly, Marshall (1977) found that in a Trukese society where similar "child exchange" occurred that kinship was defined by obligation and love and not genetics. Linnekin and Poyer (1990) who studied adoption and kinship on the Mandok Island in Papua New Guinea found that children in general share the "substance" of their (adoptive) parents which is beyond blood and included food, work and caretaking. In other words a person is not their genetic makeup so much as a product based on the nurturing from their community and physical surroundings. There is even evidence that African Americans continue to engage in informal adoption ("child-taking" or "child keeping") and that this tradition has continued since slavery (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). Furthermore, Goody (1982) who

examined "adoption" in West African societies again warned against the assumption that adoption holds the same meaning, "from group to group, time to time, or even person to person." (Terrel & Modell, 1994, p. 158.) However, they suggest that in North America we generally define kinship as biological connections.

The perceived problems of adoption in which loss must be reconciled, are due, as suggested by Miall (1987), to the societal belief that biological parenthood is the natural family arrangement whereas adoptive parenthood is a second best option (Modell, 1986). This idea is evidenced in the usage of terms like "real" or "natural" parents when referring to the biological parents or having one's "own" children where adopted children are somebody else's child. Consequently adopted children are seen as missing something that other children have (Miall, 1987).

Interestingly, if adoptees indicate that they do not feel a loss as a result of their adoption, they are often told that they are in denial (Brodzinsky, et al. 1992). It would seem that labeling someone as being in denial, if they disagree with one's theory, is a disingenuous way to support one's position without providing compelling evidence. Donovan (MacIntyre & Donovan, 1990) maintains, "the popular lay literature on adoption reflects an irrational and ideological position that signals an extraordinary lack of understanding of the emotional and cognitive developmental needs of children" (p. 833). He further adds that these so called "losses" are losses as perceived by adults. In other words the view that blood ties are the determining factor in mental health has influenced the conclusions drawn when discussing the lives of adopted individuals. It is plausible that as children increase their social network they are more likely to encounter people with negative ideas regarding adoption. As a result some adopted individuals may be at risk for

internalizing these negative messages. Our society appears to place a premium on blood-ties where nine months of pregnancy overshadow the 18 plus years spent raising a child. In fact, more extreme organizations, such as Concerned United Birthparents (CUB), argue that blood-ties are paramount and that adoptive families are not "normal" (Modell, 1986). Some authors suggest that, as a society, we place significance on the "molecular family" whereby genetic links are valued over emotional or social ties (Nelkin & Lindee, 1995) and have a bias towards "cultural biologism" (Modell & Dambacher, 1997). Kirk (1964, 1984) has noted that our society sees giving birth as "normative". Therefore, anyone who does not give birth to their child is stigmatized. In fact, Kirk (1964) regularly discussed the relationship that exists between the adoptive family and society as a whole. He indicated that our society sees adoption as deviant and that adoptive parents have the sole responsibility of helping their adopted children achieve comfort with their status as an adoptee. More recently, media initiatives for the purpose of educating the public regarding accurate information about adoption have begun to be put in place (Adlard, 1999).

Searching. Adoptees are told that it is necessary for them to search out their biological families in order to gain a complete sense of self (Sants, 1964). Lifton (1994) suggests that adoptees search for the "missing pieces" and that adoptees are "fantasy people" who are "invisible" because they do not know those to whom they are linked genetically.

This notion is evidenced in television shows where one in five adopted television characters searches for birth parents. This percentage is 18 times greater than the frequency of this occurrence with actual adoptees (Nelkin & Lindee, 1995). This portrayal then reflects a larger cultural belief that biology is all important. Is it not surprising then to

see so many adoptees wishing to search when in fact our culture regularly tells them that in order to be complete they must find a biological connection?

There is currently a debate in the adoption literature as to whether searching for one's biological roots is healthy or whether choosing not to search is the manifestation of mental health. Andersen (1993) has suggested that searching out one's biological roots is a sign of health and that we need to instead ask why some adoptees choose not to search. He found that a primary reason adoptees search is the desire to alter the way in which they experience themselves (Andersen, 1989). In fact, Hollingsworth (1998), in a recent review of the empirical, theoretical and clinical case adoption literature, indicated that, "familiarity with the birthparents is necessary to the development of a healthy identity in their child" (p. 307). She also concluded that adoptees who believe themselves to look dissimilar (e.g. physical appearance or ethnicity) to their adoptive parents are more likely to search than those adoptees who believe they look similar to their adoptive parents. Lichtenstein (1996) suggested that adoptees search, in part, to find answers to their "romance fantasies" about their biological families. In a study with Israeli adoptees, where an adoptees right to information is a given, Lichtenstein found that adoptees were more likely to share their information about searching with their adoptive parents, if their adoptive parents had been open about discussing their adoption.

Taking a different view, Aumend and Barrett (1984) found that adult adoptees who designated themselves as "searchers" were more likely to evidence lower self-esteem, a poorer identity, a lower family and physical self, and less self-satisfaction than those adult adoptees who designated themselves as "non-searchers." Similarly, Triseliotis (1973) found personality problems and disturbed family relationships in adoptees who

chose to search for their biological family. Humphrey and Humphrey (1989) suggest that a lack of interest in knowing one's ancestors is compatible with a secure sense of self. They in fact conclude that a preoccupation with one's origin is related to psychological disturbance. However, there are numerous search groups in existence all across the country that espouse the benefits, if not necessity, of finding one's biological family (Sants, 1964). Finally, Wegar (1997) argues that because of the very fact our society places such an importance on genetics and blood ties, denying adoptees information (e.g. keeping birth certificates sealed) is illogical and unfair.

Adoptive parents

Unfortunately, adoptive parents are often blamed for adoption problems and are consequently held solely responsible if their adoptive child evidences any problems. Although some adoptive parents may bear some of this responsibility, many are merely reflecting the cultural context in which adoption is imbedded. In a brief review of theory regarding adoptive parents, Miall (1996) believes that the literature is "extremely negative" towards adoptive parents and noted that theorists believe that there are inherent problems in raising a child that is not biologically related to the parents. For example, Andersen (1993) suggests that "Blood is thicker than water. Some societies recognize this fact. But adoptive families do not, perhaps because they feel invalid unless they simulate natural families" (p. 162). Similarly, Kaye (1982) adds that, "adoption occurs when something has gone seriously wrong... The tragedies, inabilities, and failures of both the biological and adoptive parents are reflected in the adopted child and his psychological development" (p. 175). Such attitudes would seem to create difficulty for adoptive families to function at a normative level. Norvell and Guy (1977) suggested that adoption

in and of itself cannot produce a negative identity but that should an adoptee develop negative aspects to their identity they more likely than not stem from problems within in the home. In fact, in the early 1960's Toussieng (1962), a child psychiatrist, suggested that emotional disturbance in adoptees is due to the unconscious and unresolved aversion towards parenting, primarily on the part of mothers. Conversely, DiGiulio (1987) suggested that the role of the adoptive parent is, in part, dictated by society at large and that assuming this role is confusing and inconsistent. Silin (1996) notes that although Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig (1992, p.33) found that adopted parent-infant pairs form attachments in a time frame similar to that found in biological parent-infant pairs. However, adoptive parents have the added burden of dealing with stigmatizing reactions by others. She further points out the realities of insensitive comments directed at adoptive parents (e.g., "It's too bad you couldn't have a baby the regular way," or "If only you knew the joy that comes with having a baby of your own," or "where did you get her?" or "how much did you pay for her?") (p. 259). As such, adoptive parents may evidence discomfort in discussing adoption issues with their adopted children because, as adoptive parents, they are influenced by cultural norms of what it means to be adopted

It is erroneous to assume that adoptive parents live in a vacuum. Rather they are part of a larger cultural milieu and may unwittingly pass on its prejudices towards adoption. Unfortunately, adoptive parents are often blamed for almost as if they were independent of the context of a larger society. For example, Brodzinsky (1987) noted that both adoptive parents and many factions of society view adoption as "second-best" to biological parenthood. Kirk (1981) suggested that adoptive family's may in fact have "role handicaps" due to discrimination by others against adoption and those impacted by

adoption. In spite of these "theories" little research has been conducted on the relative satisfaction and adjustment of adoptive parents. As a result of studies like this and general societal uneasiness with discussing adoption, adoptive families may cope by keeping the fact of adoption secret or by evincing discomfort in discussing adoption. Additionally, very little research directly asks adoptees about their experiences in adoptive families and how they may perceive this experience.

Miall (1987) concluded that the success of adoption is found in the ability to throw off negative societal attitudes rather than giving into them. Therefore, it is plausible that it is not the status of being adopted that is the problem, but rather the culture in which a definition of family is embedded. In addition, Miall (1987) found that adoptive parenthood was viewed as equal to biological parenthood when participants' social network included adoptive families. In other words, as a person is able to observe the normalcy of adoption, stereotyping decreases. Lieberman (1998) indicates that like other minority groups adoptees and their families are left bearing the responsibility to educate their friends and teachers about what family means and dispelling myths about the realities of adoption. Terrell and Modell (1994) remind us, adoption is not typical in our society. Singer et al. (1982) also suggests that to the extent that the "adoption beliefs" held by peers of adopted individuals impact adoptees, there is a need to educate society as a whole about adoption in order to eliminate stigma and thus increase adjustment of adoptees and their families. As summarized by LePere (1988), "As in any family the adoptive families who are most likely to be successful are those who learn to resolve problems through open communication, who are able to provide nurturing while fostering independence and who have a secure sense of themselves as capable members of families" (p. 84). Clearly this suggests that

adoption can be a normal family experience.

For many, adoption is seen as a positive experience. However, rarely are these experiences studied. Their numbers appear to be larger than the bulk of the literature would suggest. Brodzinsky, et al. (1992) suggest that, "The variability of adoptees' coping strategies is difficult to capture in empirical research. Unhappy adoptees are relatively easy to find, satisfied adoptees are not." Since the majority of adoptees are so hard to find, their point of view may be poorly represented in discussions of what it is like to be adopted" (p. 154.). In addition, Kowal and Schilling (1985) have suggested that adopted individuals blend into the general population and that they only come to our attention when they are involved in legal or mental health services. Therefore, in the words of Singer et al. (1982) "to the extent that non-adopted children accept the negative stereotypes about adoption that pervade our society, it is quite likely that they will provide adopted peers with unfavorable feedback concerning the latter's family status" (p. 286). It is plausible then that this "unfavorable feedback" could impact adoptees and their overall functioning. Finally, very few research studies have asked adoptees about their own experience as an adoptee and instead examine the perspective of therapists, doctors and caseworkers.

Statement of the Problem

Several problems exist in the current adoption literature that are based on a priori conceptions of what it means to be adopted in this society. That is, adoptees are not inherently pathological, but may as a result of listening to societal messages, internalize these negative messages and therefore demonstrate symptomatic behavior as they develop.

However, as previously described, it can be suggested that there are adoptees who

do not internalize these negative messages and demonstrate average to above average adjustment. So, this theory of adoption adjustment can be described as containing both external factors and internal factors. Some adoptees are affected by the existing attitude that adoption is an inherently negative experience. As they internalize these messages they often come to the attention of professionals who may also embody negative attitudes. Research is then conducted on this skewed group with findings generalized to all adoptees. Thus, there is a loop in which conclusions based on biased samples are fed back into professional attitudes and societal conceptions of what it means to be adopted. It seems erroneous to a priori assume a pathology driven model because there are credible studies that provide evidence that adoptees are as adjusted as their non-adopted counterparts (see Sobol, et al. 1994; Marquis & Detweiler, 1985). However, these studies are often downplayed as being overly optimistic or consisting of inflated perceptions. This is not to say that there are adoptees who do not have adjustment difficulties in a variety of spheres. Rather our understanding of these difficulties needs to be based on a more complete picture of the varieties of stigmatizing beliefs held by mental health workers, researchers, physicians, law makers, media and society in general. It is conceivable that the problems we do see adoptees evidencing could be markedly decreased if stigmatizing in general decreased. To date, few studies exist that rigorously examine how adopted individuals from a non-clinical sample perceive their socialization process. In addition, research has failed to examine the actual socialization process of adoptees. In other words how do adopted individuals perceive other's reactions to them and are they likely to encounter labeling and stigmatizing (negative or positive) based simply on their adoptive status? Furthermore, what effect does such stigmatizing and labeling have on the way in

which adoptive individuals experience themselves (i.e. their current attitudes)? That is, are they more likely to agree with statements that pathologize them?

Therefore, in this study, several variables were investigated in an exploratory fashion. First, the extent to which adopted individuals are stigmatized was examined (including both reported positive and negative remarks and experiences). To date there have been no studies that have systematically examined this phenomenon. Secondly, the extent to which adoptees subscribe to traditional ideas of what it means to be adopted was examined (i.e. attitudes towards adoption). That is, were adoptees more likely to pathologize themselves based on their adoptive status? The relationship between reported positive or negative remarks and experiences due to adoptive status and the extent to which adoptees pathologize themselves were also studied. Finally, adoptees self-designated status as being either a "searcher" or a "non-searcher" was explored, to determine whether differences existed on the above variables based on whether they perceived themselves as needing to find their biological family.

Chapter 2

Method

Participants

Sixty students from Colorado State University participated in the study during the fall and spring semesters 1996-1997. The final sample consisted of 36% males and 64% females and was comprised of approximately 20% minorities ($n = 10$, 12% Asian, 2% Black, 2% Hispanic, 2% Black-Mexican, 2% Hispanic-American Indian) and 58% White non-Hispanic ($n = 29$), with 16% ($n = 8$) of participants indicating that they did not know their ethnicity and 6% ($n = 3$) of participants did not answer. The average age of participants was 26.5 years old with a range from 18-47. The average age at adoption was 2.7 months with a range from birth to 16 months (Sixty percent, $n = 30$, indicated having been adopted by one month of age). Questionnaires from fifty participants were used in the final analyses. Two questionnaires were omitted because of incomplete data, one because of non-compliance, one because the participant did not meet the requirements of the study (under age 18); and six were omitted because participants did not meet the parameters for inclusion in the study (all six were adopted after the age of two).

Adopted individuals were recruited from an advertisement placed in the university paper and were also solicited in lower division courses throughout the university. Everyone who participated had their name put into a raffle for 25 lottery tickets. Participants who were from introductory psychology courses also received two extra

credits as part of the course requirement. All participants were treated in accordance with the Ethical Principles of the American Psychological Association. One female, doctoral student, and two female undergraduate research assistants were responsible for administering the questionnaires.

Measures (See Appendix A)

Adoption Experiences Questionnaire. The 44-item Adoption Experiences Questionnaire (AEQ) was designed by the experimenter to examine the nature of negative and positive attitudes and experiences encountered by adoptees in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. An equal number of positive (e.g., special, positive comments,) and negative items (e.g., rejected, negative comments) were presented in the questionnaire. In the AEQ participants were asked on a 7-point Likert Scale what kinds of messages they were given about being adopted (1 = very positive, 7 = very negative), how special they felt (1 = very special, 7 = not at all special), how rejected they felt (1 = not at all rejected, 7 = very rejected), if anyone said anything negative to them (no/yes), how often they heard those negative comments (1 = rarely, 7 = frequently), how those negative comments affected them (1 = affected me positively, 7 = affected me negatively), if anyone said anything positive to them (no/yes), how often they heard those positive comments (1 = rarely, 7 = frequently), how those positive comments affected them (1 = affected me positively, 7 = affected me negatively), feelings towards being adopted (1 = positive, 7 = negative). Participants were asked to answer each of these questions for the childhood, adolescent and adulthood subsections of the AEQ.

Participants were also asked to check whether adoptive parents, siblings, media, books, friends, teachers, significant romantic relationships, strangers, acquaintances, and

professionals affected feelings towards adoption. If they checked that a particular category affected their feelings, participants were then asked to indicate on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = positively, 7 = negatively) how they were affected. Participants were also asked to check whom (adoptive mother, adoptive father, siblings, best friend, friends, adoptive aunts/uncles, adoptive grandparents and teachers) they could talk to about being adopted. Participants were asked to answer each of the questions for the childhood, adolescent and adulthood subsections of the AEQ. At the end of the adulthood subsection participants were also asked to go back and circle the one area that they believed had the largest effect, in their experience, of what it means to be adopted. However, this question was omitted from analysis due to missing data.

