THE TRANSITION TO SINGLE PARENT ADOPTION FOR WOMEN AT MIDLIFE

by

SANDRA PATRICIA CHOPPING

B.A. The University of British Columbia, 1992

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE DEPARTMENT OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education

Faculty of Education

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

October 1999

© Sandra Patricia Chopping, 1999
Abstract

A qualitative, phenomenological research design was used to explore the experience of the transition to single parent adoption for women at mid-life. The participants were ten women ranging in age from 43 to 52 years of age who had adopted within the last five years and who had been a parent for at least one year. In individual, in-depth taped interviews, the women described the meaning and experience of the transition to single parent adoption. A thematic analysis procedure based on the work of Colaizzi (1978) was used to develop the common and unique themes of the participants. Analysis of the data revealed there were two patterns that illustrated a complex and challenging transition process. The results of this study are described in relation to their implications for counselling and further research studies.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................... ii
Table of Contents .............................................................................................. iii
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................... v
Dedication ........................................................................................................... vi

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem .............................................................................. 1
Developing Identity Within a Social Context ................................................. 3
Purpose of the Study ....................................................................................... 4

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Influence of Feminist Theories of Motherhood ...................................... 6
The Increase in Single Motherheaded Families ............................................ 9
Women's Identity and Development ............................................................... 11
Transitions .................................................................................................... 15
Background on Single Parent Adoption ....................................................... 18
Characteristics of Single Adoptive Mothers ................................................ 19
Issues Related to Single Parent Adoption .................................................... 22
Strengths of Single Parent Adoptive Homes ................................................ 25
International Adoption .................................................................................. 26
Summary ......................................................................................................... 29

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

Research Design .............................................................................................. 31
The Reflexive Process ..................................................................................... 31
Rigor ............................................................................................................... 33
Participants ..................................................................................................... 34
Procedures ...................................................................................................... 35
Data Analysis .................................................................................................. 37
Limitations of the Study ................................................................................ 39

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Case Summaries .............................................................................................. 41
The Narrative .................................................................................................. 75

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study ..................................................... 97
A Comparison to the Existing Literature ....................................................... 97
Additional Findings ....................................................................................... 103
Implications for Future Research ................................................................. 105
Acknowledgements

I would first like to express my gratitude to the ten women who found time in their busy lives to take part in this study. The sharing of your personal stories is the heart of this research project. Having the opportunity to meet and spend time with some of your children was delightful.

I would like to thank Dr. Bill Borgen, who supervised the writing of this thesis, whose support and encouragement continually generated my enthusiasm for this study.

I am very grateful to my other committee members, Dr. Beth Haverkamp, for her thoughtful reading of this work; and to Dr. Joan Shireman, whose contribution to the research on single parent adoption was the scholarly impetus for this study. Your shared interest in this topic was inspiring to me.

I would especially like to thank my mother for her dedication, not only to the research project, but to my well-being as I went through the "ups and downs" of thesis writing. Thank you to my other family members for your interest and encouragement.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my friends for the love and support they have given me, and for always believing in the value of this study.
This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother

Laura Priscilla Chopping
1890 - 1962
Chapter One

Introduction

We live in a society where women lead diverse lives. Changes in women's ability to control childbearing, their greater workforce participation, access to higher education, the development of professional careers, and the influence of feminism have led to a variety of options for personal fulfillment and life satisfaction (Burns & Scott, 1994; Daniluk, 1983). While motherhood is a primary issue that concerns most women, the ability to decide if, and how motherhood will be a part of one's life experience and self identity is a recent phenomenon (Matlin, 1987).

Changes in societal norms and in what is important to people in relationships are altering the structure of families (Burns & Scott, 1994). Significant changes in marriage, divorce and remarriage trends in North America have greatly influenced family life (Hanson, Heirns, Julian, Sussman, 1995). High rates of separation and divorce, along with increasing numbers of never married women becoming mothers, has resulted in a significant number of adults and children experiencing life in single parent families (Hanson et al.). Since 1965, an increasing number of women are opting to create families through single parent adoption (Branham, 1966; Groze & Rozenthal, 1991; Shireman, 1996).

Statement of the Problem

The increase in single adoptive parent families exists despite what Bartholet (1993) argues are the cultural and political stigmas attached to adoption, and the social disapproval of some who question whether single parent adoption is an acceptable form of family (Anderson & Stewart, 1994; Bartholet, 1993; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Shireman, 1996).

In recent years, the medical options for treating infertility and the availability of donor insemination programs have grown (Bartholet, 1993). These, along with pervasive social values which perceive reproduction as essential to issues of identity, survival, and
immortality (Peck & Senderowitz, 1974; Morrell, 1993, as cited in Currie Michener, 1996)
lead women away from adoption towards attempts at reproduction. Failed attempts to
conceive a child make adoption a last resort (Bartholet, 1993).

Single adoptive applicants are lower ranked in the adoption hierarchy (Anderson
& Stewart, 1994; Bartholet, 1993; Shireman, 1996). Social norms still encourage and
expect only married women to have children; single lesbians and single heterosexual
women are discouraged from becoming mothers (Morell, 1990; 1993; Richardson, 1993,
as cited in Currie Michener, 1996).

Recent changes to international adoption laws state that individuals (who were only
considered for adoption of older children) can now adopt newborn infants, however, not
all countries and agencies participating in international adoption have adapted their policies
to include single applicants (A. Melcombe, personal conversation, August 11, 1998).

Individuals applying to adopt are marginalized because most have fewer resources
of family support, income, time and energy, yet they are really only considered seriously
for the adoption of a "difficult to place" child with "special needs" - the ones who are older,
of different colour, and those with physical disabilities and emotional challenges
(Anderson & Stewart, 1994; A. Melcombe, personal conversation, August 8, 1998;
Shireman, 1995).

Bias shapes the ways in which those in charge of regulating adoptions develop
policies and procedures (Bartholet, 1993). While the adoption procedures may be the same
for single and coupled applicants (A. Melcombe, personal conversation, August 8, 1998),
screening rules and restrictions are still experienced most strongly by prospective single
adoptive parents (Bartholet, 1993). Feigelman and Silverman (1983) found that single
adoptive parents tend "...to have more difficulties in completing their adoptions" (p. 183),
and report more negative experiences with adoption professionals than do adoptive
couples.
The power of the adoption stigma filters down and affects the children to be adopted. "The policies designed to protect the biologic tie create the foster care limbo, which may produce the damaged children who may well have adjustment difficulties in adoption" (Bartholet, 1993, p. 183). An analysis conducted by Feigelman and Silverman (1983) found that the child's age at time of adoption was a statistically significant variable influencing the adjustment of the child. They argue that "...although being adopted by a single parent has no adverse adjustment impact on the child, waiting to be adopted does" (Feigelman & Silverman, 1983, p. 188).

In spite of the biases and difficulties, adoption of "special needs" children by single parents has increased significantly (Groze & Rosenthal, 1991).

**Developing Identity Within a Social Context**

Single adoptive mothers are part of a growing trend in women who are making alternative choices and decisions about their lives. In the past, there has been an assumption that all women are fundamentally alike (Josselson, 1996). As a society, we have preoccupied ourselves with stereotype "...instead of being able to contain in our consciousness the infinitely varied weavings of real living women" (Josselson, 1996, p. 08). In the last 30 years, women adopting a child at mid-life have grown up in two worlds - that of their parents and the world of today. Identity formation has taken place in the context of growing up with the traditional values of the 50's and the emergence of critical social change in women's lives leading to different choices, options and the timing of life events. Economic independence allows some women more freedom to experience being a woman in a variety of ways and to allow their own needs and wishes to shape the direction of their lives. "Men no longer define women. The elusive goal of self-definition is within a woman's grasp. What do I want? is a question that each woman decides for herself. The process of deciding what she most deeply wants coincides with the formation of her identity" (Josselson, 1987, p. 03).
Within this context, women have the opportunity to give intense thought to possibility, to choice, and to revision (Josselson, 1996). The existence "...of this possibility to choose affords the opportunity to investigate the pathways by which women take up and encounter that choice, how they sort through what they might become, and how they realize what they are" (Josselson, 1996, p. 10).

Theories on adult development stress the importance of context in understanding adulthood (Hareven, 1992; Neugarten & Neugarten, 1987), as cited in Schlossberg, 1995), and the impact of historical trends on life transitions.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to describe the meaning and experience of the transition to single adoptive motherhood for women at mid-life. This study hopes to find out much more about who these women are and their deeper understandings of the internal and external processes that culminate in the decision to adopt a child. These women deliberately choose a difficult, albeit rewarding life pattern and "...one wonders who they are and why they want to take on the complex task of raising a child alone..." (Shireman, 1985, p. 322). To date, most research on single parent adoption has focused on identifying motives for adopting, characteristics of single adoptive parents, and key issues of family functioning of single parent adoptive families (Branham, 1966; Dougherty, 1978; Groze & Rosenthal, 1991; Groze & Rosenthal, 1991; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Shireman & Johnson, 1976; Shireman & Johnson, 1986; Shireman & Johnson, 1995; Shireman & Johnson, 1996). Although several anecdotal accounts on the process of becoming a single adoptive mother exist (Bartholet, 1993; Cole, 1995), there is very little research on the transition experience that leads to the decision to adopt a child and therefore a phenomenological method is being used to elucidate the women's experiences, allowing them to describe what is meaningful to them (Colaizzi, 1978).

The guiding research question is: "**For women at mid-life, what is the meaning and lived experience of the transition leading to single parent adoption?**"
The goal of this research is to contribute to the literature on single adoptive parents by providing a detailed exploration and thematic analysis of the meanings that heterosexual and lesbian women ascribe to the transition process culminating in the decision to adopt a child. By listening to these women describe this pivotal life process, I hope to validate the diverse options amongst women today while at the same time exploring motherhood as a central theme for many women; to advance the knowledge base on women's lives; and to contribute to theory on women's identity development by examining lifeshaping decisions at mid-life and acknowledging the different pathways by which women come to fulfill their dreams.

Furthermore, the present study was undertaken to address the lack of research attention given to single women adopting children. "The number of unanswered questions about single parent adoption is a reflection of the complacency with which single parents have been accepted as adoptive parents for children who are hard to place and the resultant lack of research attention" (Shireman, 1996, p. 33). It is hoped that the knowledge gained in this study will distinguish this growing number of adoption applicants and provide information on single women adopting because the literature has shown that for some children, these homes are superior to two parent families (Groze & Rosenthal, 1991; Shireman, 1995; 1996).
Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

As an initial exploration of the transition to single parent adoption, this chapter includes a review of relevant literature that focuses on: a) the social influences on motherhood and single mother headed families; b) motherhood in the context of women's identity development at mid-life; c) theories of transition; d) the prevalence and incidence of single female parent adoption; e) motives, correlates and life experiences of single female adoptive families; and f) international adoption.

The Influence of Feminist Theories of Motherhood

Peck's (1986) model of women's self definition in adulthood emphasizes the importance of understanding feminist theories of motherhood as contemporary sociological influences on women making decisions about becoming a parent. Gille (1982, as cited in Baruch and Gunn, 1984) stresses that "...social scientists are increasingly having to recognize the influence of the women's movement, as well as of the social changes it both reflects and catalyzes" (p. 07). Feminism empowers women who seek motherhood to do so in "traditional" and nontraditional ways, yet at the same time, it's current stress on motherhood as a unifying theme amongst women may overemphasize and overidealize the role of motherhood in women's lives and be another form of external pressure on women to become a mother.

Feminist philosophies have often been construed as "anti-motherhood" yet a deeper analysis of evolving feminism reveals changes in the way that feminist discourse portrays the role of motherhood in women's lives. Umansky (1996) argues "...the negative critique of motherhood, never hegemonic within feminism, has achieved an exaggerated reputation" (p. 16). During the 1960's and 1970's, motherhood was focused on "...as a social mandate, an oppressive institution, a compromise of a woman's independence, and a surrender to the half-human destiny that biology supposedly decrees to women"
Umansky suggests this view was developed within the context of political activism supporting birth control and abortion rights, as well as being part of a growing generational protest movement which strongly critiqued the existing nuclear family. Having a personal awareness of a mother whose traditional lifestyle included daily routine and isolation became, for some women, a personal and political cause against which to rebel.

As the women's movement evolved, many feminists perceived that the counterculture's philosophy of essentialism, its critique of the nuclear family, its prophecy that uninhibited sexuality offered liberating power, and its developing sense of community meant far different lived experiences for women and men (Umansky, 1996). Black feminist thinking (Robinson; Davis, as cited in Umansky, 1996) strongly influenced a more positive view and reclaiming of motherhood. Motherhood became a unifying theme in the goal to establish a diverse yet bonded women's liberation movement.

In the late 1970's, one aim of cultural feminism was to amalgamate factions in the women's movement based on race, class and sexual orientation (Umansky, 1996):

...cultural feminists were forced to confront an unsolved, implicit mandate of 1960s radicalism: to reunite sexuality, procreation, and community in a way that does not exploit women. Whereas the counterculture had prized sexuality at the expense of women's liberation, cultural feminists grew increasingly more willing to sacrifice women's sexual liberation to the dream of a community of women as "mothers" (p. 102).

Two distinct yet overlapping trends emerged. Through centralized academic feminist discourse, the daily experience of mothering was affirmed and furthered through psychoanalytic studies (for example, Chodorow, 1978), personal narratives, analysis and discusion. Secondly, through symbolic meaning, motherhood was not so much portrayed through the experiences of historical birth and daily provider as it was depicted through essentialist and symbolic qualities. There was a clear movement away from minimizing the
differences between men and women and eliminating the sex roles to reconstructing a
female culture spiritually linked to an ancient matriarchy (Umansky, 1996).

Alpert (as cited in Umansky, 1996), theorized that many feminists based their
solidarity on the shared oppression they experienced because of sex-class differences as
defined by biology while not acknowledging the preeminence of women's biology nor the
enormous significance of the physical differences between men and women. "...female
biology is the basis of women's powers" and "the creative core of female biology is the
procreative potential possessed by all women" (Alpert, as cited in Umansky, 1996, p.
110). She theorized that whether a woman becomes a biological mother or not, all women
are physiologically designed to bear children and in that capacity, females throughout time
develop a unique set of psychological and behavioral traits. Alpert believed that the root of
motherhood and the root of female consciousness are the same and therefore connected
women whether they were mothers or childless women. Umansky argues that Alpert's
theoretical proposal could not be based on materialism and therefore she grounded her
beliefs in a kind of mystic spirituality based on a mythologized matriarchal past. She
contended that by embarking on an internalized, spiritual quest for a feeling of
connectedness to one's own body and consequently one's own sense of female power, the
spiritual qualities of motherliness would manifest in daily life.

Rich (1976) argued that "...motherhood, freed from the contortions through
which patriarchal society put it, could also be the locus of female self-actualization" (as
cited in Umansky, 1996, p. 123) and that the goal for women today is to recover their
bodily sense of self. Like Alpert, she emphasized the inherent bodily potential for
motherhood, rather than the biological process of creating a child. "Motherhood becomes a
route to self-healing and, above, all, to understanding and identifying with other women
(Griffin, as cited in Umansky, 1996, p. 121). "Motherhood affords literal communion
between mother and child, while on a symbolic level it allows women to commune with
each other, and with the inner, unhealed, unmothered, childlike aspects of themselves" (p.
Motherhood for some, symbolically represented a wider notion for authentic relationship, connectedness and community. This mystified, spiritualized vision of motherhood, although challenged, has been embraced by many within the women's movement and has dominated much of recent feminist thinking.

As a major social influence in shaping women's lives, the feminist focus on motherhood (symbolic or institutional) and its potential for self-actualization and connectedness to others is significant. Adopting a child stresses the nurturing aspects of parenting as well as the creation of a family which is not nuclear but is connected to another family, to a different culture and to different racial, ethnic and national groups (Bartholet, 1993). Given this social context, it is not surprising that adoption by single women has grown in appeal.

**The Increase in Single Mother-Headed Families**

"The last two decades have seen a dramatic growth in the proportion of families that are headed by women" (Burns & Scott, 1994, p. ix). Changes in marriage structures and increased divorce rates mean that today almost half of children will experience family life with one parent (Hanson, Heims, Julian and Sussman, 1995). Social and psychological shifts have altered the ways in which single women create or maintain a family.

The evolvement of feminism as a social and historical force has significantly affected the course of women's lives and the structure of families (Burns & Scott, 1994; Josselson, 1996). Critical analyses of the family and attempts to change traditional family structures have been prevalent in feminist writings (Barrett & McIntosh, 1982; Thorne & Yalom; 1982, as cited in Burns & Scott). Ongoing feminist critiques of families have challenged the assumptions of male authority and supremacy, the sexual division of labour (biology is destiny), women's unpaid labour, the organization of work around men's life cycles, and the unequal power between men and women. Feminist thinking has influenced women's sense of self identity and their perceived roles in the family and society; it has
impacted women's decisions to enter the work force; and it has led to improved social supports for women and children outside of marriage (Burns & Scott, 1994).

These changes in women's status through their work force participation and subsequent growing independence has resulted in more economic self reliance (Burns & Scott, 1994; Josselson, 1996). Women are less dependent on the support of men than at any other previous time. As a wage earner, it is possible for women to support themselves and their children outside of a partnership or marriage.

An inevitable consequence of this disruption to older marriage concepts is the development of new and higher expectations of relationships (Burns & Scott, 1994; Josselson, 1996). Alternative value systems have led to a heightened emphasis on the centrality of the relationship versus marriage as an indestructible institution (Burns & Scott, 1994).

Decomplementary theory (Burns & Scott, 1994) is a synthesis of several ideological paradigms as a way of understanding the recent changes in families. It moves away from the breadwinner/homemaker model of the family to an individualist model, where the interests of men and women have become less interdependent in modern societies, and have lost much of their complementary nature. Recent western social and economic changes - education, prosperity, technology, contraception and social services - have led to a diminished need for traditional interdependence. Developing long term partnerships is still a highly valued form of relationship but they are no longer forged out of necessity.

Many people continue to find marriage the best way of meeting their needs, but the alternatives have become steadily more attractive. In essence, marriage has become deregulated. Until the 1970's, marriage was clearly the favored marital status. Legal, economic, social, and religious arrangements all placed the nonmarried at relative disadvantage. Then, quite suddenly, changes in the law, the job market, welfare policy and popular attitudes combined to
erode marriage's elite status. Previously stigmatized alternatives - unmarried cohabitation, serial partnerships, single parenthood, gay/lesbian households, noncoresidential partnership and plain singlehood - offered new forms of freedom, and developed a new popularity.

These societal changes have led to new definitions of family (Josselson, 1996; Mechanick, Klein & Kuppersmith, 1987). Josselson (1996) argues that "...psychological theories and social mythmaking that persist in linking marriage and children or assuming that the purpose of marriage is to procreate are simply outdated. Increasingly, marriage and children are separate enterprises, differing forms of relational investment and now there is the social recognition and the technology to separate them" (p. 217).

Women's Identity and Development

Most single women adopting children are in the middle years of life (Dougherty, 1978; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Jordan & Little, 1965, Shireman, 1996). Theories of adult development and how women experience revisions of identity during mid-life are presented as a way of conceptualizing the overall inner context from which the decision to adopt a child emerges.

Erikson (1982) proposed that development occurs throughout the entire life span and that each succeeding stage is forged from the previous ones. Missing or neglected parts of the self can stunt development and reclamation of the missing elements characteristic of mid-life shapes our development, past and future (Erikson, as cited in Hardin, 1996).

When we return to reclaim missing pieces or when we move to the next developmental stage, the additions are not just layered on top of what we already are, like putting on a coat. Instead, everything in our developmental journey interconnects - when one piece is added or shifted, a new cloth is woven.
We come into the world with tremendous assets - great resources for creative self-expression and self-healing. We are more than we know. We are fully equipped to accomplish our deeply held life goals (Hardin, 1996, p. 19).

Hardin (1996) suggests that there is a deeper inner call that comes at mid-life from an inner core connected to something greater than our individual identity (p. xviii). Jung (1932) defines the transition of mid-life as a genuine spiritual crisis, as a pivotal time between the first half and second half of life in which we need to redirect our energy from seeking a place in the external world to searching out new meaning, to connecting to our true selves (as cited in Hardin, 1996, p. 27). Shinoda Bolen (J. Shinoda Bolen, personal communication, September 05, 1997) articulates that the individuation choices one makes in the second half of life resonate profoundly with what personally matters; they seem to flow from a spiritual sense of self; and have the qualities of a sacred or soul dimension.

Erikson (1982) conceptualizes generativity as the essential task to identity development at mid-life. "Generativity is a process whereby we learn to follow our deeper interests and longings" (Hardin, 1996, p. 28) but it is also an evolvement of self identity in which we transcend meeting our own needs and desires through self absorption. Self identity and legacy at this stage involve an empathy and concern for others in which we pass on our best qualities and gifts, a time to nurture others, to pass on to those younger than us the vital parts of ourselves (Schlossberg, 1996).

According to recent theorists, primary issues in the process of female identity formation and development include interpersonal relatedness, the need for attachment, connection and affiliation to others in the quest for life meaning (Belenkey, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1996; Miller, 1976; Peck, 1986). Within this context, women come to know themselves through relationship to others and by mastery (Peck, 1986); what Krestan and Bepko (1993) describe as relationship and creativity; and what Josselson (1996) refers to as connection and competence.
Josselson (1996) situates identity at the intersection of competence and connection. In her studies, adult crises in identity most often involved the struggle to keep the experience of competence and connection in balance. She suggests that as women mature, life revisions shift their expression of competence and connection. As women rebalance and reshape themselves, "...identity reflects the inner organization of the parts of the self, where unconscious yearnings are joined to conscious realization..." (Josselson, 1996, p. 238). The task of revision at mid-life is to know "...more about the nature of our own desiring and more firmly grasping the reins" (Josselson, 1996, p. 242). Levinson (1996) describes this process as a transitional phase of "becoming one's own woman" (p. 144): to be affirmed in one's world; to speak more with one's own voice; to be recognized in one's own right; and to gain a stronger sense of who one is as a woman and as a person.

