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Department of **Social Work**

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date **July 15, 1993**
Title: Adoption Reunion and the Experience of the Adoptive Parents: An Exploratory Study

Adoption policy, practice and law are undergoing rapid change in British Columbia. One of the recent changes has been the establishment of an adoption reunion registry allowing birth parents and adoptees to become reacquainted. Studies of adoption reunion have focused primarily on the experience from the perspective of the adoptee or birth parent. There has been little attention given, to date, to the adoptive parents' experiences when their son or daughter has reunited with a birth parent. At the same time, there have been many assumptions made regarding adoptive parents' reactions to adoption reunion.

This exploratory study was intended to examine the positive and negative experiences of adoptive parents, whose adult son or daughter had recently reunited with his/her birth parent(s). However, only adoptive parents who were supportive of the reunion came forward to be interviewed. Seven sets of adoptive parents, recruited through the Adoption Reunion registry, were interviewed and a qualitative design was used to identify commonalities in the experiences of these adoptive parents.

The adoptive parents demonstrated an open attitude to adoption through their family legends, their willingness to extend their definition of family, and their recognition of their son/daughter's multiple belonging. Of particular interest in the findings is a developmental component, which suggests that the experience of reunion varies for adoptive parents depending on their developmental stage and that of their adult child.
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Acknowledgments

My interest in adoptions issues goes back to my childhood when my brothers and sister joined our family. I have watched them deal with their adoption in their individual ways, and watched my parents employ a great deal of love and common sense in providing parental guidance. I thank my parents for the unique growing up experience of our family, and my brothers and sisters for their individual contributions to that family.

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Dr. David Freeman, as Faculty advisor, allowed me a level of independence while simultaneously ensuring nothing was missed. He consistently provided me with a positive message when I most needed it. Dr. Garry Grams, as research advisor, bore with me and demonstrated great understanding as I ranged from insecurity to confusion to excitement. Dr. Don Knowles was my advisor in the M.A. in counselling program. Despite the fact that I didn't complete that degree, he generously agreed to add his wisdom to this project. I am thankful to all three.

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done. His unwavering belief in me, his support and his sympathetic ear were always there when needed. Thanks.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Legacy of an Adopted Child

Once there were two women
Who never knew each other
One you do not remember
The other you call Mother.
Two different lives
Shaped to make yours one.
One became your guiding star
The other became your sun.
The first gave you life
And the second taught you to live in it.
The first gave you a need for love
And the second was there to give it.
One gave you a nationality
The other gave you a name.
One gave you a seed of talent
The other gave you an aim.
One gave you emotions
The other calmed your fears.
One saw your first sweet smile
The other dried your tears.
One gave you up -
It was all that she could do.
The other prayed for a child
And God led her straight to you.
And now you ask me
Through your tears
The age old question
Through the years,
Heredity or environment -
Which are you the product of?
Neither, my darling, neither
Just two different kinds of love.

------------------------Author Unknown
Compliments of Adoptive Parents
Association

Adoptive parents experience parenting differently from parents whose children are born to them. Infertile parents have to deal with issues related to their infertility. Prior to placement, adoptive parents are scrutinized to determine
their suitability as parents. After placement, bonding and attachment issues may arise. Adoptive parents have to address with the child the fact of adoption and the child's history prior to placement. Parenting challenges experienced by all parents may be enhanced for adoptive parents due to the absence of genetic linkages which might otherwise provide explanation for a child's medical needs or personality characteristics. As the child reaches adolescence, identity issues arise which are unique to adoptees, and which may further test the adoptive parents' skills. As the adoptee becomes an adult the opportunity for reunion, now easily accessible in British Columbia, brings with it a new set of considerations for the adoptive parents.

Traditional adoptions in North America over the last seventy years have been based on the premise that it is in the child's best interest to maintain confidentiality and anonymity regarding birth records (Sorosky, Baran and Pannor, 1978). In the 1950's in Canada, the phrase "as if born to " was incorporated into adoption legislation (MacDonald, 1984). The intent of this phrase was to protect inheritance rights for the adoptee, but a much broader interpretation developed. The societal view of adoption developed which espoused that adoptees be regarded and treated the same as children born to adoptive parents. This negated the child's history prior to placement, and adoptive parents lacked societal permission to recognize their unique parenting challenges. The secrecy surrounding the adoption itself and the child's past served to enhance the isolation experienced by adoptive parents. Kirk (1964) recognized that for adoption to be successful, it was important to acknowledge rather than deny the differences inherent in adoptive parenting. Adoptive parents who had previously coped in isolation began to form support groups and address the issues they had in common as adoptive parents.
The potential for adoption reunion has been a controversial issue for those impacted by adoptions and particularly for adoptive parents. Throughout much of the literature discussing this controversy, adoptive parents are credited with providing the most resistance to reunion (Ensminger, 1984; Feigelman & Silverman, 1986; Gediman & Brown, 1991; Kadushin, 1988; Lifton, 1979; Redmond & Sleightholm, 1982; and Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978). Legally sanctioned adoption reunions are a recent development in British Columbia. Legislation providing for a passive reunion registry was passed in 1986, and in 1991 legislative provision for the active reunion registry was implemented. As a result, adoptive parents are again facing uncharted territory. To date, literature regarding adoption reunion has focused primarily on the adoptee and birth parents' experiences. As the adoptees involved are adults, the role of their adoptive parents in their lives seems to have been negated or dismissed in the literature. Adoptive parents seem to again be facing a challenge which they do not have societal permission to recognize, and so are isolated in their experience.