Participants were also asked on a 7-point Likert-type scale what overall effect being adopted has had (1 = more difficult, 7 = easier), to rate the experience of looking, if they looked, for their biological parents (1 = positive, 7 = negative), how similar they physically look to their adoptive family (1 = very similar, 7 = very dissimilar) and how similar their ethnic background is to their adoptive family (1 = very similar, 7 = very dissimilar). Participants were asked to indicate age of adoption, in months, how long they had been in foster care (if they indicated having been in foster care), how old they were when told about being adopted, the most difficult age in dealing with being adopted. They were also asked to answer yes or no as to whether they were ever in foster care, whether they recall being told they were adopted, whether they were ever lied to about being adopted, whether they know why they were placed for adoption, whether they had looked for their biological parents or whether they would someday look.

The AEQ also contained a qualitative dimension in which participants were asked

to answer eight essay questions. The first two questions examined positive and negative things said in childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Participants were also about both positive and negative experiences related to being adopted; to explain further if they indicated having been lied to about being adopted; why they were placed for adoption; if they had not already searched, why or why not they would someday search for their biological parents; and to explain if their parents could have been more open in talking to them about adoption. These responses were analyzed qualitatively.

Attitudes Towards Adoption Questionnaire. The 28-item Attitudes Towards Adoption Questionnaire (ATAQ) was derived by the researcher from a review of the adoption literature. Items from the scale were taken directly from statements emanating from adoption theory. Participants were asked to respond on a 7-point Likert-type scale, (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). For example, "Adoptive families are 'second-best' to non-adoptive families." Items 1, 2, and 12 were reverse scored in the final analysis. Item 16 was removed from the ATAQ prior to analyses, and analyzed separately, as it lacked face validity. Thus, 27 items were used in the final analysis.

Demographic Data Sheet. The 15-item demographic data sheet asks participants to indicate their age, gender, year in school, major, income, number of siblings and the number of adopted people known. Participants were also asked to indicate on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = very close, 7 = not at all close) how close they feel to their adopted siblings, non-adopted siblings, mother (adopted), and father (adopted). Finally, they were asked on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = likely, 7 = not likely) how likely they would be to consider adopting.

Procedures

Participants were solicited from lower division courses at Colorado State University and from an advertisement placed in the university paper that read, "Adopted individuals wanted for research study. Chance to win 25 lottery tickets. Call Jill at 491-2968." Adoptees who responded to the advertisement were given a group appointment at the time of their phone call and informed of the location of the study. Participants from courses that did not require research credit were recruited in individual classes through a brief announcement and a sign-up sheet with group appointment times which were circulated. Participants receiving credit from introductory psychology courses were recruited through a Research Information Sheet (see Appendix B) that described the study and were also provided with a sign-up list of appointments and locations with reminder slips that participants could take with them.

When participants arrived at the appointed time they were asked to take a seat in the pre-determined classroom. Five minutes after the designated appointment time the classroom door was closed and a sign was posted that read, "Experiment in Progress. Please Do Not Disturb". All participants were given two copies of the consent form (see Appendix B) at this time and informed that the consent form would be kept separate from the questionnaire. Participants were told to keep a signed copy of the consent form and the second copy was then collected. After all signed consent forms were received the Questionnaire was handed out to participants. Participants were then asked to read the brief instructions and fill out the questionnaire with no limit given on time. Pencils and pens were made available as needed. Upon completion of the questionnaire participants were then asked to hand in their completed questionnaire and had the chance to sign up on

a mailing list for results of the study. In addition, everyone was given a card on which to write their name and phone number for the 25 lottery ticket's raffle. Participants who were receiving research credits were also given the appropriate sign-up sheet. Upon completion, participants were handed a debriefing statement (see Appendix B). Any additional questions were answered at this time. After the entire study was completed a name was drawn from the envelope of completed lottery raffle tickets and 25 lottery tickets along with a brief note were mailed to the individual participant who was randomly selected.

Chapter 3

Quantitative Results

Because the primary purpose of the study was exploratory in nature, descriptive statistics will be presented first. Analysis of the Attitudes Towards Adoption Questionnaire (ATAQ) along with intercorrelations of selected variables will be presented at the end of this chapter.

Adoption Experiences

Negative and positive remarks. Fifty-eight percent of participants ($n = 29$) reported that negative remarks (For example, “not parents real child” and “there must be something wrong with you, if your biological parents didn’t want you.”) were made to them during childhood. (See Figure 1 for percentage of respondents indicating that negative and/or positive remarks were made in childhood, adolescence and adulthood). The impact of negative remarks (Likert-type scale, 1 = Affected me Positively and 7 = Affected me Negatively) was neutral ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.53$). See Figure 2 for impact of negative and positive remarks during childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Eighty percent ($n = 40$) of participants reported positive remarks during childhood. (For example, “you are special” and “it is cool to be adopted and very wanted.”) The impact was moderately positive ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 1.15$). Forty percent ($n = 20$) of participants reported that negative remarks were made during adolescence. The impact, for negative remarks, was neutral ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.60$). Seventy percent ($n = 35$) of participants reported that positive remarks were

made in adolescence. The impact was moderately positive ($M = 2.03$, $SD = 1.04$). Finally, in adulthood 20% ($n = 10$) of participants reported having negative remarks made to them. The affect was neutral ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.75$). Fifty-eight percent ($n = 29$) of participants reported that positive remarks were made in adulthood and the impact was moderately positive ($M = 2.04$, $SD = 1.09$).

Frequency of sources affecting adoptees' feelings. Participants were asked to check whether various people, books or media affected their feelings towards adoption during childhood, adolescence and adulthood. That is, they could check as many items or as few items as they believed to have had any type of affect on them. See Figure 3 for a graphic presentation of percentages of adoptees endorsing sources that affected their feelings towards adoption in childhood, adolescence and adulthood. In order to determine whether there were significant differences between the frequency of endorsement of sources of impact in childhood, adolescence and adulthood a 99 percent confidence interval was calculated based on a binomial distribution ($N = 50$, $p = .50$). The 99 percent interval was used as a conservative standard to account for multiple comparisons. The success probability for the binomial distribution of $p = .50$ was also utilized in order to calculate the most conservative confidence interval ($n = +/- 7$). As can be seen in Table 1, sources of impact for childhood, adolescence and adulthood are presented in statistically significant groupings. For example, in childhood adoptees indicated that parents were more likely than any other source to have had an affect on adoptees' feelings about being adopted.

Additionally, in order to determine whether there were significant differences between the frequencies of endorsement of each source (people, books or media) of

impact were *also* compared by calculating a 99 percent confidence interval based on a binomial distribution ($N = 50, p = .50$). The 99 percent interval was used as a conservative standard to account for multiple comparisons. The success probability for the binomial distribution of $p = .50$ was also utilized in order to calculate the most conservative confidence interval ($n = +/- 7$). So, as can be seen in Figure 3, ninety-eight percent ($n = 48$) of adoptees indicated that, in childhood, their **adoptive parents** had an impact on their feelings about being adopted. Ninety-four percent ($n = 47$) reported that during adolescence adoptive parents affected their feelings about being adopted. Sixty-six percent ($n = 33$) reported that during adulthood their adopted parents affected their feelings about being adopted. Thus, the majority of participants indicated that their adoptive parents impacted their feelings in childhood and adolescence. However, there was a significant decline (i.e. $n = +/- 7$) on the overall impact adoptive parents had on adoptees in adulthood.

Seventy-eight percent ($n = 39$) of participants reported that during childhood **siblings** influenced their feelings about being adopted. Sixty-four percent ($n = 32$) reported that during adolescence siblings affected their feelings about being adopted. Forty-four percent ($n = 22$) reported that during adulthood siblings affected their feelings about being adopted. As adoptees became adolescents the overall impact of siblings on adoptees feelings about adoption significantly decreased. The overall sibling impact also significantly decreased as adoptees became adults. Although a trend of decreased sibling affect is evidenced as adoptees' age almost half of adult adoptees still perceive their siblings as having an impact on them.

Thirty percent ($n = 15$) of participants reported that during childhood **media**

sources affected their feelings about being adopted. Forty-six percent ($n = 23$) reported that during adolescence media sources influenced their feelings about being adopted. Forty-eight percent ($n = 24$) reported that during adulthood media sources impacted their feelings about being adopted. Thus, the impact of media, on adoptees' feelings about being adopted, increased from childhood to adolescence but did not change significantly from adolescence to adulthood.

Thirty-two percent ($n = 16$) of participants reported that during childhood **books** impacted their feelings about being adopted. Twenty percent ($n = 10$) reported that during adolescence books influenced their feelings about being adopted. Twenty-four percent ($n = 12$) reported that during adulthood books affected their feelings about being adopted. Although almost one-third of participants reported that books had an impact on their feelings about being adopted during childhood, by adolescence this impact decreased. In addition, no significant change in affect was noted from adolescence to adulthood or childhood to adulthood.

Seventy-eight percent ($n = 39$) of participants reported that during childhood **friends** affected their feelings about being adopted. Sixty-two percent ($n = 31$) reported that during adolescence friends impacted their feelings about being adopted. Sixty-two percent ($n = 31$) reported that during adulthood friends influenced their feelings about being adopted. While three-fourths of adoptees indicated that their friends had an impact on their feelings about adoption in childhood, by adolescence this affect had significantly decreased. In addition, no significant change in impact was noted from adolescence to adulthood or childhood to adulthood.

Fifty-two percent ($n = 26$) of participants reported that during childhood **teachers**

affected their feelings about being adopted. Twenty-four percent ($n = 12$) reported that during adolescence teachers affected their feelings about being adopted. Eight percent ($n = 4$) reported that during adulthood teachers influenced their feelings about being adopted. While over half of the participants indicated that teachers had an impact on their feelings about adoption during childhood, this affect significantly decreased from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood.

Data were not collected for the effect of **significant romantic relationships** in childhood. Fifty-two percent ($n = 26$) reported that during adolescence significant romantic relationships affected their feelings about being adopted. Sixty percent ($n = 30$) reported that during adulthood significant romantic relationships influenced their feelings about being adopted. Although over half of adoptees reported that their romantic relationships had an impact on their feelings about being adopted that was no significant change from adolescence to adulthood.

Forty percent ($n = 20$) of participants reported that during childhood **strangers** affected their feelings about being adopted. Twenty-four percent ($n = 12$) reported that during adolescence strangers impacted their feelings about being adopted. Twenty percent ($n = 10$) reported that during adulthood strangers influenced their feelings about being adopted. Although slightly less than half of participants reported that strangers had an impact on their feelings about adoption in childhood, this affect significantly decreased from childhood to adolescence. There was no change in impact from adolescence to adulthood.

Forty-two percent ($n = 21$) of participants reported that during childhood **acquaintances** affected their feelings about being adopted. Eighteen percent ($n = 9$)

reported that during adolescence acquaintances impacted their feelings about being adopted. Thirty-four percent ($n = 17$) reported that during adulthood acquaintances influenced their feelings about being adopted. Slightly less than half of participants indicated that acquaintances impacted their feelings about adoption during childhood. However, this affect significantly decreased from childhood to adolescence and then increased from adolescence to adulthood. That is, during both childhood and adulthood participants reported the same degree of impact by acquaintances.

Fifty-two percent ($n = 26$) of participants reported that during childhood **professionals** affected their feelings about being adopted. Thirty-two percent ($n = 16$) reported that during adolescence professionals impacted their feelings about being adopted. Thirty percent ($n = 15$) reported that during adulthood professionals influenced their feelings about being adopted. While over half of participants indicated that professionals had an affect on their feeling about adoption, this impact significantly decreased from childhood to adolescence and no change in impact was found from adolescence to adulthood.

Degree of impact on adoptees feelings. If participants checked that various people, books or media impacted their feelings towards adoption during childhood, adolescence and adulthood, they were then asked to rate the degree to which they were affected. Responses were on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = positive, 7 = negative) Thus, participants who did not indicate that they were affected by, for example, their siblings, did not indicate the degree to which they were affected. Means and standard deviations for degree of impact on adoptees' feelings in childhood, adolescence and adulthood are presented in Table 2.

A repeated measures MANOVA was utilized to compare whether the impact of endorsement (people, books and media) on adoptees' feelings significantly differed across childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The only significant difference found was for friends, $F(2, 18) = 5.58, p = .01$; parents, $F(2, 31) = 2.55, p = .09$; siblings, $F(2, 13) = 2.34, p = .14$; media, $F(2, 4) = 1.00, p = .44$; books, $F(2, 2) = 1.15, p = .46$; stranger, $F(2, 6) = 2.36, p = .18$; acquaintance, $F(2, 4) = 1.51, p = .32$; professionals, $F(2, 3) = 1.65, p = .33$; and romance, $F(1, 19) = 2.04, p = .06$. Teachers could not be calculated because of missing data. Seventy-eight percent ($n = 39$) of participants reported that during childhood **friends** affected their feelings about being adopted. The mean effect they reported was mildly positive ($M = 2.59, SD = 1.50$). Forty-two percent ($n = 21$) of these participants gave a "1" or "2" response (i.e. positive to mildly positive). Sixty-two percent ($n = 31$), of participants reported that during adolescence friends affected their feelings about being adopted. The mean effect reported was moderately positive ($M = 2.29, SD = 1.47$). Sixty-two percent ($n = 31$) reported that during adulthood friends affected their feelings about being adopted. The mean effect they reported was moderately positive ($M = 1.77, SD = 1.02$). Because **friends** was the only category where a significant difference was found, means were collapsed across childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Means were also collapsed in order to compare against groups and to have a large enough n to make comparisons. These collapsed means and standard deviations are also shown in Table 2.

Six repeated measures MANOVA's were performed in order to make pairwise contrasts of the collapsed means. An alpha of .01 was utilized in order to control Type I error for the pairwise contrasts. Comparing pairs of means that appeared different

minimized the number of contrasts. Six contrasts were made (adoptive parents vs. media, media vs. significant romantic relationship, significant romantic relationships vs. professionals, adoptive parents vs. professionals, friends vs. media, and friends vs. professionals). Four were statistically significant. The contrast between the effect of media on feelings about being adopted and the effect of significant romantic relationships on feelings about being adopted was significantly different, $F(1,23) = 8.06, p = .009$. Thus, **romantic relationships** had more of a positive impact than **media**. The contrast between effect of professionals on feelings about being adopted and the effect of significant romantic relationships on feelings about being adopted was significantly different, $F(1,23) = 8.94, p = .007$. Thus **romantic relationships** had more of a positive impact than did **professionals**. The contrast between effect of friends on feelings about being adopted and the effect of media on feelings about being adopted was significantly different, $F(1,28) = 17.35, p = .000$. Thus, **friends** had more of a positive impact than **media**. Finally, the contrast between effect of friends on feelings about being adopted and the effect of professionals on feelings about being adopted was significantly different, $F(1,29) = 11.22, p = .002$. Thus, **friends** had more of a positive impact than **professionals**.

Messages and feelings about being adopted. Participants were asked to indicate, on a 7-point Likert-type scale, what kind of messages they were given about being adopted, how rejected they felt about being adopted, how special they felt about being adopted and to describe their feelings about being adopted. Participants were asked to answer this question for childhood, adolescence and adulthood. However, in order to decrease Type I error and because these variables were of secondary importance, data were collapsed across childhood, adolescence and adulthood. For messages (1 = very positive, 7 = very

negative) the mean effect reported was moderately positive messages. See Table 3 for means and standard deviations. For feelings of specialness (1 = very special, 7 = not at all special) the mean effect reported was mildly special. For feelings of rejection (1 = not at all rejected, 7 = rejected) the mean effect reported was moderately not rejected. For feelings about being adopted (1 = positive, 7 = negative) the mean effect reported was mildly positive.

Categorization of who adoptees could talk to about being adopted. Participants were asked to check whether they could talk to various people about being adopted during childhood, adolescence and adulthood. That is, they could check as many items or as few items as it pertained to whom they could talk to about being adopted. See Figure 4 for a graphic presentation of percentages of adoptees' endorsing people they could talk to about being adopted in childhood, adolescence and adulthood. In order to determine whether there were significant differences in childhood, adolescence and adulthood, frequencies were compared by calculating a 99 percent confidence interval based on a binomial distribution ($N = 50, p = .50$). The 99 percent interval was used as a conservative standard to account for multiple comparisons. The success probability for the binomial distribution of $p = .50$ was also utilized in order to calculate the most conservative confidence interval ($n = +/- 7$). As can be seen in Table 4, categories of who adoptees' could talk to about being adopted in childhood, adolescence and adulthood are presented in statistically significant groupings. For example, in childhood adoptees' indicated that they could talk to their adoptive mother and adoptive father, more than anyone else, about being adopted.