Josselson (1996) suggests that differences in how women forge identity mean that "Each woman fits the pieces in place in a sequence and pattern different from one another. Some women take up their competence first, then later focus on their connection to others" (p. 239). Earlier identity choices often emphasize certain aspects of the self, overshadowing other parts. As women grow, part of their struggle is to encompass these disused or disavowed parts of the self, enhancing and expanding their identity (Josselson, 1996). "This capacity for realigning the emphases of life makes it possible for women to move among their multiple roles, roles that highlight competence and those that highlight connection, both contemporaneously and at different times in their lives" (Josselson, 1996, p. 243).

Anderson and Stewart (1994) found the overwhelming majority of single women they interviewed described mid-life as "...a time of renewal; a time of relinquishing leftover dreams, finding new and unexpectedly sweet ones, and fulfilling old ones long forgotten" (p. 131). They expressed an urgent existential need to examine the meaning of their decisions and behaviors. When the postponing of dreams no longer makes sense, priorities shift.
The decision of parenthood is pivotal for many career-oriented women today who have devoted their early reproductive years to pursuing educational and career objectives but at some point must make a decision that will alter their lifestyles and effect the remaining course of their lives (Daniluk, 1983). For many single women, the decision about motherhood is the hardest they will ever have to make: one has to decide whether or not she really wants children, the importance of giving birth, whether marriage or shared parenting is necessary and integral to family life, or if the responsibilities of single parenting are a lifetime commitment she is willing to make (Anderson & Stewart, 1994).

Career women, especially those in the corporate world, show higher rates of childlessness than those in the general population (Levinson, 1996). Contrary to media reports that there is an increase in the number of women having children over 40, incidence of having a first child after the age of 40 is very low (Daniluk, 1983; Ireland, 1993; Levinson, 1996). Clearly some women choose to remain childfree, pursuing other fulfilling life options. Studies investigating life satisfaction of intentionally childless women report high levels of subjective well-being and life mastery (Baruch et al.; Connidis & McMullin, as cited in Currie Michener, 1996). But for some who decide not to have children, it involves a period of grief and loss before refocusing on other creative ways to experience joy in their lives and to contribute meaningfully to others (Anderson & Stewart, 1994; Safer, 1996). Levinson (1996) found that some women in his study expressed a sadness or resentment over their loss of motherhood. The strongest grievance cited was that motherhood had been sacrificed for a career which did not provide expected satisfactions.

Many women experience the coming of mid-life as a time to close the door on dreams of motherhood, but for some it only strengthens their resolve to make such dreams come true. Believing that motherhood should not depend on being married, they decide that they do not want to miss the experience of raising a child. Mid-life adds urgency to women's decisions about children, but
it also gives them the strength and wisdom needed to make such decisions. By the time most women reach mid-life, they have accumulated enough experience to know what they genuinely want and are courageous enough to go after it. In fact, the single women we interviewed who chose to become mothers in mid-life wanted this experience with a passion (Anderson & Stewart, 1994, p. 229).

**Transitions**

For some older women adopting a child, the revising of certain life goals can involve an intense transition process that leads to new beginnings (Bridges, 1980). Early and ongoing studies address many of the significant factors regarding single parent adoption (Branham, 1970; Dougherty, 1978; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Groze, 1991; Groze & Rosenthal, 1991; Groze, 1996; Jordan & Little, 1966; Shireman & Johnson, 1976; Shireman & Johnson, 1985; Shireman & Johnson, 1986; Shireman, 1995; Shireman, 1996). However, to date, there has been no qualitative descriptive study which examines the transition to single parent adoption. Mercer, Nichols, and Doyle (1989) suggest that it is important to study transitions because they involve change and adaptation over an individual's life span. They characterize a transition as a turning point from which a person's life course takes a new direction requiring change in restructuring adaptive behaviours and roles to this new life path. The degree of adaptation impacts not only an individual's roles and responsibilities but her relation to others and to society.

Levinson (1996) defines a transition as "...a turning point, a shift in course, a process of cutting, sifting, separating, an attempt to resolve contradictions, a time of transformation rather than stability" (p. 29). Transitions are dichotomous in nature for while it is "...a time of promise, of hope and potential for a better future, it is also a time of separation and loss" (p. 30).

Schlossberg (1989; 1995) identifies a transition as any event or non-event which changes one's assumptions, roles, relationships, and routines in life, altering, for good or bad, an individual's perceptions of self and way of being in the world. It is a process of
varying stages in which an individual's reactions and emotions change as the event or non event is integrated into her life. Non events are events which are expected to occur but do not. They relate to one's emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual self; and they change one's life (Schlossberg & Robinson, 1996).

Levinson (1996) suggests that a transitional period incorporates three main developmental tasks. First, a termination of the existing life structure (the underlying pattern of a person's life at any given time) which includes both an outcome of the past and a starting point for the future. It represents not just an ending but a beginning, a turning point leading to transformation. Secondly, it involves a process of individuation which includes a person's relationship to self and to the external world. Levinson defines individuation as part of a developmental process toward resolving four polarities fundamental to the human life cycle: young/old; creation/destruction/ masculine/feminine; and engagement/separateness. The developmental task, according to Levinson, is to move towards integration of the opposing tendencies in a new way appropriate to the particular era in the life cycle. Thirdly, a transition represents the task of initiation of a new structure. Initiation is an evolving process, a series of choices which one endows with meaning and commitment and around which a new life structure is built. The choices made are the products of the transition.

Bridges (1980) conceptualizes a transition as a three phase natural process of disorientation and reorientation that leads to self renewal. According to him, endings, the first phase, involve a disidentification from one's existing sense of self identity and a disintegration of one's familiar assumptions and expectations of life. The second phase, or neutral zone, is a time of inner reorientation. Time spent in contemplation provides an inner space in which an expanded sense of self and a deepened sense of purpose form. A beginning takes shape from an inner idea or an external opportunity but either way the sign of validity, according to Bridges, is not a logical rationalization but rather an inner resonance of knowing. He suggests that glimmerings of one's new direction in life may
appear in the form of an impression, an image, an idea, something someone said that you cannot forget, a dream. Bridges believes that genuine beginnings in life are dependent on an inner realignment versus an external shift because "...when we are aligned with deep longings, we become powerfully motivated" (p. 138).

Women adopting a child as a single parent must reach a conclusion about marriage/relationship, accepting that they will not create a family within the context of a primary relationship (W. Borgen, personal conversation, October 1997). Living in a social context where cultural norms still advocate motherhood in the context of marriage as the ideal of female adulthood (Currie-Michener, 1996) forces a reshaping of expectations and a different understanding of motherhood in relation to the self.

How a woman views her singleness - as an actual choice or a lifestyle in which she has come to find herself in, impacts her sense of control and self-efficacy (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). According to Schlossberg, high levels of ego development (i.e. high levels of autonomy, critical thinking, the ability to tolerate ambiguity, a heightened search to deepen one's understanding of self and others, and to be responsible for one's own destiny), positively correlate with one's ability to cope with transition (1996). Fiske and Chiriboga (as cited in Schlossberg, 1990), found that women coping well with transition showed an ability to integrate many and diverse emotional experiences.

Prior to adopting, some women attempt to bear a child through donor insemination by someone they know or through medical intervention. Failed attempts at reproduction can challenge a woman's most fundamental beliefs about herself and her life (Bartholet, 1993; Berg & Wilson, 1991; Daniluk, 1988; Mahlstedt, 1985; Shapiro, 1986; Solomon, 1988, as cited in Daniluk, 1996) and reconstructing life involves a transition to biological childlessness (Schlossberg, 1995). "Such infertility is a significant and often unanticipated life event for mid-life women who planned their child-rearing careers for their 30s and 40s" (Brooks-Gunn & Kirsh, 1981, p. 17). Schlossberg (1996) found that "...a non-event which is individual and societal can be the most painful of all" (p. 43).
As life events shape decisions, so does our changing identity reinterpret versions of our life story (Josselson, 1996). "Women revise their expectations of life in part by reconfiguring the past in order to make their present identity inevitable or at least meaningful" (p. 255). Hopes and desires change as individuals come to terms with what will never be. Non event transitions such as these involve the reshaping of shattered dreams and the reclaiming of new ones (Schlossberg, 1996).

**Single Parent Adoption**

To further understand the transition to single adoptive motherhood for women at mid-life, the second section of this chapter will focus on existing single parent adoption research including the characteristics of single adoptive mothers, and the strengths and weaknesses of single parent adoptive homes. Finally, because international adoption is presently the most feasible means for single women to adopt, a brief description of the process of adopting a child internationally is presented.

**Background**

Early considerations of single parent adoption were shaped by traditional concepts of family (Jordan & Little, 1965). It was the belief "...that children both need and desire two parents and that everything possible should be done to obtain a good two-parent home for every child" (Jordan & Little, p. 536). The acceptance of applications to adopt from single persons began in Los Angeles in 1965 but single parent adoption would only be considered after case workers had "...exhausted all possibilities of obtaining sufficient two-parent homes" (Jordan & Little, 1965, p. 536) and where a two parent family had not been found because of a child's special needs. Jordan and Little (1965) defined special needs children as those of minority racial groups or of mixed race, and those with severe medical problems. There is variation in the definition of special needs but later researchers such as Groze (1991) described this as children who are over the age of six, have a disability, are part of a minority, or are part of a sibling group. A recent definition (Justice Institute of B.C., 1995) includes children with one or more physical, developmental, emotional,
and/or behavioral challenges. Special needs children may include those who have been prenatally affected by alcohol and/or drugs and children with a genetic predisposition to a psychiatric disorder. The definition takes into account a child who is part of a sibling pair or members of a family group which authorities believe should remain intact. More recently, children over the age of two are considered special needs because they often have very difficult histories, a great deal of which may be a part of their memories (Justice Institute of B.C., 1995). Many children may have experienced abuse and neglect prior to being removed from parental homes, many have been institutionalized sometimes for up to one or two years and, having had multiple caregivers, their needs for nurture have not been met. According to some, the negative impact of multiple placements makes adoption more difficult as each new placement retriggers the original loss and undermines the child's ability to trust adults and to risk making a new attachment (Fahlberg, 1988, as cited in Shireman, 1995). Some single adoptive parents adopt sibling groups (Shireman, 1995) and, although there is no data available, Pierson (1992) describes such placements as "common" (as cited in Shireman, 1995, p. 375).

The status of single parent families is changing and yet there continues to be trepidation in considering individuals as viable choices for children in need of a nurturing family life (Shireman, 1995). Shireman (1995) suggests that many professionals who work in adoption are rooted in psychoanalytic theory and perceive adverse effects for children placed in single parent homes. Glover (as cited in Dougherty, 1978) saw single parent adoption as a practice based on a double standard. "The field clings to its old psychological theories and, at the same time, says that for certain minority children the single parent family is preferable to the impermanence of long-term foster care" (p. 311).

Characteristics of Single Adoptive Mothers

The majority of single adults who adopt are women and studies indicate that most adopt a child of the same sex (Barrett & Aubin, 1990; Shireman & Johnson, 1976; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Groze & Rosenthal, 1991, as cited in Shireman, 1995).
The number of single parent adoptions is difficult to estimate. In the United States, adoption of special needs children show a range of single parent placements from .5% in 1970 to 34% in 1984 (Groze & Rosenthal, 1991). Recent American estimates are that 25% of special needs children are adopted by single men and women (National Adoption Center, reported in Harrison, 1991, as cited in Shireman, 1995, p. 373). Overall, single parent adoptions comprise between 12 and 15 percent of all non-relative adoptions in the United States (Shireman, 1995). There are no data available on the number of lesbian and gay single parent adopters. Some single parent adoptions may be processed as such, when in fact, the applicant is part of a lesbian couple but, because of the unwillingness of agencies, courts and countries to recognize same sex partners and families, the adoption is under the guise of a single adoptive heterosexual woman (Shireman, 1995).

Early reports (Jordan & Little, 1965) of eight children (18 months to 4-1/2 years) placed with single adoptive parents showed mothers ranging in age from 37 to 49 years of age. Dougherty (1978) characterized single adoptive mothers as women who were generally older than the biological mothers with children the same age. Later data gathered from private American single parent adoptive organizations described most singles adopting privately as in their mid to late thirties at the time of adoption (Dougherty, 1978; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Marindin, 1992, as cited in Shireman, 1996).

The majority of women adopting have graduate level education and hold stable jobs, predominantly in the helping professions (Dougherty, 1978; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Marindin, 1992, as cited in Shireman, 1996). Groze and Rosenthal (1991) found that agency adoptions data showed 25% of the single adoptive women studied had finished college. Twenty-eight women participating in a 20 year longitudinal comparison study in progress (Shireman & Johnson, 1976) show a more varied group in terms of education, occupation, and income compared to other studies, with approximately 50% of the applicants employed in professional occupations as teachers, nurses, ministers, and mental health workers. Shireman (personal conversation, October 06, 1999) suggests that almost
all of the participants in the longitudinal study are black and lack of opportunity for education may have been a factor in demographic variability.

Early findings on single parent adoptive families countered the skepticism that individuals had the necessary qualities to provide adequate, nurturing homes (Kadushin, 1970, as cited in Feigelman & Silverman, 1983). "In every placement thus far, our workers have been tremendously impressed by the positive development of the children and the growing feeling of "good parenting" that the adoptive mothers experience" (Jordan & Little, 1965, p. 537). These women were described as "...having above average child orientation, contributing to a healthy mother-child relationship" (Jordan & Little, p. 537).

In a review of 36 one parent placements from 1965-66 by Branham (1970), 35 adoptive mothers studied were described as "...people with a relatively high level of emotional maturity, high capacity for frustration tolerance, and an ability to pursue a relatively independent course in life, without being overly influenced about what other people think" (Marmor, as cited in Branham, 1970, p. 104). The Los Angeles County Department of Adoptions concluded that many single people have a great deal to offer children and that "the review of these 36 case records strongly suggests that the children involved have found true familiness" (Branham, 1970, p. 107).

Shireman (1976; 1995) found applicants demonstrated a high capacity for nurturing a child, a high capability of being sensitive to the feelings and needs of children, and a high ability to recognize their own feelings. Bourguignon (1989, as cited in Groze & Rosenthal, 1991) suggests that while many single adoptive parents enjoy caring for children, their own needs to be nurtured are not high.

Dougherty (1978) first addressed the question of what makes women choose the role in society of single adoptive parent. A majority of the eighty-eight women surveyed (95.1 percent) reported their motivation for adopting a child related to the fulfillment of their own needs and those similar to couples who want children: for the company of a child and to be part of a family; a sense of needing to be needed and an increased purpose in life.
Within the overall context of deciding to become a parent, thirty-nine of the eighty-eight respondents decided to adopt over natural pregnancy, the only other option of single parenting at that time because of "...societal and personal restrictions and because of the problem of who the child's father would be" (Dougherty, 1978, p. 312).

Shireman and Johnson (1976) studied 31 single-parent adoptions of black infants by black women in Chicago and found that 71 percent of the participants in their longitudinal study "...were primarily interested in having a child they could nurture and care for, teach, and guide" (p. 107). Eight of the single applicants identified their decision to adopt was based on a need to fill a void in their lives. Fourteen applicants listed this as a secondary motive for adopting.

**Issues Related to Single Parent Adoption**

The Shireman and Johnson longitudinal study (1976, 1985, 1986, 1995, 1996) examines many of the key issues related to single parent adoption, including the ability to handle life experiences; self image; motives for adopting a child; capacity to parent; financial stress; social isolation; role strain; and transracial adoption.

Early case workers based their criterion for adoption on the theory that an applicant who has had her childhood needs well met will, in turn, have developed the inner resources to cope with the stresses of parenting and the capacity to handle life experiences (Shireman, 1976). In contrast to Bourguignon's later findings (1989), the degree to which childhood needs were met for affection, appropriate dependence and independence, physical care, financial security, friendships, and formal education were examined and a common failing cited was the opportunity to have needs for dependency met. These qualities were assessed by whether the single applicants were from families the case workers considered stable - stable defined as growing up in two-parent homes. Early ratings (Shireman, 1976) conducted for self-image, expectations of self, health, energy level and use of defenses found the majority of applicants "...to possess a positive self-image and to have high expectations of themselves" (p. 107). However, some applicants were described as having
an overly attached relationship and incomplete separation from their parents, and a correspondingly low level of involvement with friends.

Low income was cited by half the sample in the early Shireman study (1976), even though the majority of women interviewed considered themselves high in achievement and experienced stability and satisfaction in their work. In a later review of single parent adoptive homes Shireman (1996), found that as children entered school and the need for child care lessened, financial strain decreased.

The intensity of the relationship between parent and child was originally of concern (Shireman & Johnson, 1976, 1985; M. Sobol, personal conversation, September, 1997). An enmeshed style of family relating (Becvar & Becvar, 1993) was noted in the early years of family building in many single adoptive parent families. Shireman and Johnson (1985; 1986) found that, as children entered school, the intense focus of the relationship developed into appropriate nurturing and a new social dimension was incorporated into the parent-child relationship.

On the whole, Shireman and Johnson concluded that single parent households appeared child centered, the parents were highly invested in the lives and welfare of their children, and actively involved with them.

A common thread noted by the researchers was the single adoptive parents reporting a sense of contentment with their lives (Shireman & Johnson, 1985). A very recent study by Siegel (1998) corroborates these findings. Siegel examined the different pathways to single motherhood: sexual intercourse, adoption, and donor insemination compared to married, sexual intercourse. Among the 51 participants interviewed, 30 conceived by sexual intercourse, 12 adopted, and 9 conceived by donor insemination. The data on life satisfaction "...indicated that the adoptive mothers were more satisfied with their situation than either of the two groups of single birth mothers" (Siegel, 1998, p. 82). The donor-insemination mothers reported the fewest chronic stressors with the adoptive mothers reporting more, and the sexual intercourse mothers reporting the most.
Shireman and Johnson (1986) found that most single adoptive mothers reported their closest social relationships are with other women. Male friends did not appear to be stable figures in their lives. However, at 8 years of age, their children showed normal patterns of identification with children and activities of their own sex. Life stage development and social interaction where peers dictate strong stereotypes of appropriate sex-role behaviours were considered major influences (Shireman, 1986). Up to early adolescence, Shireman and Johnson (1996) found that children continued to develop appropriate gender identity but suggest the impact of the inability to observe males and females in daily, family interactions cannot be assessed until these children embark on their own marriages and family building years.

Feigelman and Silverman (1983) studied the importance of support from kin, neighbours, and friends in a single adoptive parent's adjustment to adoption. Agency workers tend to stress the importance of extended families in helping single adoptive parents. The authors found that positive reactions of parents (of the adopting single parent) correlated with better adjustments to adoption. However, they also noted that having extended families merely available had little impact on the success of single-parent adoptions. "A core of positively responding intimates, composed of kin or close friends" (Feigelman & Silverman, 1983, p. 192) appeared to be more significant for perceived successful adoption adjustment. Extended family members generally responded positively to single parent adoptions, but friends of single adoptive parents did not always demonstrate an enthusiasm and involvement that adoptive couples reportedly experienced with friends (Feigelman & Silverman, 1983).

Role strain was not reported by single adoptive parents to be any greater than that of adoptive couples (Shireman & Johnson, 1995). Managing child care and employment was not considered a problem. The researchers found that single parents showed an exceptional capacity to cope with changes in the family structure and with family crises. Parent support groups were repeatedly reported as an important coping strategy for emotional support,
assessing difficulties and developing parental decision making skills. Groze and Rosenthal (1991) found that parent support groups and adoption-sensitive mental health services may be particularly helpful for single parents, as single parents reported that parent support groups were very helpful more often than did couples.

Single parents showed more difficulty discussing adoption with their children and had told them at a later age than two parent adopters (Shireman & Johnson, 1996). The researchers found that, by adolescence, adopted teenagers interviewed expressed a common theme of loss. Concerns for safety and security were noted as a major focus but no differences were found in the magnitude of concern between single and two parent adoptive homes. Self concept and overall adjustment appeared to be the same for singly adopted adolescents as in two parent adoptive families and those in birth families.

**Strengths of Single Adoptive Parent Homes**

Studies indicate that single parent adoption appears to be an effective family plan for children (Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Groze & Rosenthal, 1991; Shireman & Johnson, 1976; Shireman & Johnson, 1986; Shireman, 1996). There is an apparent positive focus in the research to date on single parent adoption. "Single parents were equally represented in disrupted and intact adoptions" (Groze & Rosenthal, 1991, p. 76) and studies show "...that marital status has little, if any, effect on risk of disruption" (Groze & Rosenthal, 1991; Boyne, Denby, Kettenring, & Wheeler, 1984; Urban Systems Research and Engineering, 1985; Festinger, 1986; Kagan & Reid, 1986; Barth & Berry, 1988; Barth et al., 1988, as cited in Groze & Rosenthal, 1991, p. 76). Shireman (1996) found that single parents often described their parenting tasks as more difficult than they had expected; however, it was found that these parents showed a great strength in adversity, a resourceful capacity to cope with crisis, and an ability to develop and use networks for support.

Groze and Rosenthal's study (1991) specifically examined special needs adoption, comparing the functioning of single and two parent adoptive families by psychosocial analysis and found "...a modest trend toward more positive adoption outcome among
single parents” (p. 67). Children who had experienced group-home or psychiatric placement before adoption seemed particularly well integrated in single parent families (Groze & Rosenthal, 1991). More single parents reported their children showed fewer emotional and behavioural problems than did adoptive couples, although the researchers cite both groups of adopted children showed emotional and behavioural difficulties. Since older children often demonstrate more severe problems than younger children and are more often adopted by single parents, the notion that couples adopt more difficult children is not an explanation (Groze & Rosenthal, 1991).