This thesis explores the issues faced by adoptive parents when the adoptee, now an adult, reunites with her/his birth parents. Many assumptions have been made regarding adoptive parents' feelings about and experience of adoption reunion. Several authors note that adoptees will often delay a search or decide not to search for fear of hurting their adoptive parents (Depp, 1982; Ensminger, 1984; Lifton, 1988, Melina, 1989; Redmond & Sleightholm, 1982; Sachdev, 1989; Sachdev, 1992; Schechtter & Bertocci, 1990; Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978; and Triseliotis, 1980). Only Depp (1982) asked adoptive parents about their experiences after a reunion has occurred. Information regarding adoptive parents' feelings toward reunion have been anticipatory in nature, i.e.
they have examined adoptive parents' attitudes toward the possibility or potential for reunion. Adoptive parents responses were, therefore, intellectually, not experientially, based. Additionally, there has been little recognition that the reunion would have an impact on the adoptive parents themselves, not only in their relationship with the adoptee. This thesis is intended as a first step in beginning to examine the adoptive parents' experiences and emotional reaction to the reunion between their adopted child (now an adult) and her/his birthparents.

This study is unique as it obtains post-reunion insight from adoptive parents. By using a qualitative method, the stories of the interviewees can speak for themselves, and thus give the adoptive parents a voice which has not, to this point, been heard. Whether or not the adoptive parents' experiences are concurrent with that suggested in the literature is only one of the issues to be explored. Just as important is the fact that these adoptive parents are, for the first time, speaking about reunion after experiencing it through at least one of their children.

As is evident in this study, adoptions and adoption reunion are complex in the number of individuals impacted and the issues involved. In an effort to clearly delineate the topic under study, it was important to limit the complexities as much as possible. Such situations as special needs, international, interracial, private or older child adoptions were not included in this study. Nor does this literature review discuss the special considerations specific to these situations. It is the author's position that reunions involving adoptees who were placed after infancy, special needs adoptees, international adoptions or interracial placements will be inherently different from reunions involving adoptees who were placed in infancy in homes where they are racially matched. As a means
of controlling for these potential circumstances and experiences the author has chosen not to study them. There are a multitude of other factors (life experiences within the adoptive family) which cannot be controlled in this study, and limitations need to be imposed wherever possible. It should be noted, however, that future research examining whether there is in fact a difference in the reunion experiences where these factors exist would be valuable. This study assumes that adoptive parents who choose private adoption (particularly those who chose private adoption over twenty years ago) are in some ways different from adoptive parents who choose agency placements, and their experiences might represent another study.

Chapter two is an historical perspective of adoption. This chapter illustrates how adoptions have been, and continue to be, shaped by the historical, social, political and legal context. The fact that adoptive parents, and other members of the adoption circle, are even addressing the issue of adoption reunion is an experience unique to our present historical moment. It is necessary, in order to fully understand the experience of adoptive parents, to review the development of adoptions in North America, and more specifically in British Columbia.

The literature review in Chapter three traces research in adoptions and adoption reunions as they have developed to date. Chapter three begins with a discussion of adoption issues in general as a means of providing some illustration of the unique challenges faced by adoptive parents. From the author's perspective it is not possible to consider the issues faced by one branch of the adoptive family system without recognizing its impact on other family members. For this reason the study reviews the evidence regarding the adoption experiences of the central members of the adoption circle: adoptees,
birth parents and adoptive parents. Additionally, the author believes that the literature regarding open adoptions is related to the adoption reunion literature. Both deal with disbanding the confidentiality and anonymity which have been central to adoptions in North America. Chapter three includes sections on open adoptions, and the controversy over unsealing adoption records. The adoption reunion literature includes discussions of autobiographies, journalistic reports and empirical studies.