Additionally, in order to determine whether there were significant differences

between sources of endorsement for people adoptees' could talk to about being adopted frequencies were compared by calculating a 99 percent confidence interval based on a binomial distribution ($N = 50, p = .50$). The 99 percent interval was used as a conservative standard to account for multiple comparisons. The success probability for the binomial distribution of $p = .50$ was also utilized in order to calculate the most conservative confidence interval ($n = +/- 7$). So, as can be seen in Figure 4, eighty-four percent ($n = 42$) of adoptees' indicated that, in childhood, they could talk to their **adoptive mother** about being adopted. Sixty-eight percent ($n = 34$) reported that during adolescence they could talk to their adoptive mother about being adopted. Fifty-eight percent ($n = 29$) reported that during adulthood they could talk to their adoptive mother about being adopted. Thus, the majority of participants indicated that they could talk to their adoptive mother about being adopted in childhood and adolescence. However, there was a significant decline (i.e. $n = +/- 7$) in being able to talk to their adoptive mother in adulthood.

Seventy-six percent ($n = 38$) of participants reported that during childhood they could talk to their **adoptive father** about being adopted. Sixty percent ($n = 30$) reported that during adolescence they could talk to their adoptive father about being adopted. Forty-six percent ($n = 23$) reported that during adulthood they could talk to their adoptive father about being adopted. Thus, the majority of participants indicated that they could talk to their adoptive father in childhood. However, there was a significant decline in adoptees being able to talk to their adoptive father from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood.

Sixty-two percent ($n = 31$) of participants reported that during childhood they could talk to their **siblings** about being adopted. Sixty percent ($n = 30$) reported that

during adolescence they could talk to their siblings about being adopted. Forty-four percent ($n = 22$) reported that during adulthood they could talk to their siblings about being adopted. Thus, the majority of participants indicated that they could talk to their siblings in childhood and adolescence. However, there was a significant decline in adoptees being able to talk to their siblings in adulthood.

Seventy percent ($n = 35$) of participants reported that during childhood they could talk to their **best friend** about being adopted. Seventy-four percent ($n = 37$) reported that during adolescence they could talk to their best friend about being adopted. Sixty-six percent ($n = 33$) reported that during adulthood they could talk to their best friend about being adopted. Thus, the majority of participants indicated that they could talk to their best friend about being adopted in childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

Sixty percent ($n = 30$) of participants reported that during childhood they could talk to their **friends** about being adopted. Seventy percent ($n = 35$) reported that during adolescence they could talk to their friends about being adopted. Sixty-six percent ($n = 33$) reported that during adulthood they could talk to their friend about being adopted. Thus, the majority of participants indicated that they could talk to their friend about being adopted in childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

Forty percent ($n = 20$) of participants reported that during childhood they could talk to their **adoptive aunts/uncles** about being adopted. Forty-two percent ($n = 21$) reported that during adolescence they could talk to their adoptive aunts/uncles about being adopted. Thirty-two percent ($n = 16$) reported that during adulthood they could talk to their adoptive aunts/uncles about being adopted. Thus, over one-third of participants indicated that they could talk to their adoptive aunt/uncle about being adopted in

childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

Forty-eight percent ($n = 24$) of participants reported that during childhood they could talk to their **adoptive grandparents** about being adopted. Forty-six percent ($n = 23$) reported that during adolescence they could talk to their adoptive grandparents about being adopted. Twenty-six percent ($n = 13$) reported that during adulthood they could talk to their adoptive grandparents about being adopted. Thus, almost half of participants indicated that they could talk to their adoptive grandparents about being adopted in childhood and adolescence. However, there was a significant decline in adoptees being able to talk to their adoptive grandparents in adulthood.

Thirty-two percent ($n = 16$) of participants reported that during childhood they could talk to their **teachers** about being adopted. Thirty-six percent ($n = 18$) reported that during adolescence they could talk to their teachers about being adopted. Sixteen percent ($n = 8$) reported that during adulthood they could talk to their teachers about being adopted. Thus, a little under one-third of participants indicated that they could talk to their teachers about being adopted in childhood and adolescence. However, there was a significant decline in being able to talk to teachers in adulthood.

Told of adoption. Thirty-two percent ($n = 16$) of adoptees indicated that they remembered being told that they were adopted. Sixty-six percent ($n = 33$) of adoptees reported that they have always just known they were adopted (i.e. they were told at an early age and have no memory of being told for the first time). Of those that remember being told, the mean age was 4.8 with a range in ages from 3 years to 9 years. Only 6 percent ($n = 3$) of adoptees reported being lied to about being adopted. Ninety-four percent ($n = 44$) indicated that they had not been lied to about being adopted. Three

participants did not answer this question.

Searching. Thirty-six percent ($n = 18$) of participants indicated that they had looked for their biological parents. Those who had searched were asked to indicate how the experience had been (1 = positive, 7 = negative). The mean effect they reported was mildly positive ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 2.05$). (Adoptees were not asked whether they had found biological relatives or any other detailed questions about having found biological relatives.) Sixty-four percent ($n = 32$) of participants indicated they had not looked for their biological parents. However, of those who had not looked, forty-seven percent ($n = 15$) indicated they will someday look for their biological parents. Fifty percent ($n = 16$) indicated they would not look in the future. One respondent did not answer the question.

Similarity to adoptive parents/family. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = similar, 7 = dissimilar) how physically similar they look to their adoptive family. Participants indicated an overall neutral rating ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.87$). Respondents were also asked to indicate, on a 7-point Likert-type scale, how similar their ethnic background was to their adoptive family. Participants indicated that their ethnic background was mildly similar ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 2.36$) to their adoptive families. It is important to note that forty-six percent ($n = 23$), of these respondents, indicated that their ethnic background was very similar (“1”) or moderately similar (“2”) to their adoptive family. Two respondents did not answer the question.

Relationship with adoptive family. Overall, participants reported a fairly close relationship with all members of their adoptive family. When asked about how close they felt to their adoptive mother (1 = very close, 7 = not at all close), participants ($N = 50$) reported feeling moderately close ($M = 2.28$). Of these respondents, eighty-four percent (n

= 42) indicated feeling mildly close to very close to their adopted mother and twelve ($n = 6$) reported feeling not close to not at all close. When asked how close they felt to their adopted father, participants ($N = 50$) reported a mean effect of mildly close ($M = 2.76$). Of these respondents, seventy percent ($n = 35$) reported feeling mildly close to very close to their adopted father. Twenty-four percent ($n = 12$) reported feeling not close to not at all close.

Sixty-eight percent ($n = 34$) of participants indicated that they had one or two adopted siblings. They reported feeling mildly close to their adopted sibling(s) ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 2.00$). Fifty-three percent ($n = 18$), of these respondents, reported feeling moderately close to very close to their adopted siblings and only fifteen percent ($n = 5$) reported feeling moderately not close to not at all close.

Thirty-eight percent ($n = 19$) of participants reported having a non-adopted sibling (i.e. their adoptive parents biological child) and reported feeling moderately close ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.84$) to them. Of these respondents, sixty-three percent ($n = 12$) indicated feeling moderately close to very close to their non-adopted sibling(s) Only 11% ($n = 2$) reported feeling not at all close to their non-adopted sibling.

General impact of adoption. Ninety-six percent ($n = 48$) of participants indicated that the overall impact (1 = more difficult, 7 = easier) of having been adopted was neutral ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.65$). However, there was a broad range of responses with thirty-three percent ($n = 16$) indicating that adoption had made their life mildly difficult to more difficult and thirty-three percent ($n = 16$) indicating that adoption had made their life mildly easier to easier.

Thirty percent ($n = 15$) of participants indicated that dealing with adoption was not

difficult at any time of their life (See Figure 5). Sixteen percent ($n = 8$) indicated that the most difficult age for dealing with adoption was ages 6-10. Twenty-six percent ($n = 13$) indicated that ages 11-15 was the most difficult time in dealing with adoption. Twelve percent ($n = 6$) indicated that their most difficult age was 16-20 and fourteen percent ($n = 7$) indicated that ages 21-30 was the most difficult for them in dealing with adoption.

Ninety-eight percent of participants ($n = 49$) indicated knowing an average of 7.63 adopted people ($SD = 7.79$) with a range from zero to 30. When asked, how likely they would consider adopting, participants ($n = 48$) overall indicated being neutral ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 2.28$). However, fifty-two percent ($n = 25$) indicated being mildly likely to likely to adopt. Conversely, thirty-eight percent ($n = 18$) of participants indicated being mildly unlikely to not likely to adopt.

Correlational analysis of selected study variables. In order to reduce the potential data set, while also maintaining the exploratory goal of this study, judgments were made as to relationships that have been the basis of theoretical discussion in the adoption literature. Variables on the vertical axis (please see Table 5) are conceptualized as being **external**, i.e. something someone else did or said to the adoptee, while variables on the horizontal axis are conceptualized as being **internal** to the adoptee, i.e. the result of reactions by others. Data for the variables Message and Feelings have been collapsed over childhood, adolescence and adulthood and the variable Pclose (closeness to parents) contains both closeness measures for adoptive mother and adoptive father. Although a Bonferroni correction was initially employed to account for multiple correlations (5 X 3) and was determined to be $p < .001$, a less conservative alpha level of $p < .01$ was utilized in the final analysis of individual correlation scores due to the exploratory nature of the study. As

shown in Table 5, adoptees' who reported being given negative messages about being adopted, were also more likely to report more negative feelings towards being adopted and were more likely to have indicated that adoption had overall made their life more difficult than those adoptees who reported being given more positive messages. Although not significant, there is a trend ($p = .04$) towards adoptees who reported being given negative messages about being adopted and reported having looked for their biological parents than those adoptees who reported being given more positive messages. There is also a trend in the data ($p = .02$) whereby adoptees who reported that they were lied to about being adopted were also more likely to have indicated that adoption had overall made their life more difficult than those adoptees who reported not having been lied to about being adopted. There is an additional trend ($p = .02$), in which those adoptees who indicated that their parents could have been more open in talking to them about being adopted, were more likely to report negative feelings towards being adopted than adoptees who did not indicate that their parents could have been more open. Finally, adoptees who reported that they were not close to their adoptive parents were more likely to report negative feelings towards being adopted; that adoption had overall made their life more difficult; and that they were more likely to have looked for their biological parents than those adoptees who reported being close to their adoptive parents.

Attitudes towards Adoption Questionnaire. As shown in Table 6, participants answered 27 questions about their attitudes towards adoption (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). A principle axis factor analysis with Varimax rotation was conducted on the Attitudes Towards Adoption Questionnaire (ATAQ). Examination of eigenvalues indicated that a two-factor model most efficiently explained the variance in the scale.

Following Stevens' (1996) suggestions for interpreting factor loadings, for a sample size of 50, items with a factor loading greater than .36 were interpreted. Table 7 lists the factors and these factor loadings. Twenty-two items had crossloadings greater than .36. Five items did not exhibit loadings of greater than .36 on any factor and thus were not included in the factor structure.

The first factor of the ATAQ consists primarily of items describing characteristics of adopted individuals. Participants who agreed with the items in factor 1 were endorsing attitudes that included believing that adoptees feel abandoned, feel loss, feel the need to be perfect, lack identity and feel different, when compared to non-adoptees. The second factor of the ATAQ consists primarily of items describing characteristics of adopted families. Participants who agree with the items in factor 2 were endorsing attitudes that included believing that adoptive families feel the need to be perfect, are not "real," are "second-best (to non-adoptive families)," know less about child rearing and are not normal, when compared to non-adoptive families. Table 8 gives the means, standard deviations and reliabilities for the total scale and each factor.

Correlational analysis of ATAQ factor scores and selected study variables. In order to reduce the potential data set, while also maintaining the exploratory goal of this study, judgments were made as to relationships that have been the basis of theoretical discussion in the adoption literature. Then, factor scores of the ATAQ were compared to these variables in order to explore their predictive value (see Table 9). Variables on the vertical axis are conceptualized as being **external**, i.e. something someone else did or said to the adoptee, while variables on the horizontal axis are conceptualized as being **internal** to the adoptee, i.e. the result of reactions by others. In particular, these internal variables are

comprised of the total attitude score, and factor 1 scores (characteristics of adopted individuals) and factor 2 scores (characteristics of adopted families). Please also note that data for the variable Message have been collapsed over childhood, adolescence and adulthood and that the variable Pclose contains both closeness measures for adoptive mother and adoptive father. As discussed prior, participants were asked to indicate whether a particular category (e.g., parents, media, etc.,) had an effect on them. If they checked that category, then they were asked to indicate how they were effected (1 = positively, 7 = negatively). Participants were asked to answer these questions in childhood, adolescence and adulthood. However, so that there would be a large enough n to make comparisons, data for childhood, adolescence and adulthood were collapsed. Data on these effect variables were further reduced by selecting those categories were $n > 30$. Thus, the effect variables Books, Strangers, Acquaintances and Teachers were eliminated from the correlation matrix. Although a Bonferroni correction was initially employed to account for multiple correlations (12 X 3) and was determined to be $p < .001$, a less conservative alpha level of .01 was utilized in the final analysis of individual correlation scores due to the exploratory nature of the study.

As shown in Table 9, adoptees' who reported being given negative message about being adopted, were also more likely to agree with negative statements on the ATAQ and to agree with negative statements on both Factor 1 (adopted individual characteristics) and Factor 2 (adoptive family characteristics) than those adoptees who reported being given more positive messages. Adoptees who reported that they were lied to about being adopted were also more likely to have agreed with negative statements about adoptive families than those adoptees who reported not having been lied to about being adopted.

Adoptees who reported having looked for their biological parents were also more likely to have agreed with negative statements on the ATAQ and to agree with negative statements about adopted individuals than those adoptees who reported not having looked for their biological parents. Adoptees who reported that they were not close to their adoptive parents were also more likely to have agreed with negative statements on the ATAQ and to agree with negative statements about both adopted individuals and adoptive families than those adoptees who reported being close to their adoptive parents. Adoptees who reported that their adoptive parents had affected their feelings negatively were also more likely to have agreed with negative statements on the ATAQ and to agree with negative statements about both adopted individuals and adoptive families than those adoptees who reported that their adoptive parents had affected their feelings positively. Finally, although not significant, there is a trend in which adoptees who reported that their siblings had affected their feelings negatively were also more likely to have agreed with negative statements on the ATAQ and to agree with negative statements about both adopted individuals and adoptive families than those who reported that their siblings had affected their feelings positively.

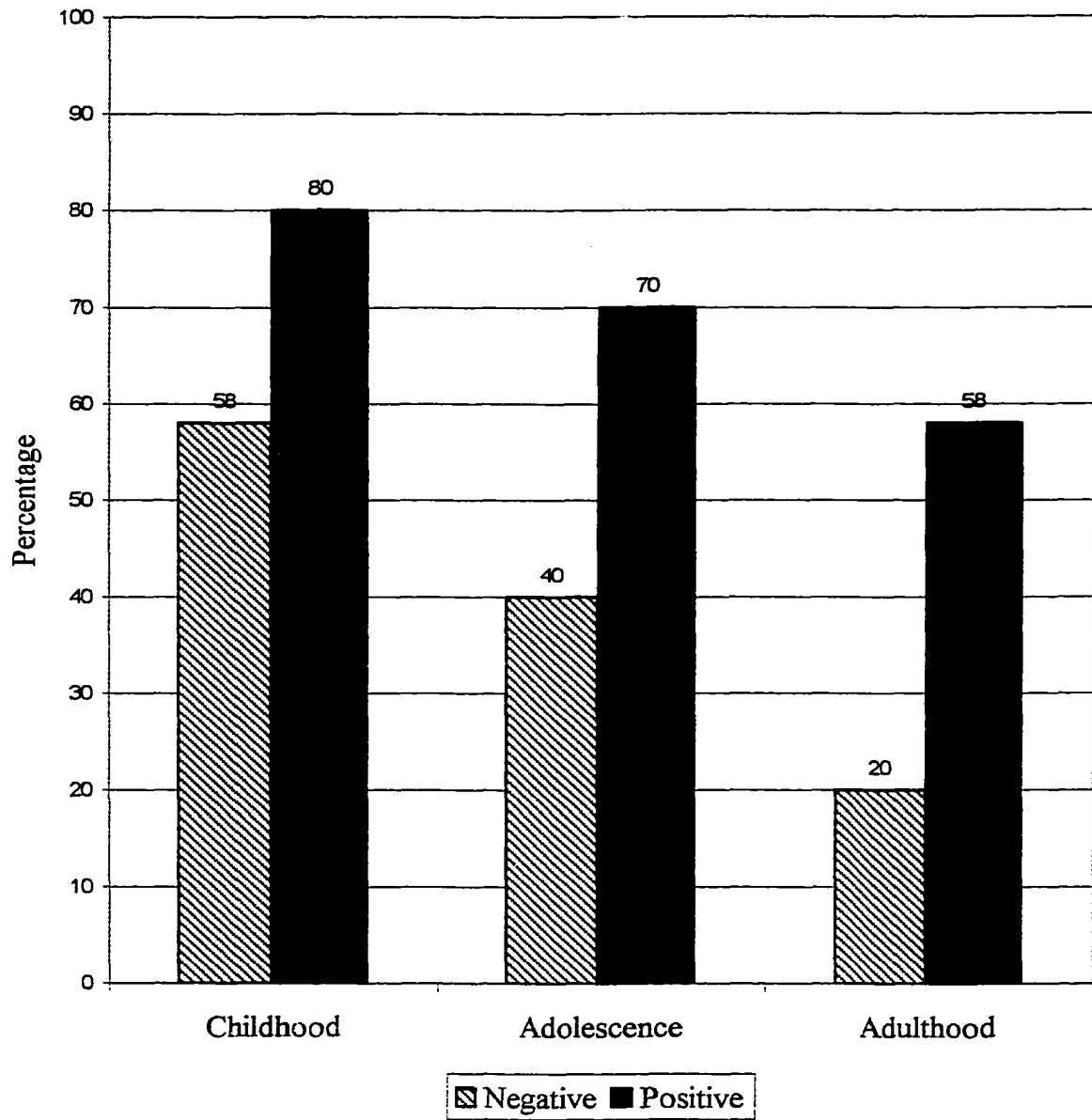


Figure 1. Percentage of negative and positive remarks.