According to Shireman (1996), for some children, relating to two adults may be more challenging than developing an intimate relationship with one parent. The simplicity of the relationship with one parent may be beneficial and in fact help the child to thrive. She suggests that there is some evidence that the intense relationship between parent and child, while it may make handling of adoption difficult, may make these homes of particular value for some of the children currently needing adoption. "With one adoptive parent, affection comes without competition...There is a security in the simplicity which can be healing" (Shireman, 1996, p. 31).

**International Adoption**

To date, most of the studies on single parent adoption have examined the experiences of parents who adopted children of the same race from agencies in the United States (Shireman, 1995). However, increasingly, international adoption is often the only way for single applicants to adopt (Bartholet, 1993). In western countries the number of children surrendered by their birth parents has diminished in recent decades due to "...contraception, abortion, and the increased tendency of single parents to keep their children" (Bartholet, 1993, p. 141). "There is no doubt that the process of adopting from a foreign country is more difficult, more expensive, and more fraught with risk than are domestic adoptions" (Shireman, 1995, p. 371). Understanding the complex issues related
to international adoption further validates the level of commitment in the decision to become a single adoptive parent.

The majority of adoptions are from Asian countries and the countries of Central America (Shireman, 1995). These children have been born into societies and cultures in which there has been a civil or international war and where widespread poverty is apparent. The majority of adopting parents are white, middle class North Americans and Western Europeans (Barrett & Aubin, 1990). The predominance of white women and men adopting black and brown skinned children from third world nations is often viewed as the exploitation by the rich and powerful of the poor and powerless (Bartholet, 1993). An increasing barrier to international adoption is the political view held that children belong with their roots within their original communities; they should not be separated from their racial, ethnic, cultural, and national groups of origin (Bartholet, 1993; Justice Institute of B.C., 1995). The notion exists that it is "...shameful to send homeless children abroad rather than taking care of them in their country of origin" (Bartholet, 1993, p. 143).

Critics of white parents who adopt transracially argue that these parents cannot transfer a sense of ethnic pride or teach their children of colour how to survive in a racist society because they are white and part of the majority, because they lack sensitivity to the harshness and inhumanity of oppressive racism, and because they reside in a white neighborhood (Shireman & Johnson, 1986). The concern is that transracially adopted children may develop intellectual knowledge of their cultural heritage but experience little if any contact with people of the same ethnic background. Single parents may lack the time to be involved in extra activities or to seek out and integrate into other communities (Bartholet, 1993; Shireman & Johnson, 1986).

According to a recent film on international adoption (Justice Institute of B.C., 1995), integration into the extended family of the adoptive parent, into friendship circles, and neighborhood may not be immediate. Growing up in a foreign land poses risks of
discrimination. Many children suffer some form of racial discrimination, especially within the school system during elementary years (Justice Institute of B.C., 1995).

Eligibility requirements for international adoption vary from country to country and are a reflection of that country's laws, customs and values (Justice Institute of B.C., 1995) with varying restrictions based on marital status, gender, sexual orientation, race, and religion. For example, a number of countries and agencies do not accept applications from single women (Alstein and Simon, 1991, as cited in Shireman, 1995) and it is often virtually impossible for men to be accepted as applicants, as many cultures consider the notion of men nurturing children completely foreign to their belief system (Stebbing and Edwards, in Marindin, 1992, as cited in Shireman, 1995).

Adopting a child from another country will confront a parent's expectations. "The task of the adoptive parent is the recognition that he or she has "adopted" not only the child, but also his or her genetic heritage" (Shireman, 1995, p. 376). Cohen (Justice Institute of B.C., 1995), stresses the need to be truly aware of one's hopes and dreams and future goals because "...this child is not going to be like someone that you produced. This child is going to be different and may not ever be able to achieve what you have achieved." According to Shireman (1995), both the parent and the child "...will have lifelong issues related to adoption to resolve" (p. 376).

The adoption process takes research, planning and preparation and yet is still surrounded by a great deal of unpredictability (Bartholet, 1993; Cole, 1995). Delays and disappointments may be numerous. Bureaucratic hold ups can occur in the parent and child's country of origin. Technical glitches and formalities may finally be completed only to find that the biological mother has changed her mind. Information may reveal that the child's needs are so great that the adoptive parent cannot provide for the child and must face the heart wrenching decision to discontinue the adoption process. With a good match and arrangements finalized, some agencies require that the adoptive parent travel to the child's country of origin to meet and bring him or her "home." Conditions in which the child is
found may be extremely poor and unsanitary by Western standards. Yet, the adoptive parent is highly encouraged to remain respectful of the country of origin and to embrace the culture so as to validate the identity and heritage of the child and foster self esteem (Justice Institute of B.C., 1995).

In an agency arranged adoption, a homestudy is always conducted with a prospective parent (Justice Institute of B.C., 1995; Shireman, 1995). The homestudy takes place in the adoptive parent's home with a social worker who is approved by the government department responsible for adoptions (for example, in British Columbia, Canada, the Ministry of Children and Families). It's purpose is twofold. Within the child's country of origin, administrators want to ensure the safety of the child. The social worker's role is to examine the physical layout of the home, and to investigate the neighborhood and community for cultural and social diversity, and adequate education and medical facilities. The homestudy is also a forum for adoptive parents to examine themselves and their expectations, and to confront many issues which they may not have initially considered. It is an opportunity to clarify what kind of child and background would be most appropriate and allow the parent to realistically consider the capabilities required to best meet the child's needs. Support systems, financial resources, child care planning, skills required to parent children with particular difficulties, and enjoyment and knowledge of child rearing are major focuses (Shireman, 1995).

Summary

In summary, the social/historical context is a fundamental component in determining and shaping women's lives. Women today have more options for creating and maintaining families as a single parent. While delays and declines in childbearing are a major influence on the formation of families, the importance of motherhood endures as a primary life shaping decision.
The symbolic meaning of motherhood is a dominant unifying theme of feminism, one of the most important social and political spheres of our time. Women's increased freedom of self-definition and the developmental process characteristic of the middle years mean more possibilities for life revision and for embarking on new chosen pathways in the later years of life.

Familiarization with the complex issues of single parent adoption and international adoption enhances awareness of single adoptive mothers and their families.

While these factors shed light on a woman's decision to adopt a child, what is missing is an illumination of the deep meaning and experience of the transition process from which this profoundly life altering decision comes.
Chapter Three

Method

Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological method was used to gather complete descriptions of single adult women's experiences of their transition to single parent adoption. This method fits this particular study because, as Marshall and Rossman (1995) suggest, it delves in depth into complexities and processes, and it is an excellent method for studying little known phenomena. Using story form is an excellent research tool because stories express a knowledge which uniquely describes human experience in which actions and happenings contribute to a final outcome (Polkinghorne, 1995). Wilson (1977) argues that one cannot understand human behavior without understanding the framework within which participants interpret their thoughts, feelings, and actions.

The research aim was to elucidate the deep and rich meanings of single women's transitional experiences that lead to adoptive motherhood. The following sections include a description of the researcher's orientation to the phenomenon and an outline of the procedures and data analysis to provide an understanding of how the research was interpreted (Osborne, 1990).

The Reflexive Process

Colaizzi (1978) emphasizes the importance of the researcher developing awareness about personal inclinations and predispositions to the research phenomena (content-method-approach unity) because these can so strongly impact how and what is investigated. "The orientation which the researcher brings to the data shapes it's interpretation" (Osborne, 1990, p. 85). "Preunderstandings [of a phenomena] that are acknowledged are less apt to be imposed upon research participants" (Becker, 1992, p. 38) and less likely to bias the data.
My interest in studying the transition to single adoptive motherhood came out of my personal story. I am a single woman in mid-life who is examining my own deep feelings, beliefs, and understandings about motherhood and the possibility of adopting a child as a single parent. This process began a number of years ago and has taken many twists and turns as I direct my life while life, in turn, imposes its joys and limitations on me.

Certain preconceptions and assumptions about the transition to single adoptive motherhood implicitly oriented my approach to this investigation. First, I expected that women at mid-life adopting a child would in many ways be living fulfilling lives. I expected that many would be well educated, have developed careers and a variety of personal interests and activities. Most would have achieved a degree of financial success and stability. I therefore expected that they would be highly independent and autonomous individuals.

Second, I assumed that most women who had adopted a child as a single parent would have come to the decision that they were not going to create a family within the context of a relationship. This doesn't preclude the possibility that they could become partnered at a future time but in order to begin the adoption process, the understanding that they would not begin a family as part of a couple was accepted.

I expected that the decision to begin life as a single adoptive parent was a result of a significant life process. This may have included issues around motherhood and identity, what it means to be feminine, what it means to be a "complete" adult female, the biological self, the sexual self, infertility, spirituality, parenting and adoption. I assumed that women adopting children see motherhood as part of their core sense of identity, as primal (fundamental to who they are), and that the decision to adopt was not so much based on "if I should have a child but how." I assumed that a more deeply understood sense of self awareness as women experienced mid-life resulted in knowing more of what they wanted, and involved a reclamation of missing parts of who they are as they journeyed toward wholeness.
I imagined that women deciding to become mothers through adoption have a high degree of personal agency. Confronting the societal bias against single women adopting and, most particularly, single lesbian women adopting, would seem to require fortitude and a strong belief in one's abilities to personally overcome the cultural prejudice and the logistical demands and biases of the adoption process.

**Rigor**

The truth value of a qualitative study may be compromised by researcher bias and the closeness of the relationship between the primary researcher and the coresearchers. While prolonged contact between the coresearchers enhances the credibility of the study, there is a risk that the primary researcher "...may have difficulty separating her own experience from that of the informants (Marcus & Fischer, 1986, as cited in Krefting, 1990, p. 218) and jeopardize the ability to interpret the findings. A self-reflexive analysis throughout the research project was used in order to examine and document my personal experience and how this may have influenced the data gathering and analysis, as well as to record my personal response to the participants and the research process. Krefting (1990) proposes using a field journal and personal diary. Specifically, the journal contained information regarding the schedule and logistics of the study as well as decisions about methods. The diary reflected "....the researcher's thoughts, feelings, ideas and hypotheses" in relation to the coresearchers (Krefting, 1990, p. 218), and through self-examination, allowed me to remain aware of my natural subjectivity and it's potential influences on this project. As well, closely connecting the data to the existing research evidence; involving a second rater; and having two single adoptive mothers (who were not participants in the research project) examine the themes, validated my analysis of the participants' experiences.

While it is necessary for the primary researcher to be acutely aware of her own process, Mishler (1986) emphasizes the possible asset of the researcher's personal familiarity with the phenomenon. The researcher, highly sensitized, may understand, perceive and
interpret subtle nuances, thereby enhancing the interview process and the construction and analysis of the descriptions.

**Participants**

Participants for this research project were recruited as co-researchers (Colaizzi, 1978; Mishler, 1986), to equalize the relationship (Laslett & Rapoport, as cited in Oakley, 1981), to "...emphasize the co-operative and voluntary nature of the research" (Osborne, 1990, p. 82), and to underline the phenomenological view that meaning is co-created (Becker, 1992). Coresearchers were informed of the reasons for my interest in the study, my intent in conducting this research, and their contribution to expanding the knowledge base on single adoptive mothers in order to affirm "the shared interest in illuminating the phenomenon" (Osborne, 1990, p. 82).

For the purposes of this study, single parent adoption is defined as the adoption of a child by a single person. Because the majority of single adoptive parents are women (Shireman, 1995), this study focused on single adoptive motherhood. Women who adopt a child as part of a couple and subsequently become a single adoptive mother through divorce were not included in this research because they do not share the transitional process leading to the conscious decision to adopt a child as an individual.

An important criteria for inclusion in this phenomenological study was that the coresearchers have the ability to articulate their experiences (Colaizzi, 1978); that is, they were able to recall events and experiences of the life transition which led to single adoptive motherhood, and they were able to express their thoughts and feelings about them.

It was my intention to interview for this study eight to ten single women, between the ages of 35-55 who had been an adoptive mother for a minimum of one year and who had adopted a child as a single parent within the last five years. Most single women adopting children are within this age range (Jordan & Little, 1965; Dougherty, 1978; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Marindin, 1992, as cited in Shireman, 1996). A minimum amount of time as a single adoptive parent was set in order to ensure some commonality
among the participants' experience as well as to provide enough perspective to reflect upon the transition. The time framework of five years was included as a criterion so that the transition process leading up to the decision was not so distant that recalling the experience would be made difficult by the passage of time. However, the researcher believed that the experience of a life transition of this magnitude would remain salient over time and five years following this experience would not impede an individual's ability to retrospectively articulate the experience nor to still grasp its personal meaning.

Heterogeneity of the participants was expected and valued by the researcher because it reflects the real diversity of women's lives. Women were not be excluded from this research based on sexual orientation, ethnic background, religion, class or socioeconomic status because phenomenological research emphasizes the uniqueness of and inability to predict the human situation, and therefore the goal is to strive to understand variation in experience rather than identical repetition (Field & Morse, 1985, as cited in Krefting, 1990; Becker, 1992).

**Procedures**

Potential participants in the study were recruited through a network of associations, including snowball sampling and researcher contact with the Adoptive Parents Association of British Columbia. An advertisement was placed in the October 1998 issue of the Single Adoptive Parents Newsletter put out by the Adoptive Parents Association of British Columbia (Appendix A). A reader subsequently made the information in the advertisement available to a listserv for single mothers who had adopted from Russia. As a result, two interviews with participants recruited through the listserv were conducted by telephone. There was no difference in the amount of detail described via the telephone interviews compared to the in person interviews.

The interview format followed the "three phases of interviewing" described by Osborne (1990, p. 84). The first meeting involved the first and second phases of interviewing. The first phase was conducted with the coresearchers to verify that the
potential participants met the criterion of the study through research and screening questions (Appendix B), to establish rapport, and to reveal the nature of the research. The second interview phase involved data gathering. This phase of interviewing was audiotape recorded. Unstructured, in depth exploratory interviews of approximately one hour were conducted with participants in order to obtain a description of the transition experience which led to single adoptive motherhood. Open ended, minimally structured interviews were used because these types of dialogal interviews "...are more likely to produce data which might otherwise be missed" (Osborne, 1990, p. 84).

The research question under study was: "For single women at mid-life, what is the meaning and experience of the transition process leading to single parent adoption?"

First, coresearchers were briefed about the purpose of the study. They were informed of the confidential nature of the study, that their participation was completely voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time. They were then asked to sign two copies of an ethical consent form and were given one to keep for their own records (Appendix C (in person interview consent form) and Appendix D (telephone interview consent form). An orienting statement was told to participants to help them focus on the purpose of the study (Appendix E). They were asked if they had any further questions and if they understood everything the researcher asked them to do.

Open-ended questions (Appendix F) were asked at the beginning of the interview with further questions developed from the participant's response (Becker, 1992, p. 38). In order to empower the participants and elicit descriptions of their experiences, the researcher listened imaginatively (Colaizzi, 1978) and empathically to the women's accounts. Emphasizing the uniqueness of each human situation, varied interview approaches such as "...listening to one person, questioning another, agreeing with someone else, or challenging another" were used to gather rich, detailed descriptions of the phenomenon (Becker, 1992, p. 40).
Following this interview, coresearchers were asked that, if upon further reflection, they became aware of any additional descriptions regarding their transition to adoption that they would like to include, these would be taken into account in the second interview (Osborne, 1990). The researcher was aware that it may be necessary to conduct additional data gathering interviews because of "...the re-spiraling effect the interview process may create" (Osborne, 1990, p. 84).

Respondent reactions (Oakley, 1981) are notably more apt to occur in repeated interviewing versus a one time interview format. Oakley (1981) addressed the relationship between 'respondent' reactions to the interview situation and experience, and the need of the researcher to respond rather than to avoid this phenomenon. This approach does not seek to minimize the personal involvement of the interviewer but relies on the formulation of a relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee as a significant component for achieving a quality of information being sought. The researcher anticipated that coresearchers may express an interest in knowing more about me personally - who I am and how I have come to be interested in the topic of single parent adoption. Oakley (1981) found that "...an attitude of refusing to answer questions or offer any kind of personal feedback was not helpful in terms of the traditional goal of promoting 'rapport'" (p. 49). She contends that personal involvement can no longer be dismissed as dangerous bias, rather "...it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives" (Oakley, 1981, p. 58). When asked, the researcher shared her personal and academic interests in the transition to single adoptive motherhood but any elaboration was postponed until after the taped interview.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis was based on the thematic analysis of the phenomenon described by Colaizzi (1978). The goal of phenomenological research is to provide a holistic view of a phenomenon. "To accomplish this, the researcher must dwell on the many manifestations of the phenomenon in order to identify the common themes. Then, by articulating the
interrelationship of these themes, the essential structure of the phenomenon is revealed" (Becker, 1992, p. 42).

First, the tape recorded interviews were transcribed in their entirety. All of the protocols (transcripts) were read and reread by the researcher in order to get a feel for the data (Colaizzi, 1978; Osborne, 1990). Significant statements or units of meaning (Giorgi, 1971, 1975, as cited in Becker, 1992) directly pertaining to the experience and meaning of the transition to single adoptive motherhood were underlined. Significant statements related to a particular theme were grouped together by cutting and pasting.

Next, I summarized and edited the meanings of each theme still using the co-researcher's own words (Becker, 1992). From this, an overall portrait of the phenomenon was written for each participant. This process was repeated for each protocol, and the formulated meanings were clustered into higher order themes which elucidated the commonalties of all of the participants' protocols. Becker (1992) refers to this as a higher level of generalization. Clusters were validated by referring back to the original protocols to compare whether the themes were representative of the original protocols: was there anything in the protocols which was not accounted for in the themes and did the themes propose anything not implied in the protocols? At this stage of the data analysis, the researcher needed to be what Colaizzi (1978) describes as endowed with a high tolerance for ambiguity, knowing "...that what is logically inexplicable may be existentially real and valid" (p. 61). Wertz (as cited in Becker, 1992, p. 45) described this process as requiring "...the researcher to suspend belief and employ intense interest." A second rater was then employed to check the themes and accompanying examples of half of the participants. The second rater concurred with the developed themes and the examples.

An exhaustive description of the transition process that led to adopting a child by single women was written in order to integrate the analysis procedures thus far. This is a structural description of the essential qualities of the phenomenon (Becker, 1992).
Finally, the data analysis involved checking for goodness of fit (Osborne, 1990) or the congruence of the researcher's interpretations of the data through the third phase of interviewing, which involved follow-up interviews with the co-researchers via telephone to have them comment on and perform any further corrections to the list of personal themes and to their case summaries (Appendix G). Any relevant new data emanating from this final process was inserted into the unique case summary and was blended into the final account of the phenomenon of the transitional experience leading to single parent adoption. At this time, participants were asked to choose a pseudonym in order to protect their identities. Some did, while others declined, opting to use their own name in the final document. Some of the women asked that their specific occupations not be named in order to maintain anonymity and therefore I only included the information that all of the participants had professional careers, save for one participant, who identified her area of work in the case summary, being aware that this would be included in the final thesis presentation.

To strengthen the rigor of the study, empathic generalizability (Appendix H) was addressed by having two women who have experienced the transition to single parent adoption but who were not participants in the study, critique the extent to which the structure of the phenomenon described from the data gathered resonated with their experiences (Shapiro, 1986, as cited in Osborne, 1990, p. 88). Their comments are discussed in chapter five.

**Limitations of the Study**

Typical of qualitative research, the results of this phenomenological study lack statistical generalizability. However, the aim is to establish empathic generalizability of the participants' experiences with other women who have experienced the phenomenon (Osborne, 1990). A second limitation is that women who volunteer to be interviewed may have different characteristics than women who do not participate in research studies (Veevers, 1980, as cited in Currie-Michener, 1996). Finally, while life choices and
decisions are an integral part of contemporary women's unfolding identities, there are external and internal limitations of choice which must be acknowledged. The financial and psychological capabilities required to become a single adoptive mother mean that this experience cannot be construed as a viable option for all woman considering creating a family as a single parent.
Chapter Four

Results

This chapter begins with a brief case summary of each participant in the study. These vignettes present the salient aspects of each story and also provide an initial appreciation of the uniqueness of each woman's life experience to single adoptive motherhood. The case summaries are followed by a comprehensive narrative developed from the analysis of each participant's story.

The Participants

Susan

Susan always knew that she didn't want to go through life without children. She expected that she would marry and have a family but by the time she was in her thirties, she began to worry that this was not going to happen. Susan made a promise to herself that by the time she was forty, if she was still childless, she would have a baby on her own.

For Susan, part of the transition leading to single parent adoption was understanding the significance of self and gender in the context of relationships. She describes herself as "a very independent, intelligent woman" who was not interested in the "whole domestic scene." For her, egalitarianism is critical in forming a relationship: "I've always had a great deal of difficulties with dating because my expectation is to be a partner, equal...I'm not looking for someone who will try to change me to take care of them...". She believes that her high expectations around equality stem from the interesting family in which she was raised and the impact of feminism as a social force in her growing up years. Her father, while domineering, "...was also very liberated as far as the roles that women and men take...I grew up thinking that I was capable." Her mother role modeled independence and, for the time, a nontraditional lifestyle including working outside the home. "It was a very matriarchal family so...I grew up thinking that this was okay, that this was the way the world worked. "Feminist philosophies declaring that women should..."
have as much opportunity as men in doing something that they are capable of doing
impacted Susan's thinking. She found it was really difficult to meet men in her peers who
believed that. Susan's sense of independence was also influenced by her two single aunts
"...both of them worked and travelled and just had a great life."