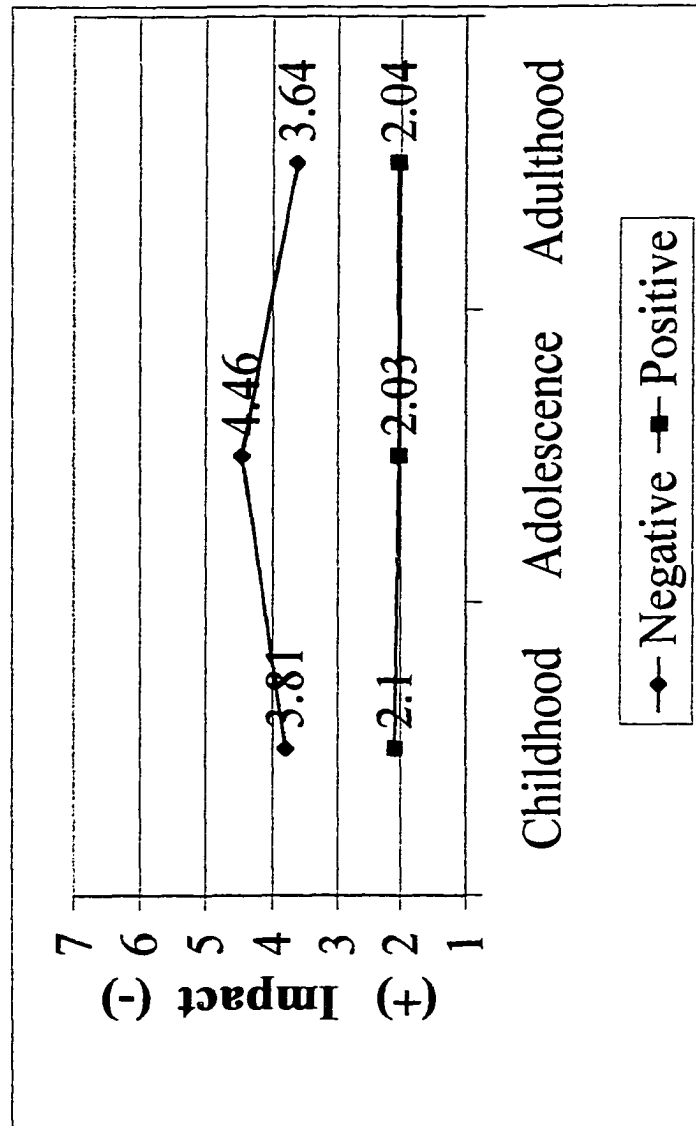


Figure 2. Mean impact of negative and positive remarks.

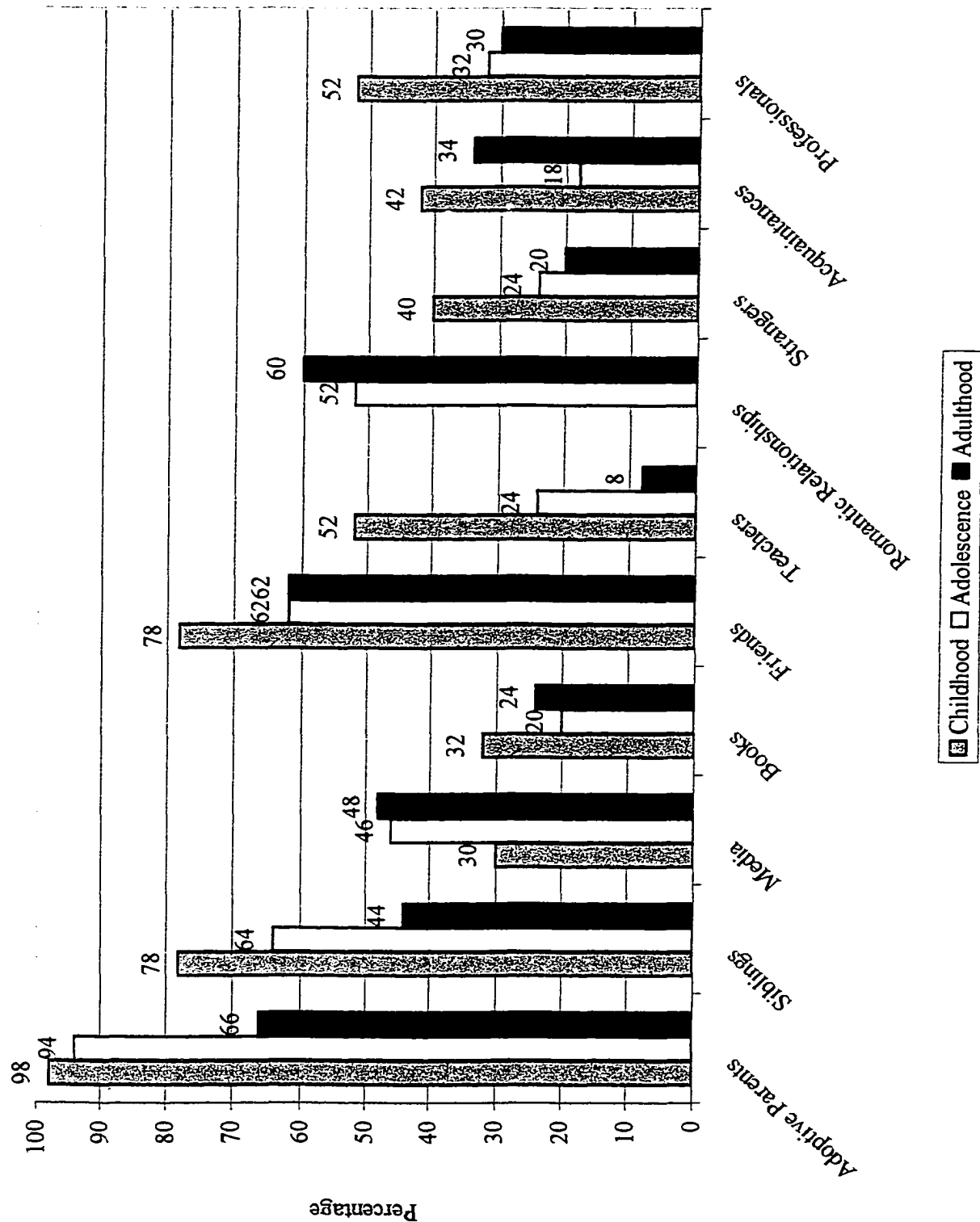


Figure 3. Frequency of sources affecting adoptees' feelings towards adoption.

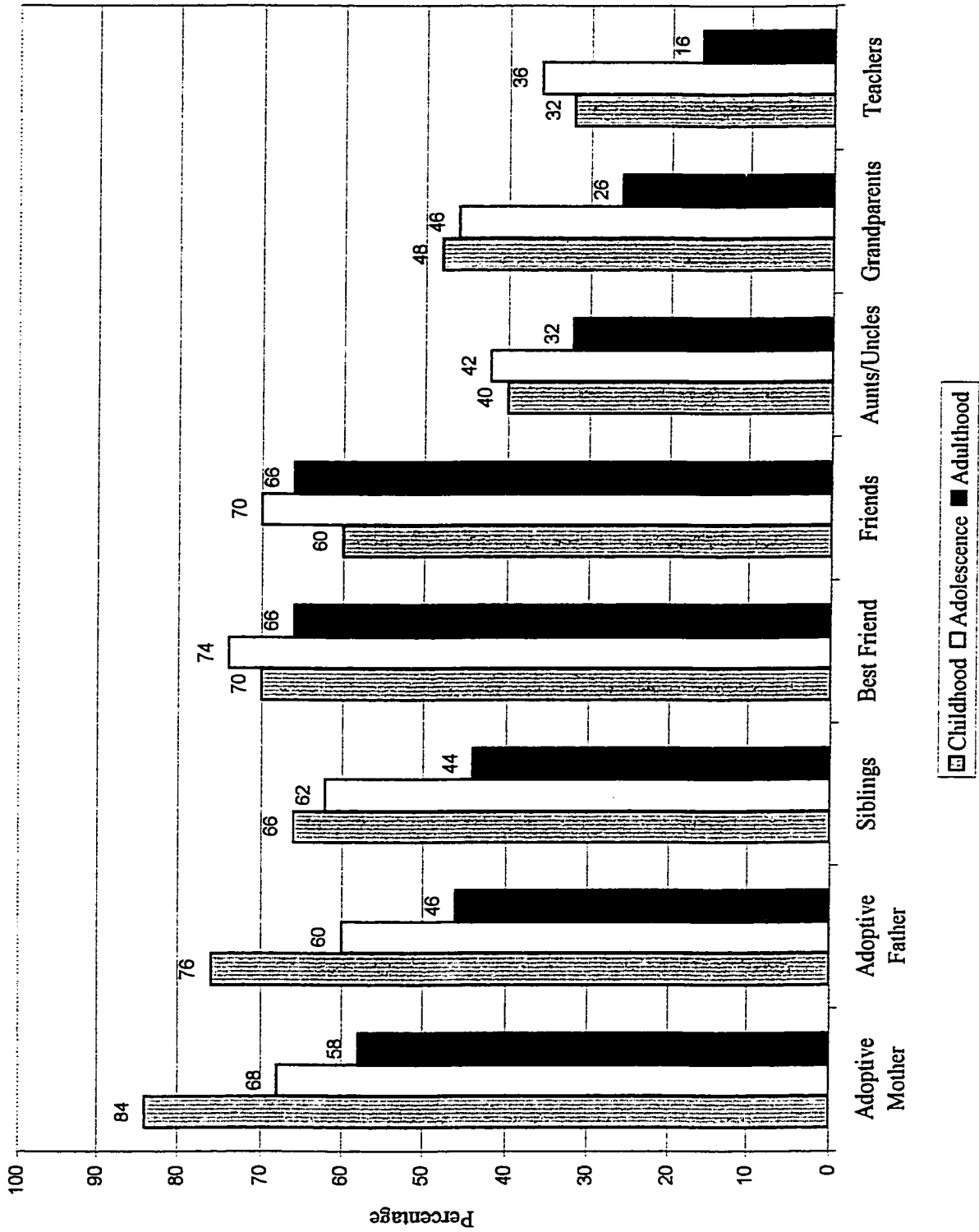


Figure 4. Percentage of whom adoptees indicated they could talk to about being adopted.

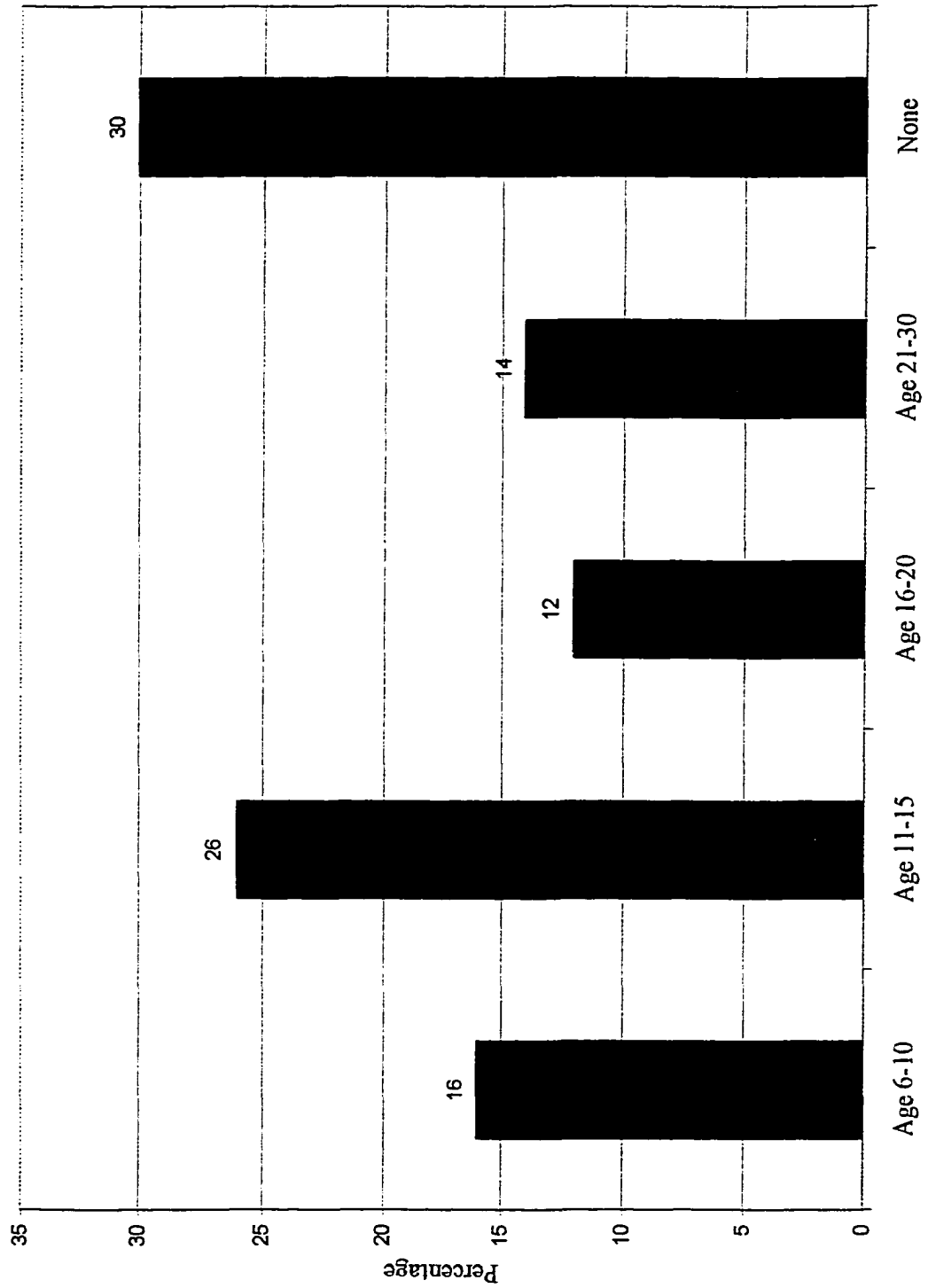


Figure 5. Most difficult age in dealing with adoption.