Having had a very positive personal adoption experience made the idea of adoption
very appealing to Susan. Her youngest brother was adopted and she loved him
tremendously. "My parents loved my little brother as much as they loved us and there was
never a question and so I knew that I would love any child I had so that was not an issue."

Turning forty was an important event in Susan's transition to single parent
adoption. Participating in a personal development program allowed her to more deeply
probe her inhibitions in creating the personal life that she wanted. "I can't meet someone to
marry me cause every guy I meet tries to control me therefore I'm never going to have
children and I was blaming that on the male race and feeling very resentful and very self-
righteous...I could blame not taking that step towards motherhood."

Participating in this course was timely in that it helped to create a pathway for Susan
to assess her own life through conversations with family members about their lives. Her
father, dying of cancer, spoke of his regrets about things that he had not done; his sister
viewed her life as something that she had survived. "I really got that if I were 65 and I
looked back at my life that I would regret very much not having a child, that it would be a
huge regret."

While adoption was the most appealing means to becoming a mother, Susan also
struggled philosophically with the possibility of having her own biological child. To have
a child without the ongoing involvement of the biological father for her, was self indulgent.
"I felt it was selfish for me to bring a child into the world that wouldn't have a father,
automatically, wouldn't have a father because of a need I have to be a mother...I wanted
my child to have a father, to have the chance of having a father, let's put it that way,
because I think that role is very important..." As well, being pregnant on her own, having
a new infant as a single mother, and working a full time job seemed like "...a pretty tough
task to set for myself."

Susan researched the possibility of adoption but was discouraged by the bias
against her as a single applicant. "I had wanted to adopt from Mexico...I had to be married
and I had to be Catholic." To adopt in Canada, she would be eligible to adopt an infant as a
single adoptive parent but she felt her chances of being chosen by a birth mother were
virtually nil. Realistically, Susan would only qualify to adopt a special needs child.
Having to work "...and having a child with emotional and physical disabilities would just
really be a killer as a single person...so that's why I wasn't adopting."

It wasn't until a chance encounter with someone knowing of a single woman who
had adopted a baby girl from China that adoption clicked as a possibility for Susan. "...as
soon as I saw an avenue I had no problem jumping in and doing it."

Susan perceived the adoption process as very positive. She found the home study
most useful in focusing on the interracial elements of adoption. She was very interested in
the Chinese culture and looked forward to assimilating aspects of it in her life. "There was
a lot of paperwork you have to go through and I really think that's a wonderful procedure,
too. I am totally behind that and I wish everyone who was going to have a child, whether
it's their own or whatever, should have to go through that procedure."

Part of Susan's process involved "...a lot of thought into what I was going to have
to do in order to be a good mother." She evaluated herself as a person who needs privacy,
needs time for herself. Susan acknowledged that in her decision to adopt a child, there
would be gains and losses and that there would be times when she would miss her
solitude. Although she has very deep emotions, she rates herself as a pragmatist, an ESTJ
on the Myers Briggs scale. It was important to her to know that within the context of who
she was, she would be able "...to give whatever child I had the best as far as my attention
to basically be there for her all the time that she needed me to be there, within reason." She
recognized that "...a child is this great big emotional being" and that she had to really think about what it meant to her to be a good mother in relation to who she is as a person.

A major factor in this life transition was Susan's job. It was critical to her that a compatibility exist between her career and mothering style. By her standards, her job was ideal for adoption. She could have her child with her as she worked. "I had this job where I could have a child live with me, where I could have my baby with me most of the time, I wouldn't be sticking her into a daycare."

Susan relied on the support of family, coworkers and friends. While both of her parents have passed away since she adopted her daughter, there loyalty was of great value to her in the early stages of deciding to adopt. "The support was there as far as my family going okay, that's what you're going to do and I'll support you with whatever you do. There was never any question that I was going to be disowned or anything." She relies on the assistance and encouragement of her coworkers, most of whom "...were really excited about having a young life in the house." However, others had reservations about an interracial adoption which Susan saw as "...their own prejudices as well as being pragmatic." For her, race was not a big issue. "I knew it would be different than having a child that was the same race as me because it would be more obvious that the child was adopted but, you know, I just figured I would overcome any problems." Her friends were extremely positive about the adoption and she has enlarged her network of Chinese friends. Susan has adopted grandparents for her daughter.

Susan, in her mid forties, works full time in a professional position, and lives on the west coast of Canada with her three year old daughter.

Debra

Making up her mind to adopt wasn't difficult for Debra. She always knew that was what she wanted to do. Even so, she experienced the transition to single parent adoption over the course of her life. "Well, I thought about it a lot...we're talking 40 odd years here."
Adoption was part of her own personal story. "I was adopted myself and so was my brother so adoption's always been a factor in my life. It was always something that seemed fairly normal and something that people did." She considers her own experience of adoption as a success, as having "...worked out well" for her and therefore this influenced her decision to adopt. "I needed to return the favour to someone else so that was part of it too...I just felt morally, not obliged, but on track that I should do that."

A critical aspect of Debra's process regarding motherhood took place in her thirties. She realized that her expectations around marriage and family had to change. "I found myself in my mid thirties, I had to really take a good look and decide whether I wanted to be by myself for the rest of my life or not and I decided I didn't want to and if I couldn't find the perfect guy, well, tough, move on, you know, go for something else, change your goal." "You can wait an awfully long time and never find the perfect person. They're not growing on every tree...you don't have time to mess around once you hit thirty...the clock is ticking over. That was my processing, giving up on the guy myth. Isn't happening, so let's forget it...the mate thing, just let go of that. Move on now, find a new goal."

At 34 years old, Debra had her birth child deliberately on her own. "That old killer biological clock that makes you do all sorts of things, it's a factor." She worried that she was never going to have children and "...really wanted to have a child, I've always loved children, I work with children, I love them and I knew that I would be a good mother." She had wanted another child but was not able to conceive and then got too old. Having her son as a single parent significantly impacted her decision to adopt. "I found it such a wonderful experience...this is a compliment to my son, he is such a great kid, he's just been so wonderful in my life that I felt I wanted to share that with someone else." As well, parenting her son showed her that she could do it: "...it was like a proving ground...I'd had a really good parenting experience and knew I could handle it and I really liked it. I was good at it."
Debra had investigated adoption prior to having her son but was negatively influenced by single parent bias. "Babies were simply not available to single women. I would have had to consider an older child who had been in foster care for many years with any number of disabilities or emotional issues, child abuse, those were the only children that were presented to me...I just wasn't prepared to take any of them on. I thought it was too much, too much to handle."

At 40 years old, Debra became acutely aware of her diminishing family. With only one child of her own, a mother who was aging, and a brother and a father who had already died, she "...saw my family circle kind of contracting and shrinking and I felt I've hardly got anybody in my life. I wanted to have a larger extended family."

Debra started seriously thinking about adoption. She joined the Adoptive Parents Association, read their newsletters, and wondered if it would work for her. She realized how expensive it was and knew that at that time, it was not possible but she "...kept it as kind of a dream, something I could think about, oh, wouldn't it be nice if I could." She brainstormed ideas on what she could sell to get the money. Coming into an inheritance was a critical external event which allowed her to be "...able to do it as a reality."

Now able to proceed, Debra decided from which country she wanted to adopt. She chose Peru, a country to which she felt a strong connection. "I chose Peru because my son's father lives there...I had travelled extensively in South America and that was part of the world with which I was familiar...I know the language and their culture."

Debra found the bureaucratic aspect of adoption very difficult. For her, it required a lot of time consuming research, phoning around, and making a lot of contacts. "For a year, it was a second job." She determined that the government social workers knew nothing about international adoption. She described it as a "very frustrating process" with "...delays and aggravations all along the way" from both the Peruvian and Canadian governments. It was a two year ordeal of waiting and form filling.
Support was critical throughout this time. Debra talked to herself, talked to friends, read what others had done and listened to other people in order to "...put it all together." She relied heavily on the Adoptive Parents Association, to connect with "...people that have done it before and survived and come to meetings and tell you about it, that they've survived it and you can too." She thrived on the newsletters and the annual conference "...to really get filled up again with the good news of it"...because ..."you hear about the terrible problems with the Romanian children but you don't hear about the thousands of perfect babies coming in here from China. You don't hear about that cause it's happy."

Along with her new associates from the Adoptive Parents organization, Debra knew that she "...had good friends that would accept and understand and be happy for me." While not necessarily significant in her own situation, Debra stressed the importance of knowing one's family member's beliefs about race. "I don't think you would go into it if you had a racist background of some sort say, if you family was of that mentality...you would have to choose to turn your back on them and not worry about what they thought, look for your support in other ways and not count on them...you have to say no to them."

Overall, Debra found the transition leading to single parent adoption, not as a mid-life crisis, but as a mid-life peak.

I think being a single parent is easier when you're older because there's a lot of responsibility, you really need to...have your career set up...and have your life together. I think it would have been difficult to do it much younger...it wasn't until I started thinking about the age, the job, the money, giving up on the guys, you know, there's four of five really big factors there that really have to come together and I think they do come together only with age in a sense. In your 20's or 30's you don't see yourself as a middle aged woman, it's only when you start to get up there that they become more present in your mind and you have to grapple with that. It was cathartic.

Debra, in her mid forties and a professional working full time, lives on the west coast of Canada with her two sons.
For Gwen, the adoption process began "a long time ago" when she was in her late 20's, early 30's. For her, adoption was always a first choice. The idea of producing more babies conflicted with the staggering number of children she encountered in reality who needed a home.

In her work, Gwen travels a great deal to third world countries, especially to India. Seeing firsthand orphaned children in the streets had a major impact on her decision to adopt internationally. Comparatively speaking, she found that "...most children in Canada, in the worst case scenario, have a pretty good life". Spending a lot of time in India, she developed a "...special sort of feeling for India" and knew in her heart that it was from here she wanted to adopt a child. She also realized that living in Canada, a country not as mixed race as many other countries, her child would "...have a slightly tougher road to hoe." In order "...to instill a large amount of self confidence and pride" in her daughter, a responsibility she took very seriously, she exudes an affinity for her child's country of origin.

Gwen initially inquired into the possibility of a local adoption with the (then) Ministry of Social Services and she was informed that, as a single parent, she would only be eligible for a special needs child. Gwen did not feel comfortable with what she perceived as an overwhelming situation for a single parent and chose not to pursue a local adoption.

Gwen began the actual adoption process in 1993. Her daughter was born in 1994. Gwen's experience was unique for two reasons. Spending a lot of time in India allowed her to visit time and again, her adoptive daughter's home at the orphanage, and to meet the people who were looking after her. Gwen believes this experience was significant in colouring her adoption process differently to someone who initially meets the child in the final stages of the adoption. She feels it has heightened her desire to know about her daughter's background which she continues to do through her ongoing travels to India.
She is also more acutely aware of the suffering: "...it's pretty heart wrenching to go there now, it's even more upsetting for me because everyone of those children that are begging in the street could be my daughter so that upsets me really badly."

She also went through the "horrific process" of having to choose between two children, a time of decision which she described as "the hardest night of my life." "I chose between the two children and I chose my daughter and that was a very tough thing and a freaky thing because nobody chooses a child, you know, you deliver this baby and you're a mother. But when you're faced with leaving one behind, that was horrific." Via mail, Gwen received the medical reports for two children from officials in India and took those reports to a paediatrician in Canada in order to gain some guidance regarding her decision. He informed her that medically he had no concerns because medicine in North America is such that most illnesses are treatable but any mental problems would be of more concern. In the end, he advised Gwen to go with her instinct. In India, Gwen took both of the children to paediatricians and neither of those paediatricians would say anything. "One of them shrugged and the other was employed on a contract basis so I wanted to get away from that because I thought this wasn't really an unbiased report." Gwen didn't know whether a bolt of lightning was supposed to strike her or whether some kind of intuition would guide her. Making the decision alone made it that much more difficult. She needed to think about it and went back to her hotel and slept for 12 hours. She knew that whatever her decision was, it was something she would have to live with. She scrutinized each baby. Her daughter, while tiny and malnourished, cried when she first saw Gwen which told her that "this little brain is working cause she looked at me and said something's really wrong here, she doesn't look right at all." In hours of time together, the other baby showed no response. This told her which baby was the healthier one.

Having chosen her child, Gwen had to wait three more months to finalize the adoption. As well as being a very emotionally upsetting time, this part of the process was extremely frustrating, filled with bureaucratic delays. The amount of documentation
required for both Canada and India, was painstakingly difficult and time consuming to gather. And even then there were no guarantees. "You have to fight to get this adoption through and it's an emotional roller coaster because, at least for international adoptions, it's an absolute up and down process where things are coming together and all of a sudden, it's all off..." you invest a lot of your energy into this and then to have it dashed repeatedly, that's tough." She compared it to mothers going through miscarriages.

Another challenging aspect of the adoption process was the constant scrutinization. "Some days you say why don't I just get pregnant? It would be so much easier." While she appreciated the need to ensure the adoptive child will receive "all the care in the world," to always be watched, to be focused on, to always be trying to say I am a good parent was very difficult. India, being one of the more stringent countries, requires follow up progress reports for 7 years (a total of 18 reports costing approximately $200.00 each).

For Gwen, the importance of money was a crucial consideration throughout the transition to single adoptive motherhood. "Money, believe it or not, is a big part of the process and overwhelming at times." She recognizes that orphanages need money to operate and while "...all of us would like to think that money doesn't enter into children...it does."

Connecting to the Adoptive Parents Association (APA) was "a godsend" for Gwen, an association of "very caring people" who helped steer her through the adoption process as well as being a source of support and encouragement. Gwen took heart from the stories and pictures of successful adoptions in the APA newsletters because they gave her hope in knowing that hers would work. "...it's not for cowards, it's a hard process I don't mean to be negative to you but it's a hard process."

Gwen continues to draw on her large extended family for their support. Their unconditional love and acceptance regarding the interracial aspect of the adoption was critical to her. "My family's pretty good in that they would support me in anything I chose to do and, of course, there was no racial bias or anything like that, it's a given so I knew in
advance I didn't have to say to them, look, you think about doing this." Their ongoing involvement increases the quality of life for her and her daughter. "I feel my family is very important in terms of the love that they give her." Her daughter is very social and loves to be a part of the large family gatherings.

For Gwen, the overall transition was synonymous with commitment. It was "the umbrella", the most global aspect, of the process leading to single parent adoption. Commitment to knowing herself, "...being absolutely sure in yourself this is what you want to do...most of us have already had lives, it's not as if we've just moved out of the house and had nothing else;" commitment to her child in what she regards as a heightened responsibility within the context of a single parent family; and commitment to the actual process of adoption which"...is so tough and you have to jump over so many hurdles, I think most moms are, I think they're absolutely committed to this or they wouldn't make it to the end."

Gwen was sensitive to criticism from others in her choice to become a single parent. "...even during the adoption process many people criticized me...because they just don't think that [being a single parent] is a good thing and many of these countries are traditional. They think that "mom plus dad plus child is a family" so it was definitely a negative for me." Part of her internal process was to search her heart thoroughly in order to answer the question "Am I giving this child a good opportunity?" While her family may not be considered an ideal family, "(if father, mother, and child is the ideal family)..." Gwen felt she had many things to offer that would constitute a loving, happy home. She feels very positive about single parent families. Gwen does not plan to marry.

Since adopting her first child, Gwen has begun a second adoption and has found the process very different. According to her, the procedures for adoption in B.C. have changed. Responsibility has been delegated to approximately five agencies and the agency that Gwen is working with is extremely helpful, positive, and supportive. While the
financial costs are higher, the progressive approach with which the agency operates offsets the increased financial expense.

Gwen, a professional in her mid forties, and her five year old daughter live on the west coast of Canada.

**Selene**

Selene was married for several years. While she married with the understanding that she and her husband would have children, over time, she learned that, in fact, her husband did not like children. Within the marriage she conceived a child but had a miscarriage and did not become pregnant again. Selene wanted to adopt a child but her husband, who was part Chinese, would only reluctantly agree to adopt a Caucasian child. This eventually led to the dissolution of their relationship. In hindsight, Selene felt that the reason she got married was to have a baby.

While Selene wanted to become a mother, she felt hesitant to form a family, and she attributes this to a lack of support. "[My husband] was very nervous about having children and now I can see that I was quite nervous about it given the lack of confidence from my parents...I wanted them but I didn't know how I was going to deal with it." She recalls that her parents were not pleased when she told them she was pregnant and her husband's mother did not want her to have children. After her miscarriage, Selene and her husband parented two foster children and, as a positive mothering experience, this played a significant role in developing her confidence around motherhood.

Selene expected that when she left her marriage she "...would just get another husband and try again but [I] didn't get another husband." She "...never wished to be a single mother...it wasn't something I was looking forward to, but I always sort of had it in my mind that it might be the way it was going to be." While she had other relationships, marriage was not a result. "I've had different boyfriends and I just found that they got more and more demented each time."
Turning 40 was a major turning point for Selene. "When I turned 40 I decided I was going to do something." She explained that prior to this time, she did not have the nerve, but turning 40, "...it's now or never." However, making the decision to have a child on her own still took several years of sorting through her options. "Before I looked at adoption, I did think about having my own kid through artificial insemination or having a child with a friend and I couldn't really find anything that I felt comfortable with." While she did have one round of donor insemination, the odds of success seemed too low compared to adoption. While she still thinks about what it would have been like to have her own child, it "...wasn't a big, big issue....I always always thought it was fine to adopt. I didn't really think it would make much difference." A final factor in her decision to choose adoption stemmed from genetic complications she did not want to pass on.

Adopting an interracial child raised many issues around race and racism for Selene. "I was concerned about the race thing and I was also concerned about my own reactions, my own sort of racist tendencies..." She wanted to adopt from Guatemala because the child would more closely resemble her. At the same time, she was concerned that the child would "...look like a native...and they get picked on and I didn't like the sound of that." In retrospect, having to question her own beliefs and feelings about race allowed her to be more forgiving of her husband's "...polarizing the situation." Now she realized that race "...doesn't make a whole heck of a lot of difference."

Selene had the unique chance of lending support to a friend who was adopting from Guatemala. She spent a summer there, waiting for the adoption to go through, and then helping her friend bring her daughter back to Canada. Selene saw this as an opportunity which enhanced her own experience as "...the next summer, when it was my turn, I didn't have anyone to come with me and I knew what was going on."

A frightening illness following this trip to Guatemala strengthened Selene's resolve to become a mother. "...when I was sick that was all I thought, I thought I was gonna die, I was possibly gonna die and I thought, well, you're not gonna have a baby, you know,
this is no good...that was the only thing, I didn't really care anything about anything else...I hadn't had that experience of raising a child...this was the missing feature."

In retrospect, Selene found her experience of the adoption process difficult. "I expected better than what happened." Selene spent a great deal of time waiting, eight months for the first possible adoption which then fell through, and then another eight months before she could go to Guatemala to adopt her daughter.

Selene was influenced by the words of Joseph Campbell who said "...follow your bliss and things will work out okay...and that's what I had in my mind" even though she could not really foresee how it was going to work out. Having inherited money was a crucial factor in allowing her dream to be realized. "Lots of money definitely helped."

Selene is a 45 year old professional living on the west coast of Canada with her 2 year old daughter.

Rebecca

The transition to single parent adoption was very much an integrative process for Rebecca. For a couple of years, she and her partner at the time tried to conceive but were unsuccessful. They went through a myriad of tests which were inconclusive. Eventually their marriage ended and at first, Rebecca thought that motherhood would not be a part of her life story. "I figured well, that was it for motherhood and then about a year later it must have been my 41st birthday, I just sort of woke up one morning and I said I don't think I'm finished with this. It just really came out of the blue like that."

Still hoping to become pregnant in the future, Rebecca spent the next year working with two infertility doctors. "I took a lot of perganol and I had to have a neighbour give me shots every day." The odds of success and the financial burden exacted an emotional toll. She realized that she did not want to do anything invasive. It was just too difficult and she did not perceive that she had enough support. "...the emotional wear and tear that something like invitro takes, I just don't think you can do it as a single person." At this time, it was her mother who was suggesting that she adopt but initially, the idea of
adoption did not appeal to Rebecca. "I just didn't want to think about adoption. It just didn't seem like the right thing to be thinking about." Moving through the grief over "missing the whole pregnancy piece...about not being able to have my own" took time. She therefore felt very strongly about adopting an infant and took advantage of being able to choose a girl. "...it was important that it be a girl...I wanted a girl. I have sisters, my whole family is very matrilineal, it's like I know from girls."

Rebecca went on a holiday to Turkey for three weeks and upon her return, she found herself contemplating adoption but issues of race and racism reinforced her hesitancy to adopt. "After a lot of consideration I realized I didn't want to adopt a biracial baby cause I was just feeling I'm single, this kid's gonna be adopted, how many things can you heap on one kid's shoulders, they're gonna have enough stuff to deal with...do I need to add this whole transracial element?"

A by chance re-encounter with friends in New York who had also experienced infertility changed, in an instant, Rebecca's stance on adoption. "I happened to call them the day they got a referral for a baby from Russia ...and I just heard this joy in his voice I had never heard and it was also the first time I had really heard that you can adopt from Russia." The importance of the connections was transparent. Three of Rebecca's grandparents were born in Russia. She grew up in a very left wing, Soviet sympathetic family. Her personal interests included Soviet history, art and theatre. She was aware of cultural similarities between Russians and Jews.

Rebecca immediately called Jewish Family Services. "I wanted to talk to someone about adoption, I wanted to deal with Jewish issues surrounding adoption. I needed to think out loud with somebody who knew what I was talking about...three sessions I knew what to do."

The first person with whom Rebecca shared her decision was her mother. "It was probably the happiest phone call she ever got." She felt her mother was much more
comfortable with adoption than donor insemination. Her mother continued to be a primary support. 
"...She was thrilled, my mother has been totally supportive."

Various other avenues of support bolstered Rebecca as she launched into the actual adoption process. Her friends in New York provided details about their own process. Rebecca spent a lot of time on the Internet corresponding with other adoptive parents and she found that extremely helpful. "Hearing people's stories about going over, it really helped get prepared because it gave me a lot of details that I didn't think I was going to get from my agency in terms of what to expect, and how things were going to work, and what is it like sitting in the courtroom waiting?" Every time a child came home locally, Rebecca would go and visit. Her greatest support has come from her sister who continues to be totally devoted to her daughter.

While new connections began, she also experienced the loss of some established friendships which she attributed to her becoming an adoptive mother. "...I had one other close friend who as soon as I brought [my daughter] home, I never saw again...dealing with [losing that friendship] was hard...I was sorry to lose that...it took me along time to stop being angry. It actually took me over a year to stop being angry at her." At the same time, a childhood friend with whom she hadn't spoken in 15 years sent a gift to acknowledge Rebecca's newly formed family which for her, balanced the losses with gains.

While the overall process of adoption was difficult as a single person - "I was already feeling like this is a lot of work. It's really hard to do on your own," the most salient memory of the experience for Rebecca was waiting. "It was the same thing as going through the infertility stuff because it's like you're just always waiting...your entire life is broken up into these two week blocks of time and you're waiting for something...it just felt like I spent the last three or four years of my life just waiting." This experience, coupled with not knowing what to expect from the bureaucratic systems governing adoptions in
Russia took it's toll. "I own my own business. I started really not being present...not being able to concentrate...I have a pretty calm personality but I mean I was losing it."

For Rebecca, the waiting period was intense and involved feelings of ambivalence towards the adoption because of a clash between her expectations and reality. "I looked at the pictures [of her daughter] and it's like okay, you know, it wasn't quite what I was expecting...It was weird, the pictures of her did not fit the image of what I thought I was going to get. I thought I was going to get a two month old with big blue eyes and instead I got a five month old with hazel eyes." Rebecca's reluctance manifested into the fear that because it was a Russian adoption, there was a possibility that the infant may suffer from fetal alcohol syndrome. "I brought this stuff to the doctor and I didn't go in thinking, Oh, I hope everything's okay. It's like well maybe there's something wrong and I can still get out of this and take the next one. I mean we're talking totally irrational."

Hearing the story of this child's beginnings - she was left on a train in a shopping bag - impelled Rebecca to persevere: "...no matter how reluctant I was, my guilt would not let me say no." She still perceives her experience as different from others: "...people say, oh, I saw her picture and I knew she was mine. I didn't get that. It [the connection] took a while, it took a while."

Rebecca describes the overall experience as an "adoption pregnancy." "I really saw it as very emotionally following a pregnancy." "It's like the first three months, nothing's really real...it's a lot of paperwork instead of morning sickness, I had to get things signed by a notary every day...the second trimester's sort of calm, nothing's really happening and then the last trimester, you've got to get ready... I wasn't going to be scared about it, I wasn't going to be scared about things going wrong...I just decided I was going to enjoy it.

Rebecca reflected on her transition to single parent adoption and how she feels about her family today. "I really went through this struggle to become a mother and you know it just made me angry, why me? Life is so unfair and I just realized in the last month
that I am at a place of total acceptance of the entire process. I realize that if anything had happened differently, if I had become pregnant, if I had sent in my adoption forms two weeks later, if any little thing would have been different, I wouldn't have ended up with my daughter. She is my bershet. This is a yiddish term and a bershet is the love of your life, the other half of your soul. And my daughter is my bershet. She is the right and perfect child for me and I am the right and perfect mother for her given our personalities. I don't believe in God so I can't say this is God's plan or anything like that but I just can't imagine mothering any other child even if I had my own biological child, I can't imagine it. I thought I would always have regrets, I never had my own child, or just be angry at the whole process but it doesn't matter anymore. You get to a higher place of acceptance."

Rebecca in her forties and self employed, adopted her 2 1/2 year old daughter 2 years ago. They live on the west coast of the United States.

Lynne

Lynne remembers always wanting to be a mother. "It was such a strong need, it was this yearning...it's almost a physical kind of feeling. I don't know how to describe it other than that, that it's that strong, that it's almost physical, that it comes from within."

Lynne was married and expected that this relationship, in time, would naturally flow into having a family. "I think like everybody else I always thought that I was going to have children and it was just kind of an assumption in my life but I put it off a long time cause I was doing the 70's early 80's me thing, I guess." The "70's early 80's me thing" included supporting her husband through medical school in the United States after she herself completed a university degree in Alaska. It became apparent to Lynne that her husband "...had a hard time with the commitment to medicine as well as the commitment to marriage." At 36 years old "...I needed to talk about having kids now and I think he couldn't deal with it, he couldn't deal with the fact that he was in debt because of medical school, he had to stay in medicine and I don't think he'd had time to work out the commitment to the marriage either so we finally parted."
Lynne returned to Canada "...with nothing basically...I was almost starting over again in terms of career and everything." She started to think about how to become a parent right after her separation and divorce and this process took 7 years. "I measured the time you know when I came back here it was like, okay now, I've got to think about what am I going to do? I only have a few years here [with the] potential of becoming a mother and how am I going to do it? And so that was the years where I would just go and think about all the different options."

Lynne pressured herself to "...start looking for a man" but just could not do it: "...when it came right down to it, I wasn't interested in getting married again, I'd been there, done that...you know, I'm a fairly normal red blooded woman but it was just that I realized that I just didn't have an interest in playing those games or getting into that [dating] and I had a great fear of getting involved with somebody and somehow losing my house."

Lynne considered different ways to become pregnant from asking a friend to donor insemination. "I was thinking about all the alternative ways of becoming a mum, everything from asking a friend to father a child and I thought oh, no, that's too embarrassing." Lynne contemplated "...going to a sperm bank" but was aware of a woman who had contracted AIDS through this method. She also speculated on the possible ramifications of pursuing a form of donor relationship on the prospective child. "...I thought it would be healthier for the child not to have a father rather than to have a father that was sort of here and there or pulling relationships every which way. I just felt it was cleaner and healthier." Ultimately it was "...the unknown factor of ...mixing my genes with some totally unknown person, I mean that's a very personal, intimate thing when you think about it...I would be looking for myself in this child...and if the child took after me well that would be fine but what if the child took after the [other] parent I would always be wondering where different traits came from or if things didn't go well, you'd want to blame this unknown person." The idea of adoption began to materialize in Lynne's mind. "I thought, well, if I'm going to go that route I may as well just go the whole way
[with] completely unknown genes and go for nothing to the child...and then [I] put it on the shelf and didn't do anything for a while."

In the meantime, Lynne had bought a house and was now "secure" in a regular position in her field of work. "...I bought this house in '91 and it was the most contented and happy years of my life...being in the house and stuff and gardening and acquiring a cat or two, so I was quite happy." However she was still aware that "...the only thing that wasn't perfect in my life was this emptiness of my future as much as anything. It wasn't so much right now what I need but the thought of not having any children."

Focusing on two aspects of her family of origin was central to Lynne's transition to single parent adoption. She was acutely aware that there was no future generation: "...my brothers didn't have any children, there was no generation upcoming and I felt that we were extinct all of us, we were endangered species, becoming extinct our branch of the family."

Also, she recognized herself as growing up in a stable family and perceived her parents as role models: "...in that respect, that's one of the things I wrestled with for a long time because I felt that the home situation, stability or home situation was very important and finally, when I finally came to the idea of adoption and as I was thinking about it, I felt well, I'm really in a pretty stable home situation."

A fundamental part of the process for Lynne was a shift in her beliefs from the importance of genetic values to the core values she developed growing up in her family of origin. "I thought a lot about this idea of having your own biological child, seeing yourself in the child and carrying on the family line, the family name...I felt that my family's pretty healthy so I always felt that I'd be passing on pretty healthy genes but when it really came down to it, it was the family - I hate to use the term family values cause it's so loaded - but what I mean is what's important in your family, the honesty, integrity all those things that are important in the end...it was kind of a shift more from biological, physical to emotional, spiritual, sociological type of traits that you hand down...that's what's really
important to pass on and that you don't have to be genetically related to the child to be able to pass on those family traits."

During this seven year struggle of finding a means to motherhood which fit with who she was, Lynne experienced the deep grief associated with infertility and attributes to this, her reluctance to consider adoption early on in her transition to becoming a single adoptive parent. 

"[Adoption] had been suggested to me a couple of times before and I wasn't able to say, well, yes, I've thought about it. I wasn't able to go home and say well, maybe I should think about it and look into it. I didn't. I kept pushing it away because I was still, I was not able to let go of the thought, the desire to produce a child myself, out of my own body." She saw her situation as similar to couples unable to conceive, not so much as an issue of biological infertility but through lack of a partner: "...basically it was an infertility, lack of a partner is infertility...the majority of people who are adopting are those who have wanted a child and have been trying for years, they had an infertility problem that wasn't surmountable apparently and that was when they decided to adopt and when they describe the process that they went through in terms of trying to have the baby and having to face up and accept that that wasn't going to happen, that they weren't going to become pregnant and then sort of grieving that loss and the coming to the point where they can put all that aside and say, okay, adoption is for me, I'm ready to go with it, any descriptions I've seen of that process for parents dealing with infertility, I think is basically the same process I went through."

The idea of adoption as a real possibility began at a dinner party with friends, where Lynne learned of a woman who had adopted a child from Guatemala. Lynne was impacted by the fact that she was also single and a professional woman. "I could relate to her life situation as well." Going for solitary walks and thinking, Lynne felt a heightened need to fulfill her yearning for motherhood. She came to the realization that adopting internationally embodied important aspects of herself. "...I suddenly thought about this woman who had adopted her boy from Guatemala and I thought yeah, that's what I need to
do because I've always been concerned about poverty in other countries and the children that suffer so much...one of my problems about producing a child, bringing another child in to this world is that it's a very crowded world and most of our social and environmental problems are really just a direct result of too many people in the world...it was two things that were very dear to me or very deeply concerned about...environmental type issues as well as social issues around the world. I thought that this was a way that I could meld these two concerns into one action and actually do something."

Meeting this woman and her little boy provided not only support, but was a turning point for Lynne. "That was the thing that I needed to just click everything in place. I think all the pieces were there they just hadn't quite clicked into place." She then committed herself to the process: "...once I made the decision I wanted to go with it and I don't think anything I've ever done in my life was so focused and so directed. I knew what I wanted and nobody was going to stop me."

While Lynne considered China and Peru as possible countries from which to adopt, she chose Guatemala because her research told her that the adoption program there was going really well and she wanted to expedite the process. Cost was a concern but her parents' financial assistance made it possible for Lynne to go ahead immediately.

The actual process of adoption took almost a year. Initially Lynne was considered for a nine month old girl and for two weeks, she thought this would be her child but the birth mother changed her mind and decided to keep her. When Lynne received the baby pictures of her now adopted daughter she "...just looked at these pictures and just fell in love immediately. I couldn't believe that." It took almost another year for the adoption to be finalized and Lynne was very anxious during this waiting period.

The experience of waiting and the eventual adoption was a "metaphorical pregnancy" for Lynne. "It was a long pregnancy. It was a quick birth, though." A significant aspect was having a friend with her in Guatemala to assist. "She was the midwife that helped the deliverer." Lynne found the process very similar to a pregnancy.
"...all the way through. There's lots of differences but there's probably more similarities than there are differences."

The integration of many aspects of her self over a long period of time culminated in Lynne's decision to adopt. She described her decision making process in this way:

When I was ready to make that decision, I heard about a friend of a friend who'd adopted and it clicked into place without me having to sort of consciously make the decision. I mean once I made the decision, it was obvious. That's what I want to do. Not, here's my options and what am I going to do and weighing this and that. I had thought about all those things for so long that when the time came that was right. It's the idea that you make a decision by not trying to make the decision. You get all the information together, you put it on the back shelf after you've had a good look at it and think about it and then don't think about it particularly and get on with life. All of a sudden it will kind of drop out at you, you'll know what the decision is. It's not like you have to make the decision. It just kind of comes to you or it sure seem like that's the way this worked.

Lynne is 46 years old. She is a full time professional living with her 3 year old daughter on the west coast of Canada.

Gabrielle

Gabrielle remembers motherhood as a constant yearning in her life: "...all I'd ever wanted in life was to have children." Her transition to becoming an adoptive mother began in her thirties with a period of mourning in which she deeply grieved "...the fact that I wasn't going to have a blond, blue-eyed little girl." Gabrielle had wanted to be pregnant, to have her own baby. "I just had to come to grips with the fact that she wasn't going to be mine." Another aspect of her mourning involved knowing that she would not have the relationship and the life that she anticipated: "I mean, I grew up with the fairy tale that you would get married and you would have children and you would live in a nice house in the suburbs and that fairy tale never came true." It wasn't until she came to some resolution around these issues that she was able to proceed with the adoption.

Approaching 40 and childless was a marker for Gabrielle. She started to think about adoption and she thought about it for a long time. She was aware of the many negative stories about unhealthy adopted children and these really frightened her. As well, she briefly considered other options on how to become a mother, such as invitro
fertilization, however, the lack of guarantees was a deterrent. She had done enough research into adoption to convince her that "I knew if I went to China I would come back with a healthy baby girl."

While support was very important to Gabrielle, her transition to adoptive mother was a very personal, intimate process in which she involved only a few close personal friends. Her mother's approval was critical.

Once the decision to adopt was made, Gabrielle was completely committed to it. To ease the year long waiting period, she continually recited a daily mantra: "I have a healthy, intelligent, beautiful baby girl" and "I just lived by that for the year that I was waiting for her...it was like a prayer in motion." Gabrielle's thinking shifted from solo to duo. "All the decisions I made were for the two of us so everything that I started to do I did with the two of us in mind."

Gabrielle's experience of the adoption process was analogous to a pregnancy. "I felt very pregnant." She described the nesting behaviours as "incredible." Just prior to getting her "...it was like labour and the tension...anybody came near me I was a bear...it was just like you were in transition the whole time." Three incidents were very distinct recollections for her: "...wanting to get on the plane, then to get there, and then to have them actually give [my daughter]...those were critical because those were the points where things could go wrong." Gabrielle compared these to the critical points in biological births: "just prior to delivery, at delivery, and a few days afterwards."

Becoming connected to her daughter Catherine in their first few days together was a predominant memory and the most difficult part of the process for Gabrielle. Being in China alone with her daughter, having no help, was a challenging beginning. The van transporting the new parents to the orphanage broke down and they were very late arriving. According to Gabrielle, the orphanage sedates the children and doesn't feed them prior to the parent's arrival for two reasons. First, it saves them money and secondly, it is a way of connecting the child to her/his new parent(s). When Catherine was placed in Gabrielle's
arms, the baby "...was frightened and she was scared and so she screamed and screamed and screamed and screamed." It was so distressing for her that "I said I wasn't going to take her I said this is wrong she's too upset, this is wrong, she's bonded, she's attached." Gabrielle realized that she was very attached to her worker at the orphanage. "The grief between these two was palpable." While beginning to develop her own relationship with her daughter, she was excruciatingly aware that she "...was destroying this relationship", thinking "...this poor thing, not only does she have her mother's pain but now she has this pain...it was very hard, it was just difficult I just didn't want to hurt this little girl."

Gabrielle still draws strength from her family upbringing in which race was never an issue, "...all people are good and all people are treated the same," in having to deal with some people who think that what she has done is very wrong. While in China, she found the Chinese people that she came in contact with extremely supportive of what she was doing, but issues of race and racism, experienced with strangers and some friends here in Canada, are an ongoing part of family life. Some people "...think that removing a child from her culture is not appropriate and that this isn't a child of your blood so it's not really your child." Gabrielle has been accosted on the street by people making the accusation that "that's not your baby." An individual who purported to be a close friend "...barely acknowledges her [Catherine] and I know it's because she's Chinese." Gabrielle finds these kinds of encounters very difficult but she has had to "learn to deal with it."

While the grieving process over not having her own biological child was very prominent in Gabrielle's thinking for a long time, "...now it's a distant memory...I look at this little girl and what we do together...and now I think why was I so concerned? Why was I even worried about it? I need to make it clear that she's not mine in terms of biological birth but I very much think of this child as my daughter and actually, people will tell you that she's my daughter because...they see qualities in her that they see in me so she's very much my child. So much of it now just seems concentrated on helping her grow up...it's all a learning process."
Gabrielle, in her mid forties, is a professional working full time. She adopted her daughter in the fall of 1997. They live on the west coast of Canada.

**Ruth**

While she engaged in some research and analysis, by the time Ruth had considered adoption, she was absolutely clear on how she wanted to become a mother. She began to think about adoption in the summer of her fortieth birthday which she feels sure "...had something to do with coming to this realization that this made sense for me."

Her husband of eleven years had died four years prior to that time. Eventually, Ruth began to feel pressured to move on from the loss of her husband in order to meet somebody and get married because she was running out of time to have children. She tried this for a couple of years but found it "an impossible task."

A by chance meeting of a woman who had adopted a baby from Russia as a single mother set in motion a new direction for Ruth to pursue her dream of becoming a mother. Prior to that, adoption had never even crossed her mind. "It felt like a huge load off of me and then I just went into action within a couple of months of that." Being of similar ethnic background, (both women are of Russian Jewish descent) and the fact that the process had gone very well for this woman, (she now had this beautiful baby and was very happy) combined to make this serendipitous encounter "a huge trigger" for Ruth in the transition to single parent adoption.

Reorienting her life through the decision to adopt "unstuck" Ruth. Prior to this, she felt "more at the mercy of whatever, the fates, not in control of my own destiny." Moving from the house that she had shared with her husband for many, many years was a very difficult thing to do. However, once deciding to adopt, buying a house that was suitable in which to raise a child "...was a catalyst, it felt like everything sort of flowed from the decision" and within a month, Ruth had purchased a new home. She described the early part of the process to single parent adoption as "it sort of felt like everything kind of fell into place. That was sort of the feeling of the transition."
Ruth found the process of adoption to be "...very much like a pregnancy." For her, it was similar to when people have described the second trimester where they "...say they have this tremendous amount of energy...I was able to make the most decisions about big things and had the most amount of energy." The very difficult final stages of the adoption process in Russia "I liken to labour, acute, acute pain and anxiety."

This is sort of an amazing process I still think when you have a baby, a pregnancy, and give birth to a baby you turn yourself over to this process and you have no control over it. I mean friends of mine have said when they were in labour, it was like a train was going through their body, you know, that sense that their body wasn't their own anymore and I felt like my life wasn't my own anymore during this period, that it had been taken over by this quest and I had no control over it.

Ruth found that her expectations were different than what she saw in the first pictures of her daughter and connecting to her took time. She had been shown one other baby who turned out not to be healthy. Having seen his picture, she felt very badly but feared he suffered from fetal alcohol syndrome and was not willing to take that on. But looking at the picture, she was not sure and found herself thinking "I think this is my baby." When seeing her daughter's picture, she found herself questioning, "Is this my baby? I don't know, it just didn't look like what I was thinking she would look like." But over time, "...it just starts to feel like this is her." She was very angry at being put in the position of having to choose between two children.

Ruth found that the adoption process began quite smoothly but the latter part was plagued with uncertainty: "...the laws started to change in Russia during that period so there was this threat of moratorium, you know, no more adoptions, there was the threat that single mothers wouldn't be allowed to adopt." Once Ruth knew who her daughter was, she found it extremely painful and difficult to wait for her daughter to become available. Twice she was scheduled to go to Russia, the first time having the trip cancelled the morning of the day she was leaving. "At that point I was thinking why did I do this...I remember feeling at that point, why did I open myself up to this, the potential for losing her
was just horrendous and I was thinking it would have been just better if I never had pursued this cause it seemed like it wasn't gonna happen but then it did." Upon arriving in Russia, one thing after another went wrong. Ruth felt that she had "...never been in a situation where I felt so much at the mercy of people, people that I really didn't know...it was a very strange, a very strange experience, a very unusual experience compared to anything else I'd done." Her sister, living in Berlin, accompanied her to Russia as Ruth did not want to go by herself. Upon arrival, they both felt sick from anxiety. A mix up over money left them without cash. "I remember one night saying to my sister when things looked really grim...I felt like I felt right after my husband died. I felt that same way it was terrible, the worst, you know, the worst."

Their experience at the orphanage, however, was very positive. They found it was situated in a beautiful town and the people working there "were wonderful." The Russian laws on adoption at this time did come under major revision and Ruth's daughter was the last baby out in that district under the old law.

Ruth, at 41 years old, adopted her daughter in the spring of 1995. She is a professional working part time. She and her daughter live in the United States.

Judy

Judy's travels to China, fifteen years prior to adopting her daughter, began her transition to single parent adoption. She traveled to China at a time prior to Tianneman Square, when the pro-democracy movement was distinct. "I saw all these kids and toddlers...I saw a need, these kids really needed somebody, especially toddlers, ..and then I decided that some day when I had a position, someday I would adopt a child."

Adoption was familiar to Judy as she came from a large family and two of the children in her family of origin were adopted. The inevitable beginnings and endings of life influenced the timing of Judy's adoption plans. Her siblings now have children who are toddlers. Both her parents had passed away several years ago. Judy realized if adopting a child was going to be part of her life story, she had better do it soon.
Working in a remote area of Canada provided the impetus to evaluate her life's direction. Judy realized she had done everything that she needed to do in terms of travelling and career plans. She wanted to adopt a child before she was fifty years old. Money was a major consideration and it took time to be in a financial position to begin the process.

Judy was always sure of how she wanted to become a mother: "...what I wanted was an orphan, a child who did not have parents...I wanted to give someone a home who had no possibility of one." She decided to "...go through all the hoops" to make it happen and if it didn't work out, she would redirect her life in other ways. She had a lot of support from her siblings in her decision to adopt. Her friends reactions were mixed: some thinking this was a great idea, others thought she was crazy.