Table 1

Groupings of Sources of Impact

	<u>Childhood</u>	<u>Adolescence</u>	<u>Adulthood</u>
Group 1	Parents (98%)	Parents (94%)	Parents (66%) Friends(62%) Romantic (60%)
Group 2	Siblings (78%) Friends (78%)	Siblings (64%) Friends (62%)	Media (48%) Siblings (44%)
Group 3	Teachers (52%) Professionals (52%) Strangers (40%) Acquaintances (42%)	Media (46%) Romantic (60%)	Acquaintances (34%) Professionals (30%)
Group 4	Media (30%) Books (32%)	Teachers (24%) Professionals (32%) Strangers (24%) Books (20%) Acquaintances (18%)	Books (24%) Strangers (20%)
Group 5			Teachers (8%)

Note. Levels were distinguished by a conservative confidence level, $p < .01$ ($n = +/- 7$)

Table 2
Sources that Affected Adoptees' Feelings Towards Adoption and the Degree of Impact on Their Feelings.

	Childhood			Adolescence			Adulthood			Collapsed Descriptives		
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>
Parents	2.02	1.73	49 _{aw}	2.72	2.13	47 _{aw}	2.12	1.60	33 _{bw}	2.36	1.74	50
Siblings	2.56	1.83	39 _{ax}	3.17	2.09	30 _{bx}	2.41	1.74	22 _{cx}	2.68	1.63	42
Media	3.67	1.40	15 _{az}	3.78	1.83	23 _{by}	3.58	1.91	24 _{bx}	3.52 _{1,3}	1.68	33
Books	2.25	1.18	16 _{az}	2.50	1.43	10 _{avz}	2.25	1.29	12 _{ayz}	2.22	1.11	23
Friends	2.59	1.50	39 _{ax}	2.29	1.47	31 _{bx}	1.77	1.02	31 _{bw}	2.18 _{3,4}	1.05	44
Teachers	2.65	1.60	26 _{ay}	2.67	1.72	12 _{bvz}	2.50	1.29	4 _{cv}	2.60	1.42	29
Romantic Partners	na	na	na	2.23	1.28	26 _{ay}	1.83	1.05	30 _{aw}	2.00 _{1,2}	1.00	36
Strangers	3.20	1.50	20 _{ayz}	3.25	1.71	12 _{bvz}	3.60	1.27	10 _{byz}	3.22	1.33	23
Acquaintances	3.52	1.37	21 _{ayz}	2.89	1.17	9 _{bv}	2.53	1.23	17 _{ay}	3.03	1.12	29
Professionals	3.50	1.75	26 _{ay}	2.23	1.28	16 _{bz}	1.83	1.05	30 _{ay}	3.31 _{2,4}	1.69	32

Note. Numbers (N's) in the same row that do not share subscripts (a, b, c) differ at $p < .01$ based on a binomial distribution. Numbers in the same column that do not share subscripts (v, w, x, y, z) differ at $p < .01$ based on a binomial distribution. Means that share a numerical subscript (1,2,3,4) differ at $p < .01$.

Table 3

Messages and Feelings About Being Adopted.

	Collapsed Descriptives		
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>
Type of Message	2.45	1.18	50
Specialness	3.01	1.51	50
Rejection	2.38	1.54	50
Type of Feelings	2.73	1.47	50

Table 4

Groupings of Who Adoptees Could Talk to About Being Adopted.

Group	Childhood	Adolescence	Adulthood
1	Adoptive Mother (84%) Adoptive Father (76%)	Bestfriend (74%) Friends (70%) Adoptive Mom (68%)	Bestfriend (66%) Friends (70%) Adoptive Mom (58%)
2	Siblings (66%) Best Friend (70%) Friends (60%)	Adoptive Father (60%) Siblings (62%)	Adoptive Dad (46%) Siblings (44%)
3	Aunts/Uncles (40%) Grandparents (48%) Teachers (32%)	Grandparents (46%) Aunts/Uncles (42%) Teachers (36%)	Aunts/Uncles (32%) Grandparents (26%) Teachers (16%)

Note. Groups were distinguished by a conservative confidence level, $p < .01$ ($n = +/- 7$).

Table 5

Correlation's Among Selected Study Variables

Variable	Type of Feelings	Overall	Looked
Message	.70** (n= 50)	-.55** (48)	.29 (50)
Lied	.21 (47)	-.36 (45)	.15 (47)
Open	.34 (50)	-.26 (48)	.08 (50)
Race	-.08 (48)	.20 (46)	.15 (48)
Pclose	.60** (50)	-.37* (48)	.45** (50)

* $p \leq .01$. ** $p \leq .001$.

Note: Lied, Open, and Looked are dichotomous variables while all others are on a 7-point Likert-type scale.

Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations for Attitudes Towards Adoption (N = 50).

<u>Items</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
1. Adoptive parents usually love their adopted children more than biological parents love their biological children.	4.94	1.81
2. Because adopted individuals do not know their genetic history, they usually feel freer than non-adopted individuals to create their own identity.	4.34	1.88
3. Adoptive families generally have more losses and fears than non-adoptive families.	3.50	1.90
4. Most adopted individuals feel as if they have been abandoned by their biological parents.	3.38	1.69
5. Adoptive parents are more likely, than biological parents, to pressure their adoptive kids to be perfect.	3.10	2.08
6. Because adopted people were "chosen" by their adoptive parents, they feel out of control of their own lives, when compared to their non-adopted peers.	2.32	1.66
7. It is usually important for adopted individuals to mourn the loss of their biological parents.	2.74	1.71
8. Adopted people often feel left out at their adoptive family gatherings.	2.26	1.86
9. Because adopted individuals do not know their genetic/familial history, they often feel incomplete.	5.22	1.88
10. The development of a healthy sexuality is especially difficult for adopted people.	2.56	1.89
11. Adoptive parents feel more of a need to be perfect parents than biological parents.	3.50	1.71
12. Adoptive parents are more able to trust and accept their adopted child's feelings than biological parents do with their biological children.	5.34	1.55

Table 6 continued on following page.

Table 6 continued

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
13. Because someone is adopted they are missing something	3.10	2.12
14. Adoptive parents are not “real” or “natural” parents.	1.90	1.73
15. Adoptive families are “second-best” to non-adoptive families.	1.46	1.31
16. Loss is usually a part of adoption.	3.64	1.99
17. Adopted individuals often experience negative attitudes by others.	3.10	1.68
18. It is usually better for children to be with their biological parents.	2.54	1.63
19. Being adopted is an inescapable trauma.	2.26	1.72
20. Adopted individuals generally feel different from non-adopted people.	3.94	1.97
21. Because someone is adopted they often lack an identity.	2.54	1.93
22. Adoptive parents generally know less about childrearing than biological parents.	1.52	.97
23. Adopted individuals often wish they could have grown up with their biological families.	3.14	1.59
24. Compared to biological families, adoptive families are not normal.	1.34	.85
25. Because adopted individuals were given up by their biological mother they may be afraid that others will also leave them.	3.64	2.07
26. Adopted individuals need to find their biological parents in order to feel complete.	2.96	1.93
27. Something must be wrong with most adopted people if their biological parents placed them for adoption.	1.28	.81

Table 7

Factor Structure for the Attitudes Towards Adoption Questionnaire

Items	Factor Loadings	
	Factor 1	Factor 2
Factor 1		
1. Adoptive parents usually love their adopted children more than biological parents love their biological children.	-.61	.59
4. Most adopted individuals feel as if they have been abandoned by their biological parents.	.42	
5. Adoptive parents are more likely, than biological parents, to pressure their adoptive kids to be perfect.	.47	.42
6. Because adopted people were "chosen" by their adoptive parents, they feel out of control of their own lives, when compared to their non-adopted peers.	.54	.36
7. It is usually important for adopted individuals to mourn the loss of their biological parents.	.45	
9. Because adopted individuals do not know their genetic/familial history, they often feel incomplete.	.50	
10. The development of a healthy sexuality is especially difficult for adopted people.	.59	
13. Because someone is adopted they are missing something.	.60	
16. Loss is usually a part of adoption.	.76	
18. It is usually better for children to be with their biological parents.	.43	
20. Adopted individuals generally feel different from non-adopted people.	.38	.36

Table 7 continued on following page.

Table 7 continued

Items	Factor Loadings	
	Factor 1	Factor 2
21. Because someone is adopted they often lack an identity.	.47	.46
23. Adopted individuals often wish they could have grown up with their biological families.	.46	
Factor 2		
3. Adoptive families generally have more losses and fears than non-adoptive families.		.50
8. Adopted people often feel left out at their adoptive family gatherings.	.38	.58
11. Adoptive parents feel more of a need to be perfect parents than biological parents.	.37	
14. Adoptive parents are not "real" or "natural" parents.	.43	
15. Adoptive families are "second-best" to non-adoptive families.	.60	
19. Being adopted is an inescapable trauma.	.40	.63
22. Adoptive parents generally know less about childrearing than biological parents.		.40
24. Compared to biological families, adoptive families are not normal.		.49
25. Because adopted individuals were given up by their biological mother they may be afraid that others will also leave them.	.38	.47

Table 8

Descriptive statistics for Attitudes Towards Adoption Questionnaire

	Mean	SD	Reliability Coefficient
Total Scale	2.93	.93	.88
Factor 1	3.32	1.09	.84
Factor 2	2.58	.96	.81

Table 9

Correlational Analysis of ATAQ Factor Scores and Selected Study Variables

Variable	Total Attitude Score	Factor 1 (Individuals)	Factor 2 (Families)
Message	.47**	.42*	.40*
Lied	.33 (n = 47)	.25 (47)	.41* (47)
Open	.26	.20	.25
Looked	.48**	.53**	.24
Race	-.02 (48)	-.02 (48)	-.06 (48)
Pclose	.56**	.45**	.53**
Parent Effect	.60**	.53**	.51**
Sibling Effect	.34 (42)	.28 (42)	.32 (42)
Media Effect	-.18 (33)	-.18 (33)	-.16 (33)
Friends Effect	.09 (44)	.18 (44)	-.05 (44)
Romantic Effect	.30 (36)	.29 (36)	.22 (36)
Professionals Effect	.01 (32)	.07 (32)	-.12 (32)

* $p \leq .01$. ** $p \leq .001$.

Note: Lied, Open, and Looked are dichotomous variables while all others are on a 7-point Likert-type scale. n 's = 50 unless otherwise indicated.

Chapter 4

Qualitative Results

Participants completed seven qualitative questions. The principal researcher and research assistant identified themes after reading participant responses. Each response was categorized according to those themes by the principal researcher. A graduate student in psychology who was familiar with qualitative methodology then reviewed the completed categories. When disagreements arose by the graduate student and principal researcher they were discussed and resolved by consensus. Percentages for each qualitative question add up to more than 100% because some respondents gave more than one response.

Negative remarks

The first question asked, "Please take some time to write about negative things people said to you, as a child/adolescent/adult, about being adopted." Table 1 shows the percentage of adoptees in each category that indicated that something negative had been said to them. Thirty-three (66 %) out of fifty adoptees responded to the question and gave a total of 46 responses. Seven themes emerged: Abandoned/Unwanted; Not "Real" Child/Family; Inherently Bad/Sad; Need to Find "Real" Family; Bad Genes; Denied Adoptive Status and Lucky to be Adopted.

The **Abandoned/Unwanted theme** was characterized by statements from others that suggested that adopted individuals were unwanted, unloved, rejected, garbage, abnormal or hated because their biological parent(s) placed them for adoption. This theme

was given by 49% ($n = 16$) of respondents. An example of this theme was "The reason you were adopted was because nobody wanted you."

The **Not "Real" Child/Family theme** was characterized by statements from others that devalued the adopted individual and their adopted family as being less real because of a lack of blood ties. This theme was given by thirty-six percent ($n = 12$) of respondents. Examples from this category were, "My dad's sister said that none of us children should be legal heirs to the family estate because we were adopted," and "Every once in a while people would tell me that my parents weren't my real parents and so they didn't and couldn't love me as if I had been born to them."

The **Inherently Bad/Sad theme** was characterized by statements from others that suggested the adoptee was inherently or intrinsically bad or sad simply because they were adopted. This theme was given by thirty-six percent ($n = 12$) of respondents. Examples from this category include, "If you tell someone you're adopted they will say half jokingly, 'well that explains a lot' as if there's something inherently wrong with you," and "Normal people (are) not adopted."

The **Need to Find "Real" Family theme**, was characterized by statements from others that suggested the adoptee needed to find their biological family. This theme was given by nine percent ($n = 3$) of respondents. Examples from this category include, "(I was) questioned as to why I wasn't trying to find my *real* parents."

The **Bad Genes, Denied Adoptive Status, and Lucky to be Adopted** theme were each given by three percent ($n = 1$) of respondents.

Positive remarks

The second qualitative question asked, "Please take some time to write about

positive things people said to you, as a child/adolescent/adult, about being adopted."

Table 2 shows the percentage of adoptees in each category that indicated that something positive had been said to them. Forty-three (86%) adoptees responded to the question and gave a total of 79 responses. Eight categories emerged: Special/Wanted; Lucky to Have/Know Adoptee; Opportunities/Advantages; Others Expressed Interest/Curiosity; Loved/Supported by Biological Parents; Well Adjusted; Genetic Freedom; and Still a Family.

The **Special/Wanted theme** was characterized by statements from others that suggested that the adoptee was special, cool, chosen, wanted, or picked. The ideas expressed here suggested some sense of "specialness" above and beyond that of biological children. This theme was given by seventy percent ($n = 30$) of respondents. Examples from this category were, "You're special, you were picked. We wanted you so badly," and "(My) parents told me adoptees were chosen children rather than, 'you get what you get' children,"

The **Lucky to Have/Know Adoptee theme** was characterized by statements from family and friends, etc., indicating that they were very lucky, fortunate, given a gift, or thankful to have the adoptee in their life. This theme was given by thirty percent ($n = 13$) of respondents. Examples from this category were, "Some people told our parents how lucky they were to have adopted children like us," and "She (adopted mother) says she is very thankful my biological mother gave me up for adoption..."

Statements indicating the advantages the adoptee has because of being adopted into a particular home characterized the **Opportunities/Advantages theme**. Some of these advantages included love, finances, family, time and stability. This theme was given

by twenty-three percent ($n = 10$) of respondents. Examples include, "A friend mentioned the financial factor...that only lets financially stable people legally adopt," and "I should take advantage of it...most likely turned out better than I would have."

The **Others Expressed Interest/Curiosity theme** was characterized by statements indicating enjoying and appreciating interest and questions from others about adoption. This theme was given by twenty-one percent ($n = 9$) of respondents. Examples were "When I was open about it with others most of them were curious as to what it's like," and "In my experience people seem to find being adopted intriguing and interesting and wish to know more."

The **Loved/Supported by Biological Parents theme** was characterized by statements indicating that their biological parents must have loved them enough to place them for adoption. Several participants had a relationship with their biological parent(s) and indicated that their biological parent(s) were pleased with their adoptive family and home. This theme was given by sixteen percent ($n = 7$) of respondents. An example was "...my biological parents had wanted me to have a better life...(and) loved us."

Statements indicating that the adoptee had turned out well and was normal characterized the **Well Adjusted theme**. This theme was given by nine percent ($n = 4$) of respondents. Examples were, "I have heard rare little bits about how I seemed to have turned out normal..." and "I receive many positive comments now such as how well adjusted I have become."

The **Genetic Freedom theme** was characterized by statements indicating both freedom from not being genetically related to adoptive parents because of problems within the family and also feeling freedom to invent oneself and develop a unique personality

without the constraints of genetics. This theme was given by seven percent ($n = 3$) of respondents. Examples were, "I felt that I was not "bound" by family genetics-you're like Aunt Helen- I was free to be my own personality," and "My best friend told me I was fortunate to not belong to my adopted father and adopted stepmother. It somehow gave me a sense of relief..."

The **Still a Family** theme was characterized by statements indicating that even though the adoptive family was not blood related, they were still a family. This theme was given by seven percent ($n = 3$) of respondents. An example of this theme was, "I was meant to be part of my adopted family."

Positive experiences

The third question asked, "Please write about any positive experiences you have had related to being adopted." Table 3 shows the percentage of adoptees in each category that indicated a positive experience. Thirty-three (66%) adoptees responded to the question and gave a total of 46 responses. Eleven themes emerged: Loving Adoptive family; Personal Growth; Emotional Support; Finding Biological Family; Other's Expressed Interest/Curiosity; Meeting Other adoptees; Being Placed for Adoption; Resources; Open/Honest Communication; Having Two Families; and Genetic Freedom.

The **Loving Adoptive Family theme** was characterized by responses that indicated feeling as if being adopted gave them a more loving family and environment. This theme was given by forty-six percent ($n = 15$) of respondents. Examples were, "Our family seems to be stronger than others because I was adopted, " and "I'm also very fortunate to have a kind, loving family...I had one mother who loved me enough to give me up (and) another mother who loved me enough to take me in."