Judy found that the adoption experience went very quickly (it happened within one year) and attributes this to her willingness to adopt a toddler. However, she had some resentments about the process. Her perception was that the process was corrupt in both Canada and China, with many people making a lot of money. She found the obligatory preparatory workshops very poorly run and quite irrelevant to the adoption. Her experience showed her that the facilitators were not up to date on adoption research, comparing all adoptions to those from Romania. She found the process extremely discouraging. "The process is difficult because it's not truthful...I wouldn't trust anything, any information that you get."

Judy's first meeting with her daughter felt like a traumatic beginning. She rendezvoused with her daughter, accompanied by three men, in a dirty old back alley outside the state adoption centre. Judy and her new daughter had a moment to hold hands and connect. Judy and her interpreter were then taken into a room in the adoption centre to sign all the papers and exchange money. The baby was then immediately handed over to her: "...all the way back to the hotel she was screaming and I'm feeling like I kidnapped a kid."
Once back at the hotel, she was fine "...she was craving food, all the kids seemed to crave food."

Judy describes adopting her daughter as "the highlight of my life...when I got my cat from the SPCA, giving your cat a home, well that feels really good, well you try that with a little child and it's way more powerful."

Judy, in her late forties, is a professional working part time. She and her two year old daughter live on the west coast of Canada.

Gertrude

Part of Gertrude's decision to adopt stemmed from her immigration to Canada from England. "I think part of it was that I immigrated to Canada so all my family is over there and I don't have any family which is a very isolated type of experience. Being in a foreign country and not having anybody that knows you, or ever will be connected to you...is a very isolated type of experience...being in a country with no past and no future." She described growing up in a very close extended family while at the same time feeling a "...sense of aloneness and loneliness that I think is a part of it."

Gertrude worked as a child care worker and youth club leader for many years of her life. Married during that time, she and her husband imagined themselves adopting many children. "We were going to have a group home and have a whole bunch of kids."

Switching from a people oriented profession to a career in creative design underscored her love of children and how much she missed them. "I had been very people oriented so when I changed careers, I noticed it was really quiet, people were anti-social and I missed the kids."

Gertrude remembers being 29 years old and first realizing, "...gee, I think I'd like to have some kids" but felt ill-prepared to become a mother. "At that time I was totally irresponsible...I hadn't worked for more than 9 months at a time, I would work and travel." Therefore, in anticipation of having children in the future, Gertrude began a
"training program" for motherhood. Beginning with plants, she moved to goldfish, then to a cat, and then a dog. She was also a foster parent to a four year old child for a year. She described this experience as "...a lot of work" and one which left her feeling somewhat ambivalent.

She spent time travelling across Canada, working in various major cities to gain enough experience to compete in a difficult job market. Settling in Vancouver, she decided to continue to prepare for motherhood by incorporating her creative skills. The next step for her was to get into "...a housing situation where you've got a sense of community and neighbourhood." She designed and coordinated the development of a housing group where one of the criteria was the desire to be part of a neighbourhood and where "...kids would be part of that community." She considered, in detail, what was required to create an optimal home environment in which to raise a child.

Initially, Gertrude opted to have her own child and spent several years searching for a suitable donor. It took time to find the right person because "...either they wanted to move in with me or move next door or...somehow develop a relationship with me...and I didn't want that, I didn't want any constraints on my parenting, I guess, or on myself." Once she did find someone, attempts to become pregnant failed: "...at that time, my life was so hectic with work, I was also a developer, and the relationship that I was in was just chaotic and I just couldn't [get pregnant]." Changes in the donor's personal life (he became involved in a significant relationship) convinced Gertrude that for the betterment of his new relationship, it was time to stop.

A serious car accident eventually ended her attempts at having her own biological child. She had continued to try to become pregnant with a friend but she "...realized that I was totally incapable at that time of being a parent, I couldn't take care of myself, I was so disoriented and sick and just totally unwell, it was after the accident." At 50 years old, she decided motherhood through pregnancy was just "...not meant to be."
Six years following the car accident, Gertrude was told she would not work again. Examining her full and very active life up to now, she thought "...well, okay, now what am I going to do with the rest of my life? I've pretty much done everything that I've ever wanted to do. I've travelled, I've had my own business, I've been a developer, I've done everything I wanted to do and the only thing I haven't done, hadn't done that I ever wanted to do was being a mum so I said well, I can do that for the next 50 years."

Initially Gertrude was "...against international adoption. I thought it was totally inappropriate to take children out of their culture, that there were totally fallacious attitudes about the North American culture, that anybody that would be coming from a different culture would see North America...as the ideal place to be and they would give up their child in a misguided way." Her views changed when, recuperating at home from the car accident, she happened to tune in to several television and radio programs on the subject of international adoption: "...it sort of became very clear that, in fact, it was a valid thing."

Gertrude did about a year's worth of research into different adoption alternatives, the different countries involved, and what their criteria were. Connecting to a woman who had adopted 7 years previously from Nepal, who like Gertrude was also a Buddhist, helped her to know what she really wanted. While she met the criterion for an adoption from China, she was not attracted to this country, and "...for some reason that was important to me. I didn't want to have a child from an orphanage and I didn't want an infant, I wanted an 8-12 year old boy and I thought okay, what do I really want, what I actually want is a Tibetan refugee child."

Gertrude wrote to the Dalai Lama "...because when he was in Canada, he thanked everybody for taking care of his kids and adopting them and so I thought well if he has confidence in the process...I could go on the basis that he has an awareness of what Canada or what North America is like and so it would give me more confidence in adopting from Tibet rather than any other country." However, the reply explained that adoptions
through orphanages had ceased. Gertrude redirected her energies toward a private adoption.

Gertrude, now linked up with the lawyer who had negotiated the adoption for the aforementioned woman, received a phone call from him at 3:00 in the morning. He proposed for adoption, not only a three year old boy but his one year old sister! Gertrude's initial response was "Oh no! no! no! no!" Quickly thinking it over, she agreed to take the boy because, as she was travelling overseas for a year, she knew that by the time she was able to bring him to Canada, he would be four years old, similar to the foster child she parented. Following this early morning call, Gertrude reflected on her decision. She talked with someone at an adoption agency who encouraged her not to think about the baby, "...they'll find somebody else for her", but found herself thinking "...well, gee, you know, it'll actually be kind of rough for the first year or two but after that it would be better." She called back and said she wanted the little girl as well. Her original plan was to go and get the children in six months time. However, after having a week to ponder the situation, she found herself thinking, "...well, who's going to take care of them?"

Gertrude called her lawyer back and was taken aback by his response - "the mum and dad."

She knew that the parents were sherpa but was under the assumption that they had been recently killed in an avalanche. "They were still with the mum and dad so then I had to go through lots of things about, well, what's that going to be like." The lawyer assured her that the parents were "...very, very keen to have you adopt their children" so she decided to keep going with the plan but really wasn't able to grasp the family situation until she had been involved with them for about a month.

Upon returning from a trip to New Zealand, Gertrude completed the home study and embarked on the actual process of meeting her adopted children and bringing them to Canada. The precarious beginnings exemplified things to come. Ready to leave, she received a call from her lawyer telling her that the politics had changed, "...they're not doing adoptions right now." She cancelled her ticket only to have him call again to say
"Okay, come now!" Gertrude, ill with the flu, left on Christmas eve amidst a terrible snowstorm, arriving in Katmandu on Christmas day. Along with the lawyer arranging the adoption, the parents of the children were there to greet her at the airport.

Gertrude's first meeting with the children took place the next day. Their reactions to her could not have been more distinct. On a walk around Bodha, "...one of the most significant spiritual centres in the whole world" with Gertrude, his biological mother and sister, the little boy allowed Gertrude to pick him up and announced "...he was going to come to Canada to live with me." In contrast, every time the little girl saw Gertrude "...she'd pull her mother's hair and kick and spit and scream and she used to have temper tantrums every ten minutes." Gertrude was very apprehensive. "Four times during the time I was there I kept saying I don't think I want to take this one, thanks very much and they kept saying, no, no, she'll be fine."

Gertrude learned much about the parents and their relationship to the children on a five day trek outside Katmandu. The parents appeared to love the children a great deal, and Gertrude struggled to understand the complexities of their lives to believe that adoption was still best for all involved. "I still couldn't figure out why they were giving up the kids...I kept saying you guys, you're so loving and such wonderful parents and there are two of you and there are four children altogether and I just don't understand." It became very apparent that "...there was more and more drinking happening all the time..." She rented an apartment close to where the family lived in order to develop a relationship with the children.

The adoption process took nine weeks. Eight different approvals from different levels of government were necessary to finalize the adoption. Bribery was expected and against Gertrude's wishes, ultimately used by her lawyer as a last resort to move the process forward. There were a lot of "...administrative bureaucratic gaps in the system" which took a lot of time to sort through. Authorities were highly suspicious of her desire to adopt two children. "He [the head of the passport division] said, why are you only
taking two, why not four, why not five? I said, 'well, why?' He said, 'well, one for the dishes, one for the laundry, one for the shopping' and I said, 'no, you really don't understand the situation, it's not like that at all.'

Sick and tired, Gertrude would go daily and wait for up to 8 hours with the hope of obtaining the approved documentation. "I had to go every day, every day, every day for eight hours and it was cold and I got so sick every day and I just would sit there and sit there and sit there and sit there and he'd [the vice minister] would make appointments with me and then not show up and then he'd say come back in at four o'clock and they'd say, oh right right right, come tomorrow, come the next day, come the next day, come the next day...so I was there nine weeks altogether just trying to get all these different people to approve and sign...there were just layers and layers and layers and layers of politics."

Gertrude described the adoption process as "...the most challenging thing I've ever done in my life...it was just totally impossible, it was just nine weeks of total emotional frustration." Through it all, only once did she have a tiny flash that said, "are you sure if it's this difficult, it's meant to be?"

Gertrude attributes her strength to her Buddhist practices. "...I swear I would not have been able to have done this adoption if I hadn't walked several times around Bodha for the spiritual strength to have dealt with the adversity of this whole process." She also credits her faith in guiding the direction of her life to include adoptive motherhood. "I'm sure my Buddhist practice is a part of it somewhere, you know, that there is right livelihood, there is an importance to life, that you do something useful while you're here."

Gertrude is 52 years old and retired from her professional career. She adopted her children in 1997. She now lives with her son, aged 5 and her daughter, aged 3, on the west coast of Canada.

The Narrative

I developed a comprehensive narrative of the transition to single parent adoption through the process of data analysis and subsequent validation interviews. It
incorporates the shared and unique experiences described by the women in this study. While this phenomenon is conceptualized within a framework that has been built on common experiences, I also included the diverse elements to present an authentic and therefore more complex description of what this experience has meant. As each aspect of the phenomenon is portrayed, the relevant themes developed by the researcher from the participants' stories will be highlighted in the text. Quotations from the participants' descriptions will illustrate the meanings they attributed to their experience.

**The Experience of the Transition to Single Parent Adoption**

The underlying desire to become a mother for some, is experienced as compellingly constant throughout life. While the women in this study pursued varied and successful other endeavours in their lives, they never dismissed or replaced wanting to become a mother. **Motherhood as a persistent yearning** was expressed by four of the participants in the study. They used such phrases as "I didn't want to go through life without children;" "It was such a strong need, it was this yearning;" and "All I'd ever wanted in life was to have children, I had this tremendous urge to have children." For many of the women, motherhood was a primal longing which needed to be fulfilled.

In retrospect, the idea of becoming a mother through adoption stems back in time and several women perceived the decision to adopt as an extended process. One woman said, "I thought about it a lot...we're talking 40 odd years here." Two others began to think about adoption 15 to 30 years before it became a reality: "It was a long time ago, I would have been in my late 20's, early 30's;" "I think there are lots of components that actually fills up the picture that brought it to completion although as I say, the initial thought was even when I was 23 when I think about it."

Prior to mid-life, there is an expectation that the desire to become a mother will be fulfilled through traditional means (**expectations of marriage/partnership and motherhood over the life course**). While this was not unanimously experienced, seven of the ten participants did expect that their wish to become a mother would be actualized
within a marriage or partnership. Ideas such as "I thought that I would get married and have children and it would just be taken care of;" "I think like everybody else I always thought that I was going to have children and it was just kind of an assumption in my life;" "Part of what I was mourning was not only the fact that I wasn't having my own baby but I wasn't having the relationship and the life that I thought I was going to lead. I mean I grew up with the fairy tale, you know, you would have children and you would live in a nice house in the suburbs and that fairy tale never came true" exemplified the perception that a marriage would naturally unfold into raising a family. Five of the participants had either been married or in a committed long term relationship.

Two of the women who were married realized that without children, their relationships were not "good enough" to sustain them. For two others, even though they always knew they wanted children, the intimate relationships they were involved in over the years did not meet their expectations and were not of a caliber that allowed them to commit long term. "I never met someone who met my very high expectations or whatever and they may have been unrealistic ones, I don't know, but that's still what I'm looking for." Another woman decided to "give up on the guy myth" because "you can wait around an awfully long time and never find the perfect person. They're not growing on every tree. I know, I picked enough bad ones." Her focus on becoming a parent changed as her perception that single parenthood is a legitimate choice was reflected in her close women friends, all of whom are single parents and "all doing really, really well."

Two of the participants gained a self awareness within the context of their relationships or marriages and came to know that the prescribed roles of traditional marriage restricted them (independence vs. traditional marriage). Perceptions such as "I never did get around to getting married, I never, I either didn't meet the right guy or I just wasn't I just am not a marrying kind of person;" "I really prided myself on my independence;" "I am not looking for someone who will try to change me to take care of them" reflected this theme. One participant remembers the influence of emerging feminist
ideas (egalitarianism: factors that shaped female self-identity) reinforcing her family upbringing in which she came to know herself as a capable, intelligent woman who deserved the same opportunities as men. While thinking that "this was the way the world worked," she recalls finding it very difficult "...to meet men, boys, men in my peers basically that believed that." This illustrated that while these women were certain that they wanted children, they were unable to compromise themselves in what was for them, an unsuitable lifestyle, to fulfill their maternal desire.

The transition to single parent adoption can involve an intrapersonal shift regarding aging and motherhood. For some of the women, being in their thirties felt as if the opportunity to have children still existed but they clearly started to think of other options. Some women became increasingly aware of their biological clock. The following statements expressed this: "I set the first limit at 35 and I realized that when I got to 35 that there was still room. There was still more time so time went on and I was still hoping that I would meet somebody and get married and have children and it didn't happen;" "When I was in my thirties, I started worrying about the fact that I wasn't married, how am I going to have children?" "I was 36 and saying I can't wait much longer and I needed to talk about having kids now;" "You don't have time to mess around once you hit thirty. That was my processing, giving up on the guy myth."

As women who want to become biological mothers move through their thirties and approach mid-life, they come to know most poignantly the grief and loss associated with this unfulfilled dream (infertility/lack of partner). Three of the women discussed consciously attempting to conceive a child but were unsuccessful. One woman described doing so within the context of her marriage. Another woman confided that she had become pregnant but had a miscarriage and was unable to conceive again. A third woman attempted to become pregnant over several years through two consecutive sexual relationships with friends.
While others did not speak specifically of attempts to become pregnant, they nonetheless expressed having had a profound grief over knowing that they would never give birth to a child. In accepting adoption as a possible alternative, three women described their experience this way: "not being able to let go of the thought, the desire to produce a child myself, out of my own body;" "feeling grief about not being able to have my own;" "missing the whole pregnancy piece;" "I wanted my own baby, I wanted to be pregnant, I wanted to have a little girl and I wanted a blue eyed baby so I had to come to terms with that;" and "It wasn't until I came to some resolution of my own feelings around that issue that I was able to proceed with the adoption."

It is also true that a woman adopting a child as a single parent can arrive at the decision regardless of whether she is able to have children biologically either on her own or within a relationship. For one woman, "it didn't have anything to do with whether or not I could have kids." For another, she always felt that adoption was the best means to motherhood for her. "My feeling is when people go through the heartache, the expense, and more heartache of things like in vitro or artificial insemination, from my position, it seems to be a better investment of your emotions and strengths to adopt, but I'm not criticizing in vitro if somebody chooses to do it."

Turning 40 is a significant turning point in making a decision about motherhood in the transition to single parent adoption. While "biological clock" played a role for those who attempted to become pregnant, all of those who cited age as a predominant factor in their transition to single adoptive motherhood stressed that the culmination of their 30's incited internal and external change regarding not if, but how, to become a mother. "It was the summer that I turned 40 which I'm sure had something to do with coming to this realization that this made sense for me;" "I was childless and approaching 40 and so I started to think about adoption;" "I basically made a promise that by the time I was forty, if I didn't have a child I was going to have one."
When thinking back to when one's orientation shifted to include the possibility of adoption, there is the perception that significant family of origin experiences contributed to the decision to adopt a child. One of the women had been adopted and remembers "it had worked out well for me" and felt that part of her decision to adopt stemmed from the perception that having had "a successful adoption" herself, she "needed to return the favour to someone else," not out of obligation but that it felt "morally on track" to do so. Two of the participants grew up in families with an adopted sibling(s). Phrases such as "my parents loved my little brother as much as they loved us;" "I loved my little brother tremendously;" and "people can't tell who was adopted and who wasn't" described an affirming personal adoption experience (the significance of positive personal adoption experience). To all three of these women, adoption was a very normal, positive aspect of their family lives.

One participant realized the importance of her upbringing and perceived her parents as role models concerning marriage as "a forever thing and a big commitment" and as providers of a "stable family" environment in which she grew up. While she was not in a committed marriage, understanding the attributes of her stable family helped her to sort through what was important to her in creating an optimal home and developing parenting skills.

Another participant recognized that because of her family relationships, there were factors influencing her trepidation to form a family. She describes her parents as not being "very pleased" when she told them she was pregnant. Having had what she remembers as "a terrible relationship with my mother" did not give her a good sense of how to be a mother and this left her hesitant, nervous: "I wanted them [children] but I didn't know how I was going to deal with it."

Someone else remembered the significance of immigrating to Canada on her decision to adopt a child. She found a lack of family members involved in her daily life "a very isolated type of experience, being in a country with no past and no future...not
having anybody that you know or ever will be connected to you." While she remembers her growing up years in a very close extended family, she "always had that sense of sort of aloneness and loneliness that I think is a part of it."

In retrospect, three of the participants remember the significance of practice at motherhood in helping to shape their future decision about adoptive motherhood. One woman had her own birth child at 34 years old as a single woman and found it "...a wonderful experience." She emphasized that her son has been "so wonderful in my life that I felt I wanted to share that with someone else." Two others had been foster parents. Expressions such as "Having had a really good parenting experience;" "I knew I could do it, it was like a proving ground;" "I got to see how it was and it was fine;" "that was part of returning my confidence" exemplified the importance of having known what it meant to be a mother and having the assurance that they were capable of parenting.

Pivotal life circumstances were factors in determining life's direction and solidifying the importance of having the experience of motherhood. Seven of the women emphasized that, in their transition to single parent adoption, there were predominant events in their lives which led to a life assessment. Whether it was a permanent disability, an illness, the loss of parents, the loss of a husband, the loss of future family generations, or reaching a perceived peak in personal and professional achievements, profoundly appraising life situations clarified for these women, their yearning and deepened their resolve to become a mother. Observations such as "I didn't really care anything about anything else...I hadn't had that experience of raising a child;" "the only thing that wasn't perfect in my life was this emptiness of my future as much as anything;" "I had to really take a good look and decide whether I wanted to be by myself for the rest of my life;" "I've done everything I need to do I mean, I've done a lot of things I wanted to do I've done travelling, I've worked in a couple of different places...I started thinking, well I'll give myself a couple of years if it [adoption] doesn't happen, I'll go through the hoops and if it doesn't happen, that's it;" "I've pretty much done everything that I've ever wanted to do.
I've travelled, I've had my own business, I've been a developer, I've done everything I wanted to do and the only thing I hadn't done that I ever wanted to do was being a mum," reflected an evaluation of one's life and what was missing.

The decision to become a single adoptive parent is born out of **processing options on how to become a single mother**. For some, the direction was crystal clear. Whether or not they were able to conceive was arbitrary. Their desire to adopt generated from the knowledge that there are many children who are suffering and need a loving, caring home. Two of the women shared their thinking on this: "I wanted to adopt a child that really needed a home ...I spend a lot of time in India and I could see a lot of children there that needed, NEEDED a home...most children in Canada in the worst scenario, have a pretty good life;" "...what I wanted was an orphan, a child who did not have parents...I wanted to give someone a home who had no possibility of one."

One means of research and analysis was to pursue the avenue that would offer the most guarantee of success. Three women expressed their reasoning on this: "I didn't want to embark on something that was going to not result in my getting a baby;" "I didn't want to do invitro because there's no guarantee with that;" "I knew if I went to China I would come back with a healthy baby girl;" "it was more like adoption was for sure I would get one well, not for sure but probably."

One woman cited **the significance of working with a therapist** as an important means to understanding what the possibility of this life direction would mean for her. She wanted to "...talk to someone about adoption...I wanted to deal with Jewish issues surrounding adoption. I needed to think out loud with somebody who knew what I was talking about. It was definitely just the most effective therapy I've ever had. Three sessions I knew what to do."

For some, the transition to single parent adoption included an elaborate exploration of how to become a single mother from the number of choices available to women today. While making oneself knowledgeable of the options, this experience involved struggling to
gain an awareness of one's deeper values and making a decision about motherhood based on those personal truths.