The **Emotional Support theme** was characterized by feeling as if others supported their struggles as an adoptee and helped them search or find connection with their biological heritage. This theme was given by eighteen percent ($n = 6$) of respondents. Examples were, "It has brought me close to my friends-all of them look out for me; give me books, phone numbers etc., ... Most have offered to search with me!" and "(I am from another country) and my boyfriend gave me things from the country and treated me with respect."

The **Finding Biological Family theme** indicates feeling positive over making contact with biological family members. This theme was given by twelve percent ($n = 4$) of respondents. Examples were, "I found my birth mother and now I understand more about me," and "But in time it became a positive experience that brought me closer to my (adoptive) parents."

The **Others Expressed Interest/Curiosity theme** was characterized by feeling good about the attention and curiosity others give them because they are adopted. This theme was given by twelve percent ($n = 4$) of respondents. For example, "I am glad people want to understand and ask questions because it shows they are interested."

The **Meeting Other Adoptees theme** demonstrates positive feelings towards meeting, connecting and knowing other people who have been adopted. This theme was given by twelve percent ($n = 4$) of respondents. For example, "Meeting other adoptees is a good feeling too since you know they know how you feel, a "bond" of same type I guess."

The **Being Placed for Adoption theme** was characterized by feeling loved by their biological family for having been placed for adoption. This theme was given by nine percent ($n = 3$) of respondents. For example, "I feel loved by people I have never met; I

feel a bond to somebody who cared enough about me to let me go...even though abortion was legal at the time-she chose to be my hero instead."

The **Personal Growth theme** was characterized by feeling positive about the opportunity to learn about self and grow because of adoptive status. This theme was given by nine percent ($n = 3$) of respondents. An example, "I've discovered a lot about being human."

The **Resources theme** was characterized by feeling as if media and books had given adoptees positive knowledge that helped them feel good about having been adopted. This theme was given by nine percent ($n = 3$) of respondents. An example was, "They (adoptive parents) had me read a book called "The Chosen Child." From then on, I felt special."

The **Open/Honest Communication theme** was characterized by feeling as if adoptive parents were willing to talk openly and comfortably about issues related to adoption. This theme was given by six percent ($n = 2$) of respondents. For example, "Both my parents were willing to answer my questions. They always explained the reason for my biological parents decision..."

The **Having Two Families theme** and the **Genetic Freedom theme** were each given by three percent ($n = 1$) of respondents.

Negative experiences

The fourth question asked, "Please write about any negative experiences you have had related to being adopted." Table 4 shows the percentage of adoptees in each category that indicated a negative experience. Twenty-four (48%) adoptees responded to the question and gave a total of 37 responses. Twelve themes emerged; Not Accepted as

Family, Feels/Fears Rejection; Adoption as a Secret/Avoided; Legal System as Roadblock; Lack of Belonging/Connection; Media; Reactions Because Searching; Teased; Adoption Difficult to Understand; Adoption Used as Catch All; Racial Differences; and Trauma Around Circumstances of Adoption.

The **Not Accepted as a Family theme** was characterized by having been rejected by extended family members and feelings of not belonging to the family. These responses were both generalized feelings the adoptee had and feelings borne out of other people's reactions to them. This theme was given by twenty-nine percent ($n = 7$) of respondents. Examples were, "Some of my adopted relatives will never accept me as part of the family," and, "I felt as if I didn't belong at family reunions..."

The **Feels/Fears Rejection theme** was characterized by having felt rejected by their biological mother and thus fearful of being rejected by significant others in their life. This theme was given by twenty-five percent ($n = 6$) of respondents. An example was, "Rejection at birth from one's own mother (whatever the circumstances) is very hard to overcome, especially as a teenager; young adult. It really makes one wonder, if she rejected me, who will, also."

Adoption as a Secret/Avoided theme was characterized by a sense of avoidance and discomfort by others when the issue of adoption was mentioned. This theme was given by twenty-one percent ($n = 5$) of respondents. Some examples even suggested a stronger flavor of discrimination and perhaps stereotyping. Examples were "Generally I don't discuss being adopted with people because they become uncomfortable and no one has an appropriate response, "and" There is some discrimination towards being adopted but I believe society is slowly coming around. I have not had too many negative

experiences only the cloud of ignorance hanging over those with closed minds."

Legal System as a Roadblock theme was characterized by feelings of frustration towards the legal system for keeping valuable and pertinent medical as well as identifying information closed. This theme was given by twenty-one percent ($n = 5$) of respondents. Examples were, "Lack of medical information is huge for me. Every time I have to go to the doctor, I have to leave many things blank. It leaves me a little anxious." and "Roadblock of the legal system and adoption agency also frustrating while searching."

Sadness and loss because of feeling a lack of belonging to anyone or anything characterized the **Lack of Belonging/Connection theme**. This theme was given by seventeen percent ($n = 4$) of respondents. For example, "I can get very sad about it and feel lost, like I have no connection to anyone, even though I am very close to my mom," and "(As an adolescent) I had a lot of resentment towards my parents, friends and life. The junior high years were the worst for me because I didn't feel like I belonged anywhere."

The **Media theme** was characterized by frustration at the negative portrayal of adoptees in the media. This theme was given by eight percent ($n = 2$) of respondents. For example, "Media bias, the reporting of the uninformed, is frustrating to read."

The **Reactions Because Searching** theme was characterized by discomfort by adoptive parents. This theme was given by eight percent ($n = 2$) of respondents. For example, "(In tracking down my birthfamily), I found I couldn't tell my adoptive parents about it without hurting them tremendously."

The **Teased theme** indicated experiences of having been made fun of because of adoptive status. This theme was given by eight percent ($n = 2$) of respondents. For example, "Some other kids in elementary school made fun of me..."

The **Adoption Difficult to Understand, Adoption Used as a Catch All, Racial Differences, and Trauma Around Circumstances of Adoption** themes were each given by four percent ($n = 1$) of respondents.

Why placed for adoption

The fifth question asked participants who indicated knowing why they had been placed for adoption to explain further. Table 5 shows the percentage of adoptees in each category that gave a reason(s) for being adopted. Thirty-three (66%) adoptees responded to the question and gave a total of 64 responses. Twelve themes emerged; Biological Parents...Age; Father Uninvolved/Single Mom; Could not Afford; Wanted to Give Baby a Better Life; Did Not Want to Marry/Have Child; Coerced; Religious Beliefs; Abandoned Baby; Emotionally Unstable; Hiding Pregnancy; and Raped.

The **Age theme** was generally characterized by the biological parent(s) being too young to care for a child with most being in adolescence. This theme was given by sixty-four percent ($n = 21$) of respondents.

The biological mother being unable to care for a child alone as well as being unmarried or the biological father recently leaving upon discovering the pregnancy characterized the **Father Uninvolved/Single Mom theme**. This theme was given by thirty-three percent ($n = 11$) of respondents. Examples include, "Single women did not bear and keep children in that time" and "My birthmother became pregnant by a married man...and could not take care of me..."

The **Could Not Afford theme** was due to lack of financial resources either at the time of pregnancy or an awareness of their inability to make enough money to care for a child. This theme was given by twenty-seven percent ($n = 9$) of respondents. Examples

were, "Birthmother already had 3 children and was divorced and couldn't afford another child," and "She (birthmother) had very little money and no where to go...she made the best choice for me and herself at the time."

The **Wanted to Give Baby Better Life theme** was characterized by responses indicating the biological parent(s) wanted to give their child a better life in terms of an emotionally stable, loving and financially able home. This theme was given by twenty-one percent ($n = 7$) of respondents. An example from this category was "She (biological mother) couldn't handle it and she knew she wanted to give me a better life."

The **Did Not Want to Marry/Have Child theme** was characterized by an unwanted pregnancy or not wishing to marry the father. This theme was given by eighteen percent ($n = 6$) of respondents. Examples were, "I was told I didn't fit my natural parents lifestyle," and "My (biological) mother didn't love my father."

The **Coerced theme** was indicative of biological mothers receiving different types of pressure in terms of potentially losing a job or a relationship. This theme was given by nine percent ($n = 3$) of respondents. An example was, "He (birthfather) was not thrilled at the prospect of a baby, marriage, etc., so she (birthmother) thought it best to give me up."

The **Religious theme** was characterized by differences of religion of birthparents and religious beliefs that prohibited abortion and frowned upon raising a child alone. This theme was given by nine percent ($n = 3$) of respondents. For example, "She (biological mother) couldn't take care of me, but she was involved in some strange mid-Eastern religion that discouraged abortion."

The **Abandoned Baby, Emotionally Unstable, and Raped** theme were each given by three percent ($n = 1$) of respondents.

Future searching

The sixth question asked participants who had not looked for their biological parents whether they may someday look and to explain their reasons. Table 6 shows the percentage of adoptees in each category that indicated they will look someday and gave reason(s). Nineteen (38%) adoptees responded that they will look and gave a total of 20 responses. Five themes emerged; Genetic Makeup; General Information/Knowing; Timing; To Thank Them; and Want Family/Friendship.

Genetic Makeup theme was characterized by statements indicating a desire to know that they look like, ancestral heritage and medical history. There was an emphasis on gaining information rather than on having a relationship with their biological family. This theme was given by forty-two percent ($n = 8$) of respondents. Examples from this category were "I don't know if I want to meet them face to face but I would like to know where I have gotten my features from. I'd like to see a picture of them," and "...mostly there is the issue of medical records and hereditary health problems."

General Information/Knowing theme was characterized by statements indicating wanting to know a little bit more about their biological parents, but again not having an intimate relationship. This theme was given by twenty-six percent ($n = 5$) of respondents. Examples were, "I want to see what my biological (relatives) are like...I'm not interested in asking why or seeing if we connect..." and "at one point I might want to know just to know, it wouldn't change much."

The **Timing theme** was characterized by adoptees interested in searching someday, but needing to be emotionally prepared and waiting for the right time to continue. These adoptees did not directly address why they might look, but instead chose

to discuss the emotional impact looking might have on them. It could be surmised that these adoptees are interested in a deeper connection since being ready is of great concern. This theme was given by sixteen percent ($n = 3$) of respondents. Examples from this category were, "It's scary, how do you feel when you meet your real mother? Once I meet them it will change my whole life. I have to be ready," and "I've started the process but am in a state of limbo at the moment...am waiting for the right time to continue."

The **To Thank Them** theme was characterized by appreciation towards their biological parents for having placed them for adoption and thus giving them opportunities they might not have otherwise had. These adoptees were concerned with alleviating any worries their biological parents might have. This theme was given by sixteen percent ($n = 3$) of respondents. An example was "...would like to meet them to show how happy I am they gave me a chance at life and say thanks."

The **Want Family/Friendship** theme example was given by 5% of participants ($n = 1$).

Adoptees who indicated that they would not look and gave reasons are shown in Table 7. Thirteen (26%) adoptees responded that they would not look and gave a total of 16 responses. Six themes emerged; Nothing to Gain; Lack of Pertinent Information; Biological Parents Deceased; Insulting/Painful to Adoptive and Biological Parents; Already Know; and Want Biological Parents to Search.

The **Nothing to Gain** theme was characterized by a lack of interest or desire and feeling that they had all their needs met by their adoptive parents and thus had nothing to gain by searching. This theme was given by Fifty-four percent ($n = 7$) of respondents. Examples were, "I think of my (adoptive) mom and dad as my parents. They raised me,

taught me, loved me, why would I ever need more?" and "I would gain nothing by finding them."

The **Lack of Pertinent Information theme** was characterized by being unable to initiate any type of search because they do not have any names, birth certificates or useful information. It is unclear whether these adoptees might otherwise choose to search if they had more pertinent information. This theme was given by twenty-three percent ($n = 3$) of respondents. An example was, "I do not have a birth certificate and I do not believe the orphanage still exists. There are some discrepancies in what my adoptive father says about my name..."

The **Biological Parents Deceased theme** is self-explanatory. This theme was given by fifteen percent ($n = 2$) of respondents.

The **Insulting/Painful to Adoptive and Biological parents theme** was characterized by not wishing to hurt their adoptive parents or disrupt the lives of their biological parents. This theme was given by fifteen percent ($n = 2$) of respondents. For example, "I think that it would be an unforgivable insult to my (adoptive) parents. They gave me everything."

The **Already Know Them theme** and the **Want Biological Parent to Search theme** were each given by eight percent ($n = 1$) of respondents.

Parental openness

Finally, the seventh question asked participants who indicated that their "adoptive parents could have been more open in talking to (them) about adoption?" to explain further. Table 8 shows the percentage of adoptees in each category that indicated their parents could have been more open in talking to them about adoption and their reasons.

Seventeen (34%) adoptees responded and gave a total of 18 responses. Three themes emerged; Open/Comfortable; Told Sooner; and Less Negative.

The **Open/Comfortable theme** was characterized by statements suggesting that the adoptee would have liked their parent(s) to have been less insecure and apprehensive and more comfortable and willing to discuss their concerns. This theme was given by eighty-eight percent ($n = 15$) of respondents. Examples from this category were, "They 'candy-coated' my being adopted, and could have been more supportive/encouraging of me wondering about my own bloodlines, heritage, etc., I was always afraid to pursue the topic with them..." and "Whenever my brother or I tried bringing up our biological history, they would change the subject or just stop the line of questioning."

The **Told Sooner theme** was characterized by statements indicating the adoptee would have like to have known they were adopted much sooner. This theme was given by twelve percent ($n = 2$) of respondents. For example, "They should have told me from day one."

The **Less Negative theme** example was given by six percent ($n = 1$) of respondents.

Table 1

Categorization of Negative Remarks.

Negative Themes	Percentage Indicating Themes
Abandoned/unwanted	48.5 (16)
Not "real" child/family	36.4 (12)
Inherently bad/sad	36.4 (12)
Need to find "real" family	9.1 (3)
Bad genes	3.0 (1)
Denied adoptive status	3.0 (1)
Lucky to be adopted	3.0 (1)

Note. Percentages may add to more than 100% because some respondents gave more than one response. Actual number of respondents appears in parentheses.

Table 2

Categorization of Positive Remarks.

Positive Themes	Percentage Indicating Themes
Special/Wanted	69.8 (30)
Lucky to have/know adoptee	30.2 (13)
Opportunities/advantages	23.3 (10)
Others expressed interest/curiosity	20.9 (9)
Loved/supported by biological parents	16.3 (7)
Well adjusted	9.3 (4)
Genetic freedom	7.0 (3)
Still a family	7.0 (3)

Note. Percentages may add to more than 100% because some respondents gave more than one response. Actual number of respondents appears in parentheses.

Table 3

Categorization of Adoptees' Positive Experiences.

Positive Themes	Percentage Indicating Themes
Loving adoptive family	45.5 (15)
Emotional support	18.2 (6)
Finding biological family	12.1 (4)
Others expressed interest/curiosity	12.1 (4)
Meeting other adoptees	12.1 (4)
Being placed for adoption	9.1 (3)
Personal growth	9.1 (3)
Resources	9.1 (3)
Open/honest communication	6.1 (2)
Having two families	3.0 (1)
Genetic freedom	3.0 (1)

Note. Percentages may add to more than 100% because some respondents gave more than one response. Actual number of respondents appears in parentheses.

Table 4

Categorization of Adoptees' Negative Experiences.

Negative Themes	Percentage Indicating Themes
Not accepted as family	29.2 (7)
Feels/fears rejection	25.0 (6)
Adoption as a secret/avoided	20.8 (5)
Legal system as roadblock	20.8 (5)
Lack of belonging/connection	16.7 (4)
Media	8.3 (2)
Reactions because searching	8.3 (2)
Teased	8.3 (2)
Adoption difficult to understand	4.2 (1)
Adoption used as catch all	4.2 (1)
Racial differences	4.2 (1)
Trauma around circumstance of adoption	4.2 (1)

Note. Percentages may add to more than 100% because some respondents gave more than one response. Actual number of respondents appears in parentheses.

Table 5

Categorization of Reasons for Adoption.

Negative Themes	Percentage Indicating Themes
<hr/>	
Biological parent(s):	
Age	63.6 (21)
Father uninvolved/single mom	33.3 (11)
Could not afford	27.3 (9)
Wanted to give baby better life	21.2 (7)
Did not want to marry/have child	18.2 (6)
Coerced	9.1 (3)
Religious beliefs	9.1 (3)
Abandoned baby	3.0 (1)
Emotionally unstable	3.0 (1)
Hiding pregnancy	3.0 (1)
Raped	3.0 (1)

Note. Percentages may add to more than 100% because some respondents gave more than one response. Actual number of respondents appears in parentheses.

Table 6

Categorization of Reasons for Searching.

Searching Themes	Percentage Indicating Themes
Genetic Makeup	42.1 (8)
General information/knowing	26.3 (5)
Timing	15.8 (3)
To thank them	15.8 (3)
Want family/friendship	5.3 (1)

Note. Percentages may add to more than 100% because some respondents gave more than one response. Actual number of respondents appears in parentheses.

Table 7

Categorization of Reasons for Not Searching.

Not Searching Themes	Percentage Indicating Themes
Nothing to gain	53.8 (7)
Lack of pertinent information	23.1 (3)
Biological parents deceased	15.4 (2)
Insulting/painful to adoptive and biological parents	15.4 (2)
Already know	7.7 (1)
Want biological parents to search	7.7 (1)

Note. Percentages may add to more than 100% because some respondents gave more than one response. Actual number of respondents appears in parentheses.

Table 8

Categorization of Ways Adoptive Parents Could Have Communicated About Adoption.

Communication Themes	Percentage Indicating Themes
Open/comfortable	88.2 (15)
Told sooner	11.8 (2)
Less negative	5.9 (1)

Note. Percentages may add to more than 100% because some respondents gave more than one response. Actual number of respondents appears in parentheses.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The primary purpose of this research was to utilize a non-clinical sample to examine, in an exploratory fashion, the nature of adoptees' positive and negative experiences and the degree to which they were impacted by those experiences. A secondary goal of the present study was to evaluate adoptees' attitudes towards adoption and the relationship of these attitudes to the types of positive and negative experiences they reported. Findings, from this study of participants drawn from a non-clinical sample, indicate that adoptees did report a range of both positive and negative experiences and that these experiences (or lack thereof) did influence their attitudes towards adoption in general.

Negative and positive remarks and experiences.

Regarding the negative and positive remarks made to adoptees during childhood, adolescence and adulthood, several trends were noted. First, adoptees reported hearing more positive remarks than negative remarks. And while negative items were perceived as having very little impact (i.e. neutral), positive remarks were perceived as having a fairly positive affect. This finding is intriguing as one may have expected to see adoptees influenced negatively by negative remarks made. It is possible that positive feedback provides a buffering effect from negative remarks. Secondly, in general, the frequency of remarks decreases from childhood to adulthood. Perhaps during an adoptees' childhood,

extended family, schools and church members may be more aware of the saliency of adoption and thus it is discussed more frequently. It may also be that adopted children encounter non-adopted children who do not understand adoption and therefore may be teased by their adopted peers. Also, as an adoptee grows into adulthood, people may be less aware of their adoptive status and thus it is not discussed as often. Furthermore, an adoptee may have incorporated the fact of their adoption into the many pieces that comprise their developing self and may also find it less important, especially as they enter adulthood. Finally, when asked about the most difficult age, almost one-third of adoptees indicated that adoption was not difficult at any age. However, of those who indicated difficulty, one-fourth found the ages of 11-15 to be the most difficult. Similarly Smith and Brodzinsky (1994) indicated that adoption issues and concomitant problems tend to be most notable in adolescence and then decrease in adulthood.

Overall, when asked to elaborate in essay form, participants reported both positive and negative remarks and experiences. However, participants reported that they heard more positive remarks, than negative. They also gave more examples of positive, than negative, remarks. When asked to elaborate about positive remarks made a full 70% of adoptees indicated that they were told they were “special” or “chosen.” That is, they viewed being told this as positive. Reitz and Watson (1992) argue that labeling an adoptee as “lucky,” “special,” etc., may make it more difficult for them to discuss issues that may imply a lack of gratitude for having been adopted or lack of appreciation to the adoptive parents. Interestingly, on a web page, that is typical of many on the internet, entitled, “Things NOT to say to adoptees,” telling an adoptee that they are “special” or “chosen” are the top two things (out of 36) not to say (Soll, 2000). Thus, although the current

sample did not perceive this as negative, some adoptees may. Future research may benefit from delineating factors that distinguish which of these groups adoptees identify with. Kowal and Schilling (1985) have pointed out that adoptees can experience contradictory feelings (e.g. feeling both “special” & “insecure”) and that an adoptees overall experience of adoption may continue to change over the lifespan.

Adoptees that received negative messages, from any source, while growing up were more likely to agree with negative statements about both individual (e.g., because someone is adopted they often lack an identity) and family (e.g., compared to biological families, adoptive families are not normal) adoption items. On the other hand, adoptees who received positive messages while growing up were more likely to agree with positive statements about both individual and family adoption items. And although they retrospectively reported that negative remarks impacted them neutrally, adoptees who heard more negative remarks, were also more likely to have negative feelings towards being adopted and feel as if adoption had, overall, made their life more difficult. Conversely, adoptees who indicated receiving positive messages were also more likely to have positive feelings towards being adopted and feel that adoption had, overall, made their life easier. Miall (1986), in a discussion of “self-labeling” indicated that someone may label themselves as deviant as they become aware of the “normative social meanings.” Thus, by extension, adoptees, as a result of the pathology based or negative climate towards adoption in this culture, may internalize negative self-attributions. However, this study suggests that there may be mediating variables.

Sources and intensity of adoption impact

When asked to indicate who affected feelings towards adoption, parents, not

surprisingly, had the most significant affect that declined slightly by adulthood.

Professionals had some notable influence in childhood possibly because, as Weiss (1985) suggested, adoptive parents may be more aware of resources and thus are more able to procure professional help. Shaw (1984) also noted that physicians and teachers may be more likely to believe that adopted children are having problems and thus refer them for treatment. Furthermore, friends and romantic relationships overall affect was very important in adulthood. And although there was some decrease, siblings continued to be important to adoptees across time. Although media does not have as large an influence as other sources, interestingly, it's affect does increase over time. One possible explanation is that as they develop an identity, adolescents look to television, movie and magazine characters as role models. Often these mediums suggest that most adoptees' search. News stories often focus on adoptions gone awry, thereby suggesting that adoptees have more problems than they actually do. Thus, people beyond the immediate family clearly have an affect on adoptees. March (1995) noted that almost three-fourths of adoptees did not perceive differences between adoptees and biological families, but that they felt other's saw them as different. Some evidence is found for the validity of their feelings in Meckler's (1997) article. She outlines a study that found an ambivalence by Americans towards adoption overall and towards the adoptive parent and adoptive child relationship and bond. In particular, non-adoptees may be more inclined to believe negative media portrayals and unwittingly provide this inaccurate feedback to adoptees. Finally, when asked about the **impact** of these sources, overall friends and romantic relationships were seen as having a more positive impact than either media or professionals. Additionally, across childhood, adolescence and adulthood friends increased in their positive impact.

Adoptive Family

Not unexpectedly, adoptive parents (particularly adoptive mothers) were of significant import to adoptees in discussing adoption and although many adoptees indicated they could talk to teachers and family members outside the nuclear family, they were still of less importance than parents. Best friends were also very important in discussing adoption. Furthermore, adoptees who reported that their adoptive parents impacted them negatively were also more likely to endorse negative family and individual adoption items. Conversely, adoptees who reported that adoptive parents impacted them positively were also more likely to endorse positive family and individual adoption items. Furthermore, adoptees who reported that they did not feel as close to their adoptive parents were also more likely to endorse negative individual and family adoption items. Conversely, adoptees who reported that they felt close to their adoptive parents were also more likely to endorse positive individual and family adoption items. Although not significant, there was a notable trend in which adoptees reported that if their siblings impacted them negatively they were also more likely to endorse negative family and individual adoption items. Finally, adoptees who reported feeling not very close to their adoptive parents, were more likely to report negative feelings towards being adopted and that adoption had overall made their life more difficult. Conversely, adoptees who reported feeling close to their adoptive parents reported more positive feelings towards being adopted and that adoption had overall made their life easier. Clearly then adoptive parents, just like in non-adoptive families, can do a lot to impact their child. However, unlike non-adoptive homes, adoptive families are subject to negative feedback based on their minority status as adoptees.

Attitudes towards adoption and correlation matrices

The Factor Analysis was conducted on a fairly low n , so findings are tentative. However, preliminary analyses suggest that the two-factor ATAQ is a reliable scale and lends to our understanding of the relationship between self-reported retrospective socialization experiences and overall attitudes.

Although the current research did not find any significant relationship between openness and attitudes towards adoption or overall feelings, it is still noteworthy that the majority of adoptees indicated that their adoptive parents did not lie to them about being adopted. However, over one-third indicated that their parents could have been more open in talking to them about being adopted. Even though two-thirds knew why they had been placed for adoption, it would seem that adoptees want more information as well as parental comfort in discussing it. In fact, adoptees who reported being lied to were not surprisingly more likely to agree with negative statements about family adoption items than adoptees who were not lied to. As suggested by Kirk (1964), some adoptive parents may be uncomfortable with differences (“rejection-of-differences”) and therefore not be comfortable talking about them. Thus, at least in this sample, there are still those adoptive parents who would appear to evince (at least according the adoptees perceptions) some discomfort. Wroebel et al. (1996) suggests that one possible explanation is varying degrees of information available for other adopted siblings. However, Smith (1997) reminds us that degree of openness is probably not the best predictor of adoption adjustment. That is, if adoptive parents have less information available for an adopted sibling, they may be less likely to share the information they do have with the other adopted sibling. Because two-thirds indicated having adopted siblings, it is possible that

this may have impacted parental openness to some degree. However a more likely explanation is that not too many decades ago adoptive parents were told not to share much information about their adopted child's past (Silin, 1996). Instead they were encouraged not to discuss adoption for fear of upsetting the adopted child. Thus, adoptees may be sensing their adoptive parents conflicted feelings.

Searching

Most articles on adoption, as well as media portrayals would lead us to believe that most adoptees search for their biological parents. In this sample slightly over one-third of adoptees had indicated having searched (however questions were not asked as to the nature, extent or outcome of their searching) and found the experience mildly positive. One-third indicated they would never search. The final third said they may search. In this sample, adoptees that had searched reported more overall negative attitudes towards adoption (and specifically towards individual adoption items) as well as a distant relationship to adoptive parents. Conversely, adoptees who had not searched for their biological parents were more likely to report a closer relationship to their adoptive parents and more positive attitudes towards adoption. Thus, there is a relationship between searching and negative attitudes as well as a distant relationship with adoptive parents. Aumend and Barrett (1984) found that adult adoptees who designated themselves as searchers evidenced less self-satisfaction, lower family self and poor identity than those who designated themselves as non-searchers. So, in part the results of this study support Aumend and Barrett's findings. Triseliotis (1973) found disturbed family relationships in adoptees who choose to search. Conversely, other researchers and theorists have argued that searching is healthy (Andersen, 1993) and necessary (Hollingsworth, 1998). This

study suggests that as positive messages increase and as closeness increases between adoptive parents and adoptive children less searching occurs. Similar to non-adoptive families, negative messages and lack of closeness may lead to other problems.

Furthermore, this is not a causal relationship and thus further research may help us understand this relationship. Wegar (1997) reminds us though that society places such an importance on blood ties and genetics. Thus, it would seem difficult to label an adoptee as “healthy” or “unhealthy” based only on their decision to search.

Of those wishing to search over half wanted to know more about their genetic makeup and gain general information about their history. Similarly, adoptees (one-fourth) that indicated they would not search for their biological parents also had more positive attitudes towards adoption. They further noted that there was nothing to be gained by searching. Thus, one could surmise that genetic history, unlike what media representations and theory would otherwise suggest, is not important to some adoptees. Because research has been primarily conducted on adoptees who are self-designated searchers it will be important to continue exploring the difference between searchers and non-searchers. We do know that there are adoptees in other countries who, as a group, generally do not search. Thus, shedding light on this phenomenon may add to our understanding of the impact of social/cultural, familial and intrapsychic factors on this phenomenon.

In their decades of research on parent-child attachments, Chess and Thomas (1999) outline the well-known idea of “goodness of fit.” This variable can take on a multitude of dimensions including physical similarity, ethnic similarity (examined in this study), similarity in temperament, interests, and intelligence to name a few. Stein and Hoopes (1985) noted that adoptees who perceived that they looked physically dissimilar

to their adoptive family were more likely to search. Hollingsworth (1998) found, in a review of the empirical, theoretical and clinical case adoption literature, that adoptees who believe they looked dissimilar to their adoptive families were more likely to search. Unlike Hollingsworth, the present study examined ethnic similarity and did not find a significant relationship between these variables in spite of the fact that one-third of adoptees' indicated they were not of a similar racial background to their adoptive parents. This finding appears to mirror that of Smith (1997) who concluded that transracially adopted children do as well as others. In fact, no relationship was found between ethnicity and attitudes towards adoption, searching or feelings towards adoption. Thus, the past emphasis on "matching" adoptees with families (in terms of ethnic background) may be more about the cultural emphasis on biological relativism than on the best interest of the adoptee.

Clinical and Social Implications

In spite of the fact that more positive, than negative, remarks were made to adoptees, it is still remarkable that fifty-eight percent of participants reported that one or more negative remarks were made regarding their adoptive status at some point in their past. Singer et al. (1985) discusses the "psychological vulnerability" that the social stigma surrounding adoption can cause and Kirk (1981) wrote on the "role handicaps" adoptive parents face due to discrimination from the larger social world. Adoptive parents may internalize some of the negative reactions from others and thus have some discomfort in discussing adoption.

In order to foster more comfort in discussing adoption, adoptive parents would benefit from an **empirically based** set of guidelines regarding adoption development. In

particular, adoptive parents would benefit from learning how to respond to negative comments from others. In turn, this would help model, for their adoptive children, empowering and positive coping tools to deal with this stigma as they develop.

Brodzinsky, Schechter and Brodzinsky (1986) suggested that understanding children's adoption beliefs and overall adjustment to adoption will lead to a decrease in anxiety by adoptive parents and thus an increased comfort by adoptive parents in discussing adoption. In fact, Miall (1987) noted that the success in adoption is found in the ability to throw off societal attitudes. However, this can be difficult as Kirk (1964) noted because adoptive parents have the sole responsibility of achieving comfort with their adoptive status in a culture milieu that sees adoption as deviant. Furthermore, Miall (1996) believes that the literature is extremely negative towards adoptive parents. Wegar (1997) suggests that until researchers and professionals see adoption within its larger social and cultural context they will continue to inadvertently stigmatize adoptees. Clearly, this could create tension and discomfort both within the home and in interaction with society-at-large. Lieberman (1998) reminds us that like other minority groups, adoptees and their families are left bearing the responsibility to educate and dispel myths. So, with this reality it is important not to blame adoptive parents, for their understandable stress, but rather to educate and empower them.

It will also be equally important to accurately educate others and increase the positive images associated with adoption. Adlard (1999) outlines a program that has had some initial success. Two of the areas include an educational program about adoption in school curricula for children ages 12-18 and a "media initiative" to give correct information about adoption. Positive social action campaigns that focus on the positive

attributes of adoptees, rather than focusing on just adoptees that have problems would be beneficial. For example, media figures, who are also adoptees, such as Greg Louganis (Gold Medal Olympic swimmer), Dan O'Brien (Olympic Decathlon winner), Faith Daniels (television journalist), Dave Thomas (founder and CEO of Wendy's), Scott Hamilton (Olympic Skater), James Michener (renowned author), Art Linkletter (news personality), Faith Hill (Country music star), to name a few, are all positive role models for adoptees and society at large. A more concerted effort to challenge "negative" adoption stereotypes is needed in the decades to come particularly as adoptions continue to increase. Rather than marginalizing adoptive families and assuming that family problems or issues are due to adoption, it will be important to step away from this current trend and ascertain whether the presenting issue might also occur in non-adoptive families. Finally, because professionals also appear to have some impact on adoptees in childhood, they should be trained to exam their own stereotypes and beliefs about adoption (Janus, 1997).

Strengths, Limitations and Future Research.