For several of the women who considered donor insemination, they wrestled with whether this modern form of family planning fit with their beliefs. One woman said, "I did think about having my own kid through artificial insemination or having a child with a friend and I couldn't really find anything that I felt comfortable with." Some chose not to pursue this route because it was not consistent with their personal values around quality of life for the donor father and for the child. One woman explained: "I didn't feel right having a baby with a friend that I didn't really want to share the baby with, and it didn't feel right having a baby with a stranger." If a known donor was considered, how this would impact the father and the child was contemplated. Another woman expressed it this way: "I felt that this need for me to have a child was, oh, I need to have a child so I go ahead and I have artificial insemination or I just meet a guy and go out with him until I know it's safe to have sex with him, get pregnant and leave him in the lurch." The same woman struggled with how her decision would impact the child: "I felt it was selfish for me to bring a child into the world that wouldn't have a father automatically, because of a need I have to be a mother;" "I wanted my child to have a father, to have the chance of having a father, let's put it that way, because I think that role is very important and so I really struggled over it." Another participant realized: "I wasn't willing to just go out and ask some man to father a child and then sort of be there or not as to whether he wanted to be or not."

For one woman, an unknown donor was not appealing because of possible health risks for the woman and ultimately the child: "I kept thinking about that woman... who had gone that route and got AIDS;" and there are "the complications of mixing your genes with somebody you don't know anything about." Because the relationship exclusively involves donor sperm, there was "the perception that mixing your genes with someone is a very personal, intimate thing." Another participant who contemplated donor insemination,
envisioned the personal toll this method may have taken on her: "the emotional wear and tear that something like invitro takes, I just don't think you can do it as a single person."

Two participants attempted to become pregnant through donor insemination with an unknown donor but in both cases, this did not result in a pregnancy. Another searched for an appropriate known donor: "it took a long time until I found somebody that was the right person." In part, this quest was based on wanting to find an individual who would not want to be involved either in the woman's life or, if she was to become pregnant, in the life of the family. "It was a very difficult thing because either they wanted to move in with me or move next door or somehow develop a relationship with me and I didn't want that. I didn't want any constraints on my parenting I guess, or on myself."

A critical aspect of the transition to single parent adoption for two of the women in the study included an internal shift around their perceptions and beliefs regarding adoption. For one this involved a process of accepting international adoption philosophically. Initially she was against international adoption because she thought "...that it was totally inappropriate to take children out of their culture, there were totally fallacious attitudes about the North American culture, that anybody that would be coming from a different culture would sort of see North America, Canada whatever, as the ideal place to be and they would give up their child in a misguided way."

For another woman, accepting adoption included an integrative process involving a fundamental shift from the importance of genetic values to core values. Her desire to biologically produce a child in order to see herself in her child and to have the child carry on the family line became less about genetic similarities and more about values learned within her family of origin. She came to realize that "...what's important in your family, the honesty, the integrity, all those things that are important in the end, that's what's really important to pass on and that you don't have to be genetically related to the child to be able to pass on those family traits." For her, "It was a shift more from biological, physical to emotional, spiritual, sociological type of traits that you hand down because I think even
though we leave home and we go and we learn other values and we shed some things that we learned from our parents, I think no matter how much you change or you try to go out and change yourself, what you grew up with is so much a core of who you are.

As the women in this study struggled with the inner complexities of making motherhood a part of their lives, a key turning point often resulted in transforming the idea from a hypothetical possibility into the potential for achieving their goal. Through what was often experienced as synchronicity, four women explained that when the timing of an external critical event coincided with the degree to which they had integrated their life circumstances, the real possibility of adoption suddenly jelled. This outer coincidence involved the first time each heard of a successful adoption which in some way was consistent with their situation. One woman, who all of a sudden became aware of the possibility of adopting from China as a single person, saw this as a precipitating factor: "...as soon as I saw an avenue I had no problem jumping in and doing it." Another explained it this way: "The external thing that triggered it was that I met a friend of a friend who had gone to Russia and adopted a baby as a single mother and I think until I'd seen that, it hadn't even crossed my mind that that was an option. Until then, I hadn't thought about it at all consciously." One woman "...heard this joy in his voice [a friend who had adopted] that I had never heard and it was also the first time I had really heard that you can adopt from Russia...it was like that morning when I woke up and I said, I don't think I'm finished with this." Another stressed the significance of such an event as follows: "When I was ready to make that decision, you know, I heard about a friend of a friend who'd adopted and it all kind of clicked into place without me having to sort of consciously make the decision...yeah, that was the thing that I needed to just click everything in place. I think all the pieces were there they just hadn't quite clicked into place."

Intermixed with the inner psychological processes around adoption, there develops an outer focusing on the feasibility of adopting as a single parent. International adoption is an extremely expensive process and seven of the participants stressed the necessity of
money. While all of the women in this study have or have had professional careers, money was still an issue for the majority. As one participant said, "all of us would like to think that money doesn't enter into children but it does...money, believe it or not, is a big part of the process and overwhelming at times." Acquiring a substantial amount of money through inheritance made adoption possible for two of the women in the study. One woman attributed her financial means to having worked extremely hard as well as having received a legal settlement. Another participant received financial support from her parents and stated she couldn't have done it without their help "without taking out a second mortgage." According to another, "money's a factor for sure and I think everyone who adopts internationally has debts, there's no question."

As they began to pursue the possibility of adoption, half of the participants felt impeded by single parent bias. While internally the shift to adoption was integrated, the external process presented obstacles related to being a single person and a prospective parent. Five women encountered this bias in either pursuing local or international adoptions. Expressions such as "I had wanted to adopt from Mexico...I had to be married and I had to be Catholic;" "To adopt in Canada, I was eligible to adopt an infant but my chances of being chosen as a birth mother were virtually nil;" "they were the only ones that would accept me as a person of my age and being single;" "producing your own child is a lot easier than adopting a child and as a single parent that's even more true;" "they think that mom plus dad plus child is a family so it was definitely a negative for me;" "babies were simply not available to single women;" "local adoptions, they're really not available for single women;" "some countries won't accept single parent adopters at all" exemplified that these women, because they were single, experienced prejudice as prospective adoptive parents.

Several of the women in this study described a part of the process which reflected shifting focuses - preparing to be a single mother. For one woman this included a time of inner reflection on balancing between self and role of motherhood. While she "put
a lot of thought into what I was going to have to do in order to be a good mother," she also recognized her need for time alone. While waiting for the adoption, she reflected on the irrevocable changes to come and how she would miss her times of solitude. Another aspect of this theme regarding balance was considered in the importance of compatibility between career and mothering style. For the same person, being able to work and have her child with her was a major part of her decision. The support of her coworkers was like "an extended family" and in terms of her values, this was an ideal job to have. "I don't know if I would have even gone through with it if I was working in a corporate position."

Focusing on the possibility of adopting a child, the significance of a connection to the adopted child's culture became invested with meaning. In retrospect, six women realized the importance of this connection helped to guide the process forward. One woman expressed an affinity for India, where she spends a great deal of time in relation to her work. Another had travelled extensively in South America and was very familiar with the language and culture. As well, she noted that her biological son's father lives there. For two other participants, feeling a link to their adopted child's country of origin because of ethnic and cultural heritage was a critical factor in psychologically propelling the process forward. Another realized the appeal of adopting Tibetan refugees from Nepal. She is a Buddhist. Phrases such as "we're both Russian Jews so I felt some connection;" "I think that was part of why the whole thing seemed so appealing;" "the fact that most of my family was there [Russia];" [being attracted to a country], for some reason that was important to me;" "I considered other countries, my heart wasn't in any of them, India was what I wanted" exemplified that for some women they felt a connection to the child through something more than the family they were creating.

When a woman has begun to direct her energies toward adopting a child, she may consider the ramifications of international adoption (race and racism: self, family and community). For some, it involves a genuine and candid exploration of their own views
on race and the impact of creating a biracial family. One woman explained, "I knew it would be different than having a child that was the same race as me because it would be more obvious that the child was adopted but I just figured I would overcome any problems." For others, the issue of race was more complex. "After a lot of consideration, I realized I didn't want to adopt a biracial baby cause I was just feeling I'm single, this kid's gonna be adopted, how many things can you heap on one kid's shoulders, they're gonna have enough stuff to deal with...do I need to add this whole transracial element?" "I was concerned about the race thing I and was also concerned about my own reactions, my own sort of racist tendencies like if I got a completely black kid from Africa;" "I actually wanted a Guatemala kid cause they would look more like me;" "How was I going to feel having a daughter who was completely black or brown;" "I think kids have a slightly tougher road to hoe when momma looks very different from what the child does in this country, especially. It's not a mixed race country as many other countries are."

Knowing the racial views of family members was important in a woman's decision to adopt internationally. Six of the participants cited growing up with egalitarian views on race impacted their ability to conceive of a biracial adoption. Examples such as "My family's pretty good in that they would support me in anything I chose to do and of course there was no racial bias or anything like that;" "Race has just never been an issue in my family, you know, all people are good and all people are treated the same;" "I was an only child and I just grew up you know, that all people were alright;" "I can remember sitting at the dining table with my father and saying do you think there's people on other planets? and he said, yup, there's probably some little girl sitting down to supper with her daddy somewhere else right now and it just wasn't an issue you know, that difference wasn't a reason to dislike or for there to be difficulties;" and "I don't think that you would go into it if you had a racist background of some sort, say, if your family was of that mentality...you would have to choose to turn your back on them and not worry about what they thought and look for your support in other ways and not count on them;" "it's important to get that
straight right from the start, you know, are you going to be apart of this or not and if they're not, well, you have to say good-bye to them" emphasized the significance of having family members' recognize and honor this prospective transracial family.

Several of the participants became acutely aware of the perceived differences of their newly formed family within the community. For some, racism has become a part of every day life. This was exemplified in the following ways: "Some people think that what I've done is very wrong and I've had to deal with that too;" "Somebody who purported to be a very close friend barely acknowledges her and I know it's because she's Chinese;" and "thinking that removing a child from her culture and that kind of thing is not appropriate and that this isn't a child of your blood so it's not really your child."

In looking back on this life changing experience, all of the women spoke of the distinct importance of **connection and the importance of support.** Through the complicated stages of making the dream of motherhood a reality, support was the thread which held the process together. In the early phases, women coming into contact with single adoptive mothers to whom they could relate found this a significantly motivating factor in their transition to single parent adoption. They had met a "kindred spirit." Several of the women voiced the relevance of this experience. "I saw her soon after she'd come back with her baby and saw this beautiful baby and it had all gone very well for her and she was very happy and she was around my age...there was other ways in which her experience seemed like it might be similar to mine;" "The fact that it was another single woman, another professional woman so I could kind of relate to her life situation as well;"

"...the phone number I was given of somebody who had adopted about 7 years previously and she had adopted from Nepal so I phoned her up I just went through all my files, found her phone number, this is a year later, and she was still there...she was 45 and a Buddhist and we kinda clicked;" "I called this woman and went over and saw her little boy...she had just been home about a month...that sort of was what started me on the whole process."
As one embarks on the adoption process, the support of a knowledgeable organization which provided tangible success stories was considered critical. The importance of this kind of support was evidenced in the following expressions: "You have to really want to do it or have a really strong support group of friends and the organization behind you, people that have done it before and survived and come to meetings and tell you about it, that they've survived it and you can too;" "I really thrived on those newsletters and the conference once a year to really get filled up again with the good news of it and just day to day, you know, that it works out, to know that it works out for most people really really well and they still feel good about the decision they made;" "it's really really important to belong to an organization where you hear about good news stories even in the newsletter every other month;" "APA is just a godsend...they're very caring people;" "the newsletter also is wonderful because you can take heart when you read about babies coming home and where other parents have succeeded;" "you can see a real picture of a baby that's actually come home and so you can say mine's gonna work."

A very meaningful form of support throughout the process - from it's inception, to ongoing, daily life once this new family is formed - is that of one's own extended family. For several of the participants, it was critical that their own parents and siblings be affirming of their decision to adopt a child. This was emphasized by the following: "my mum and I are very close so it was very important to me that my mother be okay with this;" "the support was there as far as my family going okay that's what you're going to do and I'll support you with whatever you do. There was never any question that I was going to be disowned or anything;" "The support from my own family was well, boy, I mean this is a tough one but whatever you do I'm there for you which was nice;" "I told them [my parents] what I was going to do. My father said you know, you could help a lot of children in the world without doing this and I said but I wouldn't be a mother and he went oh, he got it, that was it, that was the end of the conversation;" "my mother at first went oh my god, she wouldn't talk about it, she'd change the subject and then after my father died
she was especially interested she became very much fixated on it...she was very very excited about the whole thing and became more so; "my family's pretty good in that they would support me in anything I chose to do;" "I called my mother It was probably the happiest phone call she ever got. She was thrilled, my mother has been totally supportive;" "My mother was so thrilled she finally got a granddaughter." One woman explained the importance of ongoing family involvement for her daughter in this way: "I have an extended family who thinks a lot of my daughter...I want to offer her everything I can, therefore, I feel my family is very important in terms of the love that they give her and also just that family busyness feeling" "It's the idea that she's got other relatives and that they care about her and other people that she can I guess draw from."

Six of the women in the study mentioned the importance of friendships around their decision to adopt a child, not just in terms of the help that they could offer, but in their acceptance of the adoption as well. Several women spoke about this in the following examples: "I knew I had good friends that would accept and understand and be happy for me;" "most of my friends were good;" "I think another thing that's important is to have a good support group, whether that be friends or family...I don't know if it's a shoulder to cry on but somebody to sort of prop you up occasionally when you're sort of worn out;" "some of my friends thought it was a great idea, some thought I was crazy;" "my friends were very excited, just extremely excited about it and the people I work with had no problems either;" "I have some really good friends that have just been very supportive;" "I have a really strong support system so I have lots of help;" and "I was on the Internet a lot and I actually got to know a few people in person through the Internet...and that was really helpful." One woman found that while support was very important to her, she experienced the transition to single adoptive motherhood as a personal process. She explained it this way: "It was very intimate and it was very private...I didn't make public the fact that I was doing this I was very quiet about it. It was very private...It wasn't something that I felt comfortable sharing with everybody, I guess."
For two of the women, adopting a child meant a significant change to some of their existing friendships. This experience was characterized by the following: "she fell away at that point and then I had one other close friend who as soon as I brought _____ home, I never saw again;" "there's been some tension in different aspects and it always, it comes where you don't expect it, some of the people that you thought would have felt would have been the most supportive, have been the least."

A salient aspect of the transition to single parent adoption involved developing a connection to the adopted child. Four women in this study expressed their varied experiences. For one woman who pursued a private adoption, her initial reaction to the two children she would eventually be adopting was this: "I thought my god, what an ugly looking kid, I thought my god, this kid looks just like a monkey, these are the most terrible looking kids I've ever seen in my whole life!" Her daughter's reaction to her was no less dramatic: "...she took one look at me and she started to spit and kick cause her mum had told her that I was gonna be her mum and she didn't want that...every time she saw me she'd pull her mother's hair and kick and spit and scream...she would say I don't want you to be my mummy and I'm not going to Canada." For two other women who cited connection to their adopted child as a significant part of the adoption process, they too had the experience that connection developed over time. One expressed it this way: "when they first showed me ______ picture, I was looking at it going, Is this my baby?...it just didn't look like what I was thinking she would look like...I had it in my head that I thought it was going to be a boy...I just kind of thought is this her? ...but then over the period...even though I didn't see any more pictures or anything or have anything more to go by, it just starts to feel like this is her." For another, in the early stages of the process, it went this way: "I looked at the pictures and it wasn't quite what I was expecting...I was probably expecting a really blond, blue eyed baby and that wasn't what I got...it was weird, the pictures of her did not fit the image of what I thought I was going to get...people say, Oh, I saw her picture and I knew she was mine. I didn't get that...It wasn't love at first
thought...the connection took a while, it took a while." For a fourth participant, the
connection to her adopted daughter was immediate: "They sent me her baby pictures of
when she was probably about two months old, and I just looked at these pictures and you
just fell in love immediately. I couldn't believe that." These women demonstrated a
diverse range of experiences in developing a bond with their adopted child.

Applying to adopt a child internationally is the beginning of a long and intricate
journey towards motherhood. Nine of the ten women interviewed described experiencing
the process of adoption as difficult. Three women outlined it this way: "It's a very
difficult process to fight your way through;" "A very frustrating process;" "You have to
really commit yourself to it and be entirely focused because it's not an easy thing to do."
"There's a lot of negativity in the process instead of encouraging people to look at different
things...I just found it very discouraging;" "the process is difficult because it's not
truthful;" "I wouldn't trust anything, any information that you get."

Four of the participants stressed the frustration and pain they felt during the very
lengthy waiting process. Expressions such as "During that period it was really really
difficult to wait for her to become available;" "I had to go every day every day every day
for 8 hours and it was cold and I got so sick every day and I just would sit there and sit
there and sit there... I was there 9 weeks altogether just trying to get all these different
people to approve and sign...It was just 9 weeks of total emotional frustration;" "Your
entire life is broken up into these two week blocks of time and you're waiting for
something;" "I have a pretty calm personality but I mean I was losing it;" "it was the same
thing going through the infertility stuff because it's like you're just always waiting"
portrayed the strain these women felt during the long waiting period of the adoption
process.

One woman expressed the strain she experienced when in the adopted child's
country: "I remember feeling at that point, why did I open myself up to this? The potential
for losing her was horrendous... I was thinking it would have been just better if I never
had pursued this cause it seemed like it wasn't going to happen but then it did...I'd never been in a situation where I felt so much at the mercy of people, people that I really didn't know...That was the thing that was very unusual. I'd never given myself over to a process like this."

Another woman recounted the hardship she felt: "It's a difficult process to do and I can understand why people get discouraged with it. You have to fight to get this adoption through and it's an emotional roller coaster because you know at least for international adoption, it's an absolute up and down process where things are coming together and all of a sudden, it's all off and then the child that you have focused on, something has happened, somebody else has the child now. I guess it's not for cowards, it's a hard process I don't mean to be negative to you but it's a hard process. Some days you say why don't I just get pregnant, it would be so much easier."

The essence of this arduous journey to motherhood was epitomized by some in experiencing the adoption process as a metaphorical pregnancy. Four women compared their transition to single parent adoption to the experience of pregnancy. Such phrases as "I felt very pregnant;" "the whole process to me seemed very much like a pregnancy;" "I really saw it as very emotionally following a pregnancy" embodied this overall feeling. Four of the women felt that their experience of the actual adoption process very much paralleled the stages of pregnancy. "it's like the first three months nothing's really real cause it' a lot of paperwork...instead of morning sickness I had to get things signed by a notary every day instead of cretching in a toilet;" "you go through pregnancy and you have nesting behaviours. I went crazy painting her room and cleaning things...the nesting behaviours were incredible;" "The second trimester's sort of calm, nothing's really happening...and then the last trimester you've got to get ready;" "Just before I went to get her it was like labour;" and "there was a whole period I liken it to labour, you know, acute acute pain and anxiety." One woman summed up what this meant to her: "I always kid [my friend] my metaphorical pregnancy and my delivery and she was the midwife that helped
the deliverer. It's a good metaphor because there really is sort of parallels in that time of waiting and the birth...I think there's a similar process all the way through. There's lots of differences but there's probably more similarities than there are differences."

Six of the women in this study shared how they made sense of the experience which led them to become a single adoptive mother (The meaning of the transition to single parent adoption: yearning fulfilled). For three participants, the concept of generativity, the commitment to caring for other was important. One woman described "the transition as the commitment, that's kind of the big umbrella." Another thought of it this way: "I mean big gobs of money isn't really the thing that defines you as making some kind of contribution." For another, to come to a decision about motherhood was the consummation of a difficult, intense, lengthy intrapersonal struggle and was crystallized in her sense of commitment to the process of caring for a child. "I just wanted to make it happen because once I made the decision I wanted to go with it and I don't think anything I've ever done in my life was so focused and so directed. I knew what I wanted to do and nobody was going to stop me." One woman understood her sense of commitment through a daily ritual: "It was almost a mantra. I used to walk around saying I have a healthy, intelligent, beautiful, baby girl. I just believed that with my whole heart and soul...it was a prayer in motion." "When I made it, the decision, I just made it and I was committed to it."

Another related her experience to a mid-life peak: age as a positive factor. She explained, "it isn't as much a mid-life crisis as a mid-life peak. I think being a single parent is easier when you're older because there's a lot of responsibility, you really need to have a good job, to have your career set up and have an income and have your life together. It wasn't until I started thinking about the age, the job, the money, giving up on the guys, you know, there's four or five really big factors there that really have to come together and I think they do come together only with age in a sense. In your 20's or 30's, you don't see yourself as a middle aged woman, you know, it's only when you start to get up there that they become more present in your mind and you have to grapple with that. It was cathartic
I think 35, 45 I think is when you deal with all of those issues. I think the body is shutting down and you have to make a choice. Are you going to do this now or are you going to adopt or what are you going to do?

For another, it included the importance of spirituality. She described it this way: "I'm sure my Buddhist practice is a part of it somewhere, you know, that there is right livelihood, there is an importance to life, that you do something useful while you're here."
Chapter Five

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore the lived experience of single women at midlife who adopt a child. The research question was: "For women at mid-life, what is the meaning and lived experience of the transition leading to single parent adoption?" This chapter includes a comparison of the results of this study to the existing literature presented in chapter two; additional findings not currently addressed in the literature; suggestions for future research; and a discussion of the implications for counselling. A brief summary concludes this chapter.

A Comparison to the Existing Literature

Many of the women who participated in this study expressed their gratitude at being able to share their experience of the transition to single parent adoption. Each woman's perspective contributed to the growing body of knowledge on women at midlife, as well as to enlarge upon the small existing research base on single adoptive mothers.