Although the current study contributed to our understanding of adoptees positive and negative socialization experiences among a non-clinical sample, it also has several limitations. The sample is non-representative as it was drawn from lower level undergraduate courses at Colorado State University and is comprised of volunteers and thus subject to the well known "volunteer effect," (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1975). As in any volunteer study, it may also be that volunteers were higher functioning than non-volunteers might have been. Because this sample was limited to adoption before age 2, with the average age at adoption being 2.7 months, findings can only be generalized to early adoptions. However, as pointed out by Marquis and Detweiler (1985), participants

can not be randomly assigned to experimental and control groups and thus research will, to some degree, be non-representative. Thus, it is important to be clear on the type of sample being utilized when developing broader and potentially heuristic theories from these data. It is also possible that participants in this sample are higher functioning, as indicated by graduating from high school, and attending a public college and thus responded in a more positive direction than what would be found in a random sample of adoptees. It is also important though, to note, that the bulk of adoption research is drawn from clinical samples thereby overestimating the nature and extent of adoptees' issues. Furthermore, it will be important to utilize non-adopted controls whenever possible so that accurate conclusions may be drawn. For example, are we observing an adoption issue or an issue that also occurs in non-adoptive families?

The questionnaire itself may have resulted in a fatigue effect due to its length and repetitiveness (i.e. repeating the same questions for childhood, adolescence, and adulthood) as well as the overlap of some items. Questions that asked adoptees about the overall impact of various experiences may have been difficult to answer, as participants may not be totally aware of who impacted them and to what degree. An ability to answer such questions subsumes a fairly cogent self-understanding that some participants may not evidence at this point in their lives. This possibility is evidenced whereby adoptees' indicated that hearing negative remarks impacted them neutrally, yet hearing these remarks was related to negative attitudes towards adoption. In addition, the childhood and adolescent questions are retrospective. As with any retrospective study, participants can exaggerate the importance of some variables or diminish the importance of others. Kowal and Schilling (1985) remind us that recollection of childhood feelings may be impacted by

adult perceptions. Perhaps this sample of adoptees perceive negative remarks in childhood as have a neutral impact now as the overall frequency of negative remarks decreased from childhood to adulthood. Thus, asking children and adolescents these questions in a longitudinal format may be useful for future research studies. Such an exploration may also help illuminate previously ignored variables and enhance the specifics of how others positively or negatively impact adoptees' feelings about adoption. Future research on social stigma should examine in more detail, the nature of remarks towards adoptees and the quantity of these remarks (for example, a schoolmate making a one time teasing remarks, or negative remarks being made on a regular basis by a relative).

Another poorly studied area, and that has been illuminated in this study as important, is that of adoptive parents. Research with adoptive parents to determine kinds/types of biases they experience seems to be an important next step. This phenomenon is repeatedly noted, but we have limited understanding as to how biases are manifested, their frequency as well as adoptive family reactions and overall ability to cope.

Haugaard (1998) suggests that older adoptions by stepparents, circumstances of adoption, interethnic adoptions, adoptees with histories of abuse or neglect, comparison of defined variables with non-adoptive families (when appropriate) and adoptive parent satisfaction are all important areas for future research. Although this study did not explore open adoption (i.e. varying degrees of contact with biological parents), it will be an important variable to examine in future research as more recent trends are moving towards this (see Melina & Roszia, 1993; Miall, 1998 for a more detailed discussion). Kraft, Palombo, Mitchell, Woods, Schmidt, and Tucker (1985) believe that openness in adoption might hinder the development of attachment in adoptees and adoptive parents. Thus, in

light of the current finding that adoptees' relationship with their parents is very important, exploration of open vs. closed adoptions will be important in providing therapists guidelines for working with adoptive families. Furthermore, focus should be on asking adoptees (for example, not drawing from therapist interpretation) about their reactions as children, adolescents and adults in an open adoption situation since, as discussed, little research has focused on asking adoptees about their adoption experience. Finally, further analyses of the ATAQ will strengthen reliability and validity of this instrument and perhaps increase its utility in delineating adoption-related issues.

Conclusions

The topic of adoption is a very broad with numerous dimensions that can not be appropriately addressed in a single theory. Overall, the current study has demonstrated that adoptees are subject to both positive and negative influences from a variety of sources both within and outside the family. Not surprisingly the nature of these interactions is related to adoptees attitudes towards adoption. Previous research has suggested that “stigma” is a potential problem for some adoptees, but the nature of these stigmatizing experiences has not been formally examined in a rigorous way. Clearly, a strong parent-child relationship can have a buffering effect on these experiences. Additionally, engaging in a concerted effort to challenge “negative” adoption related stereotypes is needed in the decades to come, particularly as adoptions continue to increase. Finally, continuing to explore adoptees’ (and their families) perceptions of their socialization experience will provide us with an invaluable understanding of their unique experience.

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Please take some time to write about any negative things people said to you, as a child, about being adopted. _____

6. As a child, did anyone ever say anything positive about you because you were adopted?

_____ No.
 _____ Yes. If yes, how often?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Rarely						Frequently

7. How did their positive comments effect you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Affected me Positively						Affected me Negatively

Please take some time to write about any positive things people said to you, as a child, about being adopted. _____

8. As a child, what best described your feelings towards being adopted?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positive						Negative

9. As a child, which of the following affected your feeling towards adoption (check all that apply)? Also for each one you check, please circle the number that best describes how you were affected. If you do not check a particular item, do not circle a number.

_____ Adoptive parents.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

_____ Siblings.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

_____ Media.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

_____ Books.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

_____ Friends.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

_____ Teachers.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

_____ Strangers.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

13. As an adolescent, how rejected did you feel because you were adopted?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at All Rejected						Very Rejected

14. As an adolescent, did anyone ever say anything negative about you because you were adopted?

No
 Yes. If yes, how often?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Rarely						Frequently

15. How did their negative comments effect you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Affected me Positively						Affected me Negatively

Please take some time to write about any negative things people said to you, as an adolescent, about being adopted. _____

16. As an adolescent, did anyone ever say anything positive about you because you were adopted?

No
 Yes. If yes, how often?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Rarely						Frequently

17. How did their positive comments effect you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Affected me Positively						Affected me Negatively

Please take some time to write about any positive things people said to you, as an adolescent, about being adopted. _____

18. As an adolescent, what best described your feelings towards being adopted?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positive						Negative

19. As an adolescent, which of the following affected your feeling towards adoption (check all that apply)? Also for each one you check, please circle the number that best describes how you were affected. If you do not check a particular item, do not circle a number.

_____ Adoptive parents.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

_____ Siblings.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

_____ Media.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

Books.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

Friends.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

Teachers.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

Significant romantic relationships.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

Strangers.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

Acquaintances.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

Professionals (doctors, psychologists).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

Other. (please explain) _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

IMPORTANT: Now go back and in the space below the items you checked please write what was said and why it affected you the way it did.

Please take some time to write about any negative things people have said to you, as an adult, about being adopted. _____

26. As an adult, has anyone ever said anything positive about you because you were adopted?
 _____ No
 _____ Yes. If yes, how often?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 Rarely Frequently

27. How did their positive comments effect you?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 Affected me Affected me
 Positively Negatively

Please take some time to write about any positive things people have said to you, as an adult, about being adopted. _____

28. As an adult, which best describes your feelings towards being adopted?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 Positive Negative

29. As an adult, which of the following has affected your feelings towards adoption (check all that apply)? Also for each one you check, please circle the number that best describes how you were affected. If you do not check a particular item, do not circle a number.

_____ Adoptive parents.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

_____ Siblings.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

_____ Media.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

_____ Books.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

_____ Friends.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

_____ Teachers.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

_____ Significant romantic relationships.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

_____ Strangers.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positively						Negatively

Acquaintances.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Positively Negatively

Professionals (doctors, psychologists).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Positively Negatively

Other. (please explain) _____

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Positively Negatively

IMPORTANT: Now go back and in the space below the items you checked please write what was said and why it affected you the way it did.

Please go back and circle the one area (e.g. media), in question 29 that you believe has had the largest effect in your experience of what it means to be adopted.

30. Please write about any positive experiences you have had related to being adopted.

31. Please write about any negative experiences you have had related to being adopted.

Attitudes Towards Adoption

Please answer the following questions on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree", to 7, "Strongly Agree". Please write your answer on the line to the left of the question. Some may be difficult to answer, but please try to answer each one with the statement that best describes how you really feel.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Moderately Disagree
- 3 = Mildly Disagree
- 4 = Neutral
- 5 = Mildly Agree
- 6 = Moderately Agree
- 7 = Strongly Agree

- _____ 1. Adoptive parents usually love their adoptive children more than biological parents love their biological children.
- _____ 2. Because adopted individuals do not know their genetic history, they usually feel freer than non-adopted individuals to create their own identity.
- _____ 3. Adoptive families generally have more losses and fears than non-adoptive families.
- _____ 4. Most adopted individuals feel as if they have been abandoned by their biological parents.
- _____ 5. Adoptive parents are more likely, than biological parents, to pressure their adoptive kids to be perfect.
- _____ 6. Because adopted people were "chosen" by their adoptive parents, they feel out of control of their own lives, when compared to their non-adopted peers.
- _____ 7. It is usually important for adopted individuals to mourn the loss of their biological parents.
- _____ 8. Adopted people often feel left out at their adoptive family gatherings.
- _____ 9. Because adopted individuals do not know their genetic/familial history, they often feel incomplete.
- _____ 10. The development of a healthy sexuality is especially difficult for adopted people.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
2 = Moderately Disagree
3 = Mildly Disagree
4 = Unsure
5 = Mildly Agree
6 = Moderately Agree
7 = Strongly Agree

- ___ 11. Adoptive parents feel more of a need to be perfect parents than biological parents.
- ___ 12. Adoptive parents are more able to trust and accept their adopted child's feelings than biological parents do with their biological children.
- ___ 13. Because someone is adopted they are missing something.
- ___ 14. Adoptive parents are not "real" or "natural" parents.
- ___ 15. Adoptive families are "second-best" to non-adoptive families.
- ___ 16. It would be a good idea for most adopted individuals to be taught/counseled how to deal with negative societal attitudes towards adoption.
- ___ 17. Loss is usually a part of adoption.
- ___ 18. Adopted individuals often experience negative attitudes by others.
- ___ 19. It is usually better for children to be with their biological parents.
- ___ 20. Being adopted is usually an inescapable trauma.
- ___ 21. Adopted individuals generally feel different from non-adopted people.
- ___ 22. Because someone is adopted they often lack an identity.
- ___ 23. Adoptive parents generally know less about childrearing than biological parents.
- ___ 24. Adopted individuals often wish they could have grown up with their biological family.
- ___ 25. Compared to biological families, adoptive families are not normal.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Moderately Disagree
- 3 = Mildly Disagree
- 4 = Unsure
- 5 = Mildly Agree
- 6 = Moderately Agree
- 7 = Strongly Agree

_____ 26. Because adopted individuals were given up by their biological mother they may be afraid that others will also leave them.

_____ 27. Adopted individuals need to find their biological parents in order to feel complete.

_____ 28. Something must be wrong with most adopted people if their biological parents placed them for adoption.

Demographics

Please answer the following questions about yourself.

1. Gender: Male _____ Female _____
2. Age _____
3. Year in School:
 - a. Freshman
 - b. Sophomore
 - c. Junior
 - d. Senior
 - e. Other
4. Major _____
5. What is your current families income?
 - a. Under \$12,000.
 - b. \$12,000.-24,999.
 - c. \$25,000.-39,999.
 - d. \$40,000.-59,999.
 - e. \$60,000.-79,999.
 - f. \$80,000-\$99,999.
 - g. over \$100,000.

6. What is your predominant ethnic background? (check one)

<input type="checkbox"/> Irish	<input type="checkbox"/> Polish	<input type="checkbox"/> French-Canadian
<input type="checkbox"/> Italian	<input type="checkbox"/> African-American	<input type="checkbox"/> English
<input type="checkbox"/> German	<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic	<input type="checkbox"/> American-Indian
<input type="checkbox"/> Scotch	<input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Indian	<input type="checkbox"/> Middle Eastern
<input type="checkbox"/> Asian	<input type="checkbox"/> Eastern European	<input type="checkbox"/> Scandanavian
<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____		

7. How many siblings do you have? _____ (if 0 go to Question 12)

8. How many of your siblings were adopted by your parents? _____

9. How many of your siblings are biologically related to you? _____

10. How close do (did) you feel to your adopted siblings?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very Close						Not At All Close

11. How close do (did) you feel to your non-adopted siblings?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very Close						Not At All Close

12. How close do (did) you feel to your mother?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very Close						Not At All Close

13. How close do (did) you feel to your father?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very Close						Not At All Close

14. Approximately how many adopted people do you know? _____

15. How likely are you to consider adopting?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Likely						Not Likely

You have now completed this study. Please wait for final directions!

Appendix B

Forms

Consent Form

Research Information Sheet

Debriefing Statement

**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

Title of Project: Adoptees Perceptions of Growing Up Adopted
Principal Investigator: Larry Bloom, Ph.D. (970-491-5214)
Co-Investigator: Jill A. Kuhn, M.A. (970-491-2968)

You are volunteering to participate in a research study which is examining how college students who are adopted perceive what it means to be adopted. In particular we are looking at the kinds of experiences you had growing up as an adopted person. Questions will be presented to you in a paper and pencil format and will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. Your name will NOT be included in the study itself or written on the questionnaire and all answers are confidential. Additionally, the consent form will be filed away separately from the questionnaire. All information will be stored in a locked cabinet.

You may refuse to answer any questions at any time. You may also withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice and will still receive 1 research credits and an entry into the lottery ticket raffle. Any questions you have regarding this study will be answered.

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, but reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and the potential, but unknown, risks.

Because Colorado State University is a publicly-funded, state institution, it may have only limited legal responsibility for injuries incurred as a result of participation in this study under Colorado law known as the Colorado Governmental Immunity Act (Colorado Revised Statutes, Section 24-10-101, et seq.). In addition, under Colorado law, you must file any claim against the University within 180 days after the date of injury. In light of these laws, you are encouraged to evaluate your own health and disability insurance to determine whether you are covered for any injuries you might sustain by participating in this research, since it may be necessary for you to rely on your individual coverage for any such injuries. If you sustain injuries which you believe were caused by Colorado State University or its employees, we advise you to consult an attorney. Questions concerning treatment of subjects' right may be directed to Celia Walker (970-491-1563).

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary. If I decide to participate in the study, I may withdraw my consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I have read and understand this information and willingly sign this consent form. My signature also acknowledges that I have read the information stated and have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 1 page.

Participant Signature: _____ Date _____

Participant Name (printed) _____

Investigator Signature: _____ Date _____

Page 1 of 1, Participants initials _____ Date _____

RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

NAME OF EXPERIMENT:
Adoptees Perceptions of Growing Up Adopted

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY:

The purpose of this research study is to examine how you have been effected by other people's perceptions of what it means to be adopted. You will be asked to answer questions on your experiences growing up as well as attitudes you currently hold about being adopted. You will also be asked to provide some basic information about yourself. The research study will take approximately one hour to complete. Your name will also be entered in a raffle for 25 lottery tickets.

SPECIAL PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS:

Both adopted men and adopted women can participate in this study, but you must be at least 18 years of age. Please do not sign up if you are not adopted

APPROXIMATE TIME REQUIRED FOR PARTICIPATION AND CREDIT TO BE EARNED:

- 1 HOUR - worth 1 experimental credit.
 2 HOURS - worth 2 experimental credits.
 3 HOURS - worth 3 experimental credits.

WHEN AND WHERE:

Please see the sign-up dates, times, and location listed on the opposite page. Sign-up for a time that works best for you and take the attached reminder slip.

ADDITIONAL SIGN-UP INSTRUCTIONS:

Please be on time to the research study as the door will be closed at the designated appointment time. If you are late you will have to sign-up for another day and time.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THIS STUDY, PLEASE CONTACT:

NAME: Jill Kuhn
DEPARTMENT: Psychology
OFFICE NUMBER: C-65
TELEPHONE: 491-2968

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

The current study was designed to examine people's perception of what it means to be adopted. Specifically we wanted to examine your perception of negative and positive adoption experiences and the types of negative attitudes or beliefs about adoption that may affect adoptees. In addition, if you are adopted, we wanted to look at the degree to which these experiences affect you and how they relate to your current beliefs about what it means to be adopted.

The present study conforms to the ethical principles of the American Psychological Association. We are interested in obtaining your comments regarding your participation in this study. This information would serve as a basis for checking and evaluating the quality and care with which this research is conducted. Please feel free to comment or ask questions. If you find after you leave today that you have further questions concerning this study you can contact the researcher, Jill Kuhn, or the research project supervisor, Dr. Larry Bloom. Both phone numbers are listed on your consent form. In addition, the raffle for 25 lottery tickets will occur during the spring semester of 1997. You will be notified should your name be selected.

We thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this very important area of research!