The ten participants in this study were all well-educated, Caucasian, economically self-reliant women ranging in age from 43 to 52 years. Education and financial stability factors were consistent with earlier research (Dougherty, 1978; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Marindin, 1992, as cited in Shireman, 1996). The age range of participants reflected the findings of studies by Jordan and Little (1965) and by Groze and Rosenthal (1991) compared to studies from private American single parent adoptive organizations that indicated most single adoptive parents were in their mid to late thirties (Dougherty, 1978; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Marindin, 1992, as cited in Shireman, 1996). The fact that all of the women were white conforms with previous findings that the majority of parents adopting internationally are Caucasian (Barrett & Aubin, 1990). Nine of the participants dwelled within an urban setting while one lived in a more rural environment. However, the
fact that most of the women lived within, or in close proximity to, a major city is not necessarily suggestive of an "urban element" with regards to single parent adoption, although an earlier study by Feigelman and Silverman (1977) of 58 single parents also found that single adopters frequently lived in urban areas. Research involving a larger number of participants would be needed to address the relevancy of this finding. Nine of the women adopted girls, with one woman adopting two children, a boy and a girl. The majority of the participants adopting girls is consistent with the existing literature which has found that most people adopt a child of the same sex (Barrett & Aubin, 1990; Shireman & Johnson, 1976; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Groze & Rosenthal, 1991, as cited in Shireman, 1995).

In accordance with the nature of qualitative research, heterogeneity of participants was expected and valued in this study as a reflection of the real diversity of women's lives. While the participants were not asked about sexual orientation, it was interesting to note that in discussing the transition to single parent adoption, only two of the women alluded to this aspect of their identity regarding their heterosexual orientation.

One of the final readers of the results of this study reflected on an aspect of her transition which was not described by any of the participants in the study and, again, this underscores the diverse nature of the process. Specifically, her desire for motherhood was never experienced as a yearning, but more of an ebb and flow feeling, more intense at some periods of her life than others, but never as an unending ache. Her yearning began when she actually received photos of her prospective daughter and she said that it was this tangible event, versus the abstraction of adopting an unidentified child, which committed her to the process of adoption.

For many of the women in the study, revisions of identity during midlife involved a significant process of letting go of expected or assumed life outcomes, forming new concepts of motherhood as part of their identity, and then actualizing their desire. While this transition process resembled Bridges' (1980) notions of endings, a neutral zone,
followed by new beginnings, there was no phase that anyone described which focused on not knowing what would urge their lives forward. The process was always embedded in knowing the desire to become a mother. The most conspicuous problem related to not if, but how, to achieve the goal of motherhood. In this sense, the transition process leading to single parent adoption is intertwined with what existing theories on development have described as revisions of identity during midlife, whereby women move towards fulfilling a sense of balance by incorporating missing aspects of themselves (Anderson & Stewart, 1994; Hardin, 1996; Josselson, 1996). From this perspective, the process leading to single parent adoption may demonstrate a positive developmental expression of generativity and midlife identity formation rather than a remedial solution to fill a void in one's life.

Recent conceptualizations of generativity reflect its paradoxical nature, in which a process of knowing and following our deeper longings is consummate with transcending our own needs and desires (Erikson, 1982; Hardin, 1996; Schlossberg, 1996). Self identity is expressed through the giving of the most vital parts of ourselves to others. The women who participated in this study seem to embody what many theorists conceive of as generativity.

The question of how a woman chooses the role of single adoptive parent was an important element of this study. The depth to which women described exploring this aspect of the transition to single adoptive motherhood clearly enhances earlier research (Dougherty, 1978; Shireman & Johnson, 1976). Six of the ten participants ultimately decided to adopt a child as their first choice in becoming a mother. Half of the participants spoke of the original importance they placed on having their own biological child. Miller (1992), in her study, suggested that people choosing to adopt may not have as strong a need as others to genetically replicate themselves. An early study by Dougherty (1978) found that thirty-nine of the eighty-eight participants (44%) decided to adopt over "natural" pregnancy. However, at the time of Dougherty's study, alternative options for pregnancy such as donor insemination did not exist. While fertility centres in many major cities offer
such a procedure to single women today, only one woman in this present study elected to attempt pregnancy by this means. One other participant attempted to become pregnant through a known donor. Even though "times have changed," apparently for some women, adoption fits best with their personal values and beliefs. This strongly suggests a need to understand the complex decision making process around adoption, rather than simplistically seeing adoption as "a last resort." Having engaged in the personal struggle which ultimately results in the perception of adoption as a choice may, in part, reflect the optimism and sense of self efficacy which these women then appear to bring to their family life. This may reflect the findings of Siegel's (1998) study which showed that single adoptive mothers reported more satisfaction with their life situation compared to single birth mothers.

The results of this study related to literature regarding infertility (Bartholet, 1993; Berg & Wilson, 1991; Daniluk, 1988; Mahlstedt, 1985; Shapiro, 1986; Solomon, 1988, as cited in Daniluk, 1996; Brooks-Gunn & Kirsh, 1981) suggest there was no singular way that women responded to not giving birth. Some of the women in the study who realized that they would not have a biological child described significant experiences of mourning which were consistent with the processes of grief and loss characterized in the existing literature on infertility. However, for several of the women in this study, this period of mourning did not evolve from failed attempts at becoming pregnant but was based on the realization that there expectations around marriage and motherhood would remain unmet. These findings reflect Schlossberg's (1995; 1996) conceptualizations of non-events. Of interest, other participants who described either nominal or concerted efforts to become pregnant did not necessarily stress a deeply felt loss around infertility. They realized that a successful pregnancy was unlikely and refocused their goals for achieving motherhood. These findings stress the importance of assuming uniqueness in coming to understand a woman's psychological responses to child bearing and how they impact her decision to adopt.
Post adoption studies by Shireman (1976; 1995) cited low income as a concern for women who had adopted a child as a single parent. This present study focused on the transition period leading to adoption and the findings suggest that financial considerations at the beginning of the adoption process are significant, even though all of the participants have, or have had, professional careers. Amassing the necessary funds may delay starting the adoption process, even when a woman has realized that adopting a child is the right decision for her. Beginning family life, having significantly depleted savings as well as having to perhaps borrow money in order to complete the adoption process, may be a contributing factor to the financial concerns discussed in Shireman's work.

None of the participants elaborated on their single status as a salient, critical feature in their transition to single parent adoption. No one mentioned the impact of becoming a single parent on potential relationships as an element in determining their future course of action. Several of the women stressed the advantage of consistent parenting style, and in contemplating the creation of their families, they said they would never marry because of the possibility of family breakdown, to which they would not want to subject their child. It appears that the desire to become a mother and to maintain a sense of stable care for their child was more important than the desire for a prospective mate.

Feigelman and Silverman (1983) examined the importance of support from family, friends and neighbours in both the child's and the adoptive parent's adjustment to adoption. The findings of the present study concurred with previous results and added new insights. For many of the women in this study, having their parents' endorsement of their adoption plans was extremely important in the decision making process. It was not just about having extended family help once the single adoptive family is formed. Parental support of the idea to adopt appeared to be psychologically encouraging and necessary for many of the women, validating the importance of motherhood in their lives. Interconnected with this parental backing for their plan to adopt is the necessity of knowing that their own parent's racial beliefs are congruent with the creation of a biracial family.
Concerns regarding the biracial element of the adoptive family superceded any concerns expressed around creating a family as a single parent. While previous research addressed racial discrimination as a component of daily life for a transracial family (Justice Institute of B.C, 1995; Shireman & Johnson, 1986), none of the research to date included the candid reflections some of the participants from this study offered regarding their own inner process, and sometimes struggle, around the issue of race. Rather than seeing this as a blatant form of prejudice, it seems to represent a very honest self-examination of racial beliefs and issues, crucial to creating a healthy family dynamic in the future adoptive family.

Many today refer to the world as a "global village." Along with a growing sense of interconnectedness amongst people, is the hope for many that a pattern of history where prejudice and bias have often been the norm is declining. However, we are still a long way from eradicating hostility and enmity based on differences. Several of the participants in this study and other women I know who have adopted as single parents have commented to me anecdotally on the impact of racial discrimination in their daily lives. Women have described situations in which their children have been bullied, teased and taunted by other children because of their colour. Adults comment in front of the children on the biracial nature of the family. Others show a complete intolerance for this form of family. A participant in this study described to me a recent altercation she had with someone on the street in which an adult, disturbed by the sight of a Caucasian mother with a Chinese child, spat at them. As one participant put it, "You are never invisible again."

Numerous critical issues have been raised around Caucasians adopting children of colour which have been invaluable in addressing serious shortcomings which result in deleterious outcomes for adopted children (Barrett & Aubin, 1990; Bartholet, 1993; Shireman & Johnson, 1986). However, the kinds of behaviours described above will potentially have harmful, long term effects. This knowledge is a humbling attestment to the need for understanding some of the deeply held beliefs regarding race and the fears
associated with those beliefs. As people struggle to maintain a sense of their genetic and cultural heritage in an ever changing world, these women, who are pioneers in creating new forms of family, and more poignantly their children, are highly visible targets for other's fears and intolerance.

Results of this study concurred with earlier findings which reported that international adoption is difficult and risky (Justice Institute of B.C., 1995; Shireman, 1995). Nine of the women in this study described the actual process of adopting a child as extremely demanding and challenging. Their perseverance corroborated the findings of Anderson and Stewart (1994) who found that single women "...who chose to become mothers in midlife wanted this experience with a passion" (p. 229). Of note, one of the participants in this study later reported that she is in the process of adopting a second child and has found the experience very different. In short, she described a procedure involving far less political and bureaucratic adversity. It is my hope that her experience suggests that the findings of this study are already anachronistic, with government policies improving to benefit both the prospective parent and adopted child.

**Additional Findings**

An important result of this research is it's contribution to the new studies on female decision making. The findings suggest that while the decision to adopt is considered in relation and affiliation, it is also derived from a fierce sense of self determination. As early as 1970, Branham's study described single adoptive mothers as demonstrating autonomy (i.e. a relatively high level of emotional maturity, high capacity for frustration tolerance, and an ability to pursue a relatively independent course in life, without being overly influenced about what other people think). New theoretical frameworks suggest that women make decisions by considering factors traditionally related to males (rules, roles, responsibilities and justice), with factors of affiliation, relationships, and connectedness (Veeder, 1992). Earlier based theories (for example, Freud, 1914, 1921, 1925, 1931;
Erikson, 1965, as cited in Veeder, 1992), attributing these latter factors to characteristically female forms of decision making, described decisions made by women as "...indecisive, passive, lacking on logic, realism, and incisiveness, contextual, weak, wishy-washy, and emotional" (Veeder, 1992, p. 02). In order to examine the qualities attributed to women's decision making from a different and progressive angle, Veeder (1992) stresses the need for studies of women's lives which "...adopt a flexible and creative research design and methodology stressing the value-laden, subjective, complex, and embedded-in-the-situation texture of women's lives" (pg. 2-3). This qualitative study augments the growing knowledge base on women's decision making by illustrating elements of the participants' decision making processes leading to single parent adoption.

Veeder suggests that studies show women in adulthood are "...as instrumental, active, and interested in autonomy, individuation, and competent performance as adult males" but to this equation, women add "...a value for attachment, relationship, or affiliation. It is a process of constantly evolving individuated attachment or connected autonomy" (Veeder, 1992, p.20). She suggests that by reframing the factors of affiliation, relationships, and connectedness as positive qualities in the decision making process, they take on a different meaning in relation to the idea of power as it pertains to women, "...since to make decisions is to make things happen, to effect some kind of action and change or to wield power" (Veeder, 1992, p. 24).

In gaining a better understanding of how women experience the transition to single parent adoption, it became apparent to me that the participants in this study exuded an ability essential to accomplishing their goal - resiliency. O'Gorman (1994) defines resilience as "...the ability to align ourselves with our strengths and to recognize our personal power" (pg. 01) She says that having developed the quality of resilience, we are able to take charge of our lives "...and find for ourselves the meaning, richness, and purpose we seek" (O'Gorman, pg. 02). People who demonstrate resiliency possess the ability "...to recover from the adversity they have experienced and retain a positive self-
image and view of the world." Most of the women in this study included elements of profound loss, grief and distress as they described their personal process leading to single parent adoption. Yet they had clearly developed the strength and wisdom to face the changes and losses that, in part, comprised their life stories and ultimately regained control over their lives. Through their resiliency, these women were able to know what they needed and had the courage to act on that knowledge. They were able to develop new goals regarding motherhood, and then shape their actions and responses to overcome a myriad of obstacles and problems through the transition to single parent adoption.

Implications for Further Research

This research was an exploratory, descriptive study involving the experiences of a relatively small number of participants. Further research with a higher number of participants may be useful to further clarify the themes and identify factors which expand on the differences of experiences among women adopting as a single parent.

It is not only women who are seeking parenthood through adoption. Men are adopting as single parents as well. It is the researcher's hope that this study will generate further interest in single parent adoption to include exploratory studies into men's experiences of the transition leading to single parent adoption.

This study outlined some of the factors involved in navigating a challenging life transition. It may be very useful to know more about the coping strategies used. Further research into the helping and hindering factors of women moving through the transition leading to single parent adoption may be of great use to those working in the helping professions with women and men who are renegotiating the dream of parenthood.

While the women in the study often cited the importance of the support of others in helping them through this process, it may be of great benefit to know to what they attributed their resiliency. While single parent adoption has taken place for approximately 30 years, the ability for single women to adopt internationally is still a recent social phenomenon, and by most accounts, continues to be an extremely stressful endeavour.
Future studies on single parent adoption which focus on self perceptions of resiliency may not only add to our knowledge on single adoptive parents, but may be of great value in further understanding the interplay between personal attributes, family environment, and community environment, which supply us with the resilience to handle adversity.

This research identifies some of the characteristics of women adopting as single parents and provides insight into the values they bring into their newly formed families. Having this knowledge may help to structure further research on single parent families, in particular, it may help to formulate ideas about why single parent homes may be a source of strength for some children. However, the particular women who took part in this study exuded the necessary internal resources symbolizing a successful life passage and appear to have the external means to provide important continuous support. Earlier research by Shireman and Johnson (1976) categorized 12 single adoptive parents into three groups: the super parent, the isolated parent, and the demanding parent which suggested great variability in parenting styles. Ongoing studies may further distinguish personal characteristics and circumstances, and help to address some of the challenges other adoptive mothers may experience.

All of the women in this study expressed great happiness in the outcome of their decision to adopt a child. However, there is still not a great deal known about the implications of single parent adoption for the children adopted. Continued longitudinal studies similar to the one being conducted by Shireman (1976; 1985; 1986; 1995) would be extremely useful in understanding how the lives of these families develop, how the women continue to show resiliency in the daily issues of family life which in some cases, are exacerbated by such factors as racism and intolerance of differences, and how this impacts the lives of their children.
Implications for Counselling

Counsellors and therapists working with single women contemplating adoption may find this research useful in understanding the issues around motherhood and adoption, and the complexities of the transition process to single adoptive motherhood.

While only one participant in this study described eliciting the services of a counsellor as part of her transition to single parent adoption, other studies have shown that women seek professional guidance in decisions regarding motherhood (Daniluk, 1983). The nonjudgmental support of a counsellor knowledgeable about the alternatives available to women may be invaluable in the decision making process around having a child. Counsellors working in the area of women's development need to be informed of resources, and need to be highly aware of their own biases, personal values, and assumptions regarding the diverse options for attaining motherhood today.

While changes in the life of the adoptive mother may be many, the decision to adopt has major ramifications for the adopted child, who experiences an enormous transition in personal and family identity, as well as in her/his social and cultural context. Counsellors working with single adoptive parent families having access to this research may better understand the formation of the family and some of the significant issues for the mother and child.

Groze and Rosenthal (1991) report that approximately one-third of the single parents they studied (compared to one-quarter of two parent families) were working with a family therapist. Rather than implying that single adoptive parent homes demonstrate more difficulties and therefore require therapeutic intervention, the use of family therapy may underscore one of the strengths of single parent homes: to develop and use networks for support, including family, informal networks, parent support groups and the mental health services (Shireman, 1996). The increasing numbers of women creating families through single parent adoption, and many of those including therapy as part of their support, means
that mental health professionals need to be aware of the issues common and unique to single adoptive parent homes.

Some of the women participating in this study described issues they had to address around racial differences, initial feelings of ambivalence to the child they were adopting, and how the connection to the child sometimes develops over time. Knowing that these aspects can be a part of the transition may help therapists normalize, as well as to explore, some of the more confusing and uncomfortable feelings others may experience around the nature of adoption and creating a biracial family.

There appears to be solid support networks for women once they have made the decision to adopt a child. Yet this study identifies numerous points along the transition process at which some women face challenging psychological and existential issues regarding motherhood. Working with a therapist who is particularly sensitive to the intricacies around this part of a woman's identity can be very useful in making sense of life's unfolding, knowing one's heart's desire, and redirecting the future. It is my hope that this research also plays a role in enabling counsellors and therapists to discern and honour the multifaceted nature of the transition to single parent adoption.

This study raises an important issue around the experience of women who want to become a mother but who may not be in a position to adopt. International adoption is an expensive endeavour and is available to women who have the financial means to incur the high costs of the adoption process. Therapists working with women who are unable to fulfill their desire for motherhood may need to address added elements of grief and help women to gain a sense of closure before exploring other rewarding life paths.

Finally, the transition leading to single parent adoption for women in midlife can be embedded in a larger context in terms of women's psychological experiences and the issues they bring to therapy today. Women's lives do not unfold in a linear, predictable sequence - the interrelationship between biology, culture, and psychology creates variability in the sequencing of life patterns and events (Barnett, 1984). The extensive changes in our social
environment impact the social and political definitions of women's roles and the resulting therapeutic issues with which women in their middle years are struggling (Barnett, 1984). "Yet explicit work on exploring the implications of these widely discussed social shifts on the psychological experiences of women and on the issues they bring into therapy has not kept pace" (Barnett, 1984, p. 341).

There is an awareness that the old norms that socialized women and shaped their life patterns no longer apply but a lag exists "...in accepting that diversity and normlessness are the new norms" (Barnett, 1984, p. 342) and that alternative life patterns can be experienced as fulfilling and right (Barnett, 1984). There is a psychological gap between intellectually acknowledging that freedom to choose one's life pattern is vital, and the ability to embrace non-traditional roles as a way to satisfy basic personal needs (Barnett, 1984). Choosing to depart from known patterns involves risking "...the anxiety of the unknown, of being on a path untraveled by one's mother or maybe by anyone else in one's immediate circle" (Barnett, 1984, p. 347). Fully accepting one's choices for alternative life patterns can be a complex psychological process.

While it may be difficult to perceive of oneself as consciously choosing a life pattern for which there are few precedents and for which one may even be stigmatized, there are significant psychological gains to be had for doing so (Barnett, 1984). "Findings support the speculation that knowing yourself well enough to know what life pattern you want, and being in that pattern, contributes to feelings of well-being" (Barnett, 1984, p. 355). My hope is that this research will assist mental health professionals in helping women more deeply understand the choices they contemplate, the decisions with which they struggle, and to face the internal and external risks involved in taking responsibility for their lives and for their happiness.
Conclusion

The results of this exploratory study suggest that the transition to single parent adoption is a complex psychological and practical process. At a time when women have more options for attaining motherhood, societal norms still lag in supporting women who choose to become a single parent. This is reflected in the bias many single women experience in their efforts to adopt a child. The intent of adoption for the women in this study appears to be rooted in self actualization, in heartfelt love and caring for another, but part of the agenda for international adoption is still steeped in the notion of commodity. It is plagued with bureaucratic complications. Despite the inner psychological challenges and external hardships faced through this life transition, the women in this study persevered to manifest their chosen dream of motherhood through adoption. While parenting is not the objective of every woman, for some, it seems to be an integral part of who they are.

This study is timely because it has explored the intricacies of a particular phenomenon and trends indicate this knowledge may be relevant to an increasing number of women. But it is also fitting because it reflects many of our current social issues: dramatic changes in women's identity formation and development, changes to adult relationships, diverse family options, and multiculturalism. Life's inevitable evolvement challenges our understanding of who we are, our ability to tolerate change and to accept diversity. Through this gradual process, we must foremost maintain a sense of compassion and concern for the wellbeing of the children.
References


Appendix B - Research and Screening Questions

Research Question

For single women at midlife, what is the meaning and experience of the transition to single adoptive motherhood?

Screening Questions:

How did you hear about this research?

Are you between 35 and 55 years of age?

Did you adopt a child when you were a single woman?

Are you available for one interview of approximately 2 hours, and one interview of approximately 1 hour for a total of about 3 hours?
Appendix E - Orienting Statement

The purpose of this research is to find out how single women at midlife experience the transition that leads to adopting a child. To date, research in this area has essentially examined the demographics and motivations of single women who decide to adopt a child. It is my hope that this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the process which leads to adoption, to our knowledge of single adoptive mothers, and to help other women addressing the question of motherhood.

Please speak as freely as you wish about anything relating to your experience. Please speak in the first person, (i.e. using "I" statements), as much as possible. I am basically interested in learning about anything that you feel and believe is important to you about your transitional experience to single adoptive motherhood. Do you understand what I am hoping to learn about your personal story? Do you have any questions before we begin?
Appendix F - Orienting Questions

Can you think back to a time when you first thought about adopting a child?
What were some of the things you thought, felt and did then?
What was your experience up to when the final adoption papers went through?
Appendix G - Follow-up Validation Interview

Introduction

The purpose of having you read the interview transcript, case summary and themes is to provide you the opportunity to respond to how your story has been summarized, and to the researcher's interpretations of themes that emerged from your story. Please feel free to convey any comments, suggestions, or differences of opinion that you have about these interpretations. Wherever possible, your suggestions will be incorporated into the final version of this master's thesis.

Probes

Do you feel the summary of your story authentically reflects the transition you experienced to becoming a single adoptive mother?

Are there any thoughts or feelings that you would like to add to your summary?

Is there anything that I have included in your story that you would like to change or remove?
Appendix H - Empathic Generalizability

Introduction to task for theme readers:

Please read these common themes and tell me, in your experience as a single adoptive mother, how do these themes compare with your lived experience of the process which led to your decision to adopt a child?