Chapter four describes the method used in this study. As it is an exploratory study, a qualitative method was best suited to examining the questions at hand. The rationale for the decisions made throughout the research process ranging from the selection of method, people to be interviewed, and the way the data were collected and analyzed are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter five is an account of the conceptual findings. The adoptive parents' response to the reunion was divided into four categories. The legends, or stories they repeatedly told about the adoptee gave insight into the adoptee's role in the family and the adoptive parents' views regarding adoption. The level of openness evidenced by this group of adoptive parents was reflected in actions as well as words. The adoptive parents seemed to approach parenting from a non-ownership philosophy. Finally, the adoptive parents' response to the reunion appeared to be related to their developmental stage.

The final chapter discusses the implications of the findings. Included are discussions of the findings in relation to the literature and to policy and/or practice, the limitations of this study and questions for further research.
TERMINOLOGY

Before progressing to the next chapter it is important to first address the terminology used in this thesis. Just as adoptions have undergone significant change over the years, so has the terminology used by adoption professionals and those impacted by adoption. Appendix A outlines the terminology currently seen as acceptable (positive language) replacing that which relayed incorrect or undesirable messages (negative language). There are certain terms which are used repeatedly in this thesis which warrant elaboration.

**Adoptee:** the term adoptee refers to anyone who was adopted regardless of age and is used in place of the term adopted child. The adoptees referred to in this study are, for the most part, adults, although there is some discussion of adoption experiences in childhood. Adoptees have argued that the sealing of records has kept them children in the eyes of society. The use of the term adoptees in this study is meant to recognize that the individuals involved are adults.

**Adoptive parents/birth parents:** While the author would prefer not to have to make these distinctions (and many of my subjects didn't), they are important for the sake of clarity. Throughout this thesis, parents have been consistently identified as either an adoptive parent or a birth parent so that no confusion would arise.

**Born into vs natural children:** Just as the term "natural parents" carries certain implications, so does the term natural children. In this study, the term children born into the family has been used instead, as a means of respecting the parties involved while maintaining clarity.

**Planned adoption for a child vs surrender a child:** Where possible the term "planned adoption for" has been used. However, the term "surrendered"
has been used by adoption professionals for some time (in place of "gave up a child"), and some of the literature uses this term.

**Reunion/reacquaintance/make contact with:** The list of adoption language in Appendix A, shows the term reunion as negative language. This term is widely used throughout the literature, however, and has been widely used in this thesis. While the author agrees with the intent in changing the term to "making contact with", for the purpose of this thesis, such a change would cause confusion or misunderstanding regarding the central theme of the study. As such, the term that is most widely recognized in the literature (reunion) has been maintained.

**Adoption triangle, adoption triad, adoption circle:** Appendix A suggests the preferred term to describe the parties influenced by adoption (adoptive parents and birth parents) is adoption triad. The reasoning behind this is that the term adoption triangle suggests that the parties are at opposing poles from one another, while adoption triad suggests a cohesive unit. Both of these terms are, however, gender insensitive. The implication in both adoption triangle, and adoption triad, is that there are three parties involved. The birth parents and adoptive parents are each treated as a unit. This negates one partner in each of the birth parent and adoptive parent dyads; there are, in fact, five central parties to adoption: adoptee, adoptive mother, adoptive father, birth mother and birth father. Since the bulk of the adoption literature is biased toward the female experience (female adoptee, adoptive mother, birth mother), it is reasonable to assume that it is the birth father and the adoptive father who are lacking acknowledgment in the term adoption triad (or triangle). It could be further argued that while there are five central figures in adoption, there are a multitude of related others impacted by adoptions: siblings (birth and adoptive),
grandparents (birth and adoptive), aunts, uncles, and adoption professionals. The term adoption circle has recently been used to accommodate this reality. Gediman and Brown (1991) used the term adoption circle as has the Forget-Me-Not Society in their quarterly publication.

The terminology around adoptions can sometimes be unwieldy and, like adoptions generally, is subject to revision. The author has attempted to use terms which reflect sensitivity to the issues and respect for the individuals involved.
CHAPTER II: HISTORICAL REVIEW

1920’s
Today is the day we give babies away,
With a half of pint of tea.
You open the lid, and there is a kid,
As healthy as it can be.

1970’s
Today is the day the baby grew up.
Drank the tea, ate the cup.
She gave a loud sigh, and said "Who am I?"
And went on a search to see.

Lifton 1979, p. 9

ANCIENT HISTORY

Adoptions are by no means a new concept. Several authors (Benet, 1976; Berland, 1990; Kadushin & Martin, 1988; and Smith & Miroff, 1987, for example) have traced adoptions back to ancient times. These authors have described how adoptions have served a social, moral, political, and religious function. Berland (1990) provided a thorough review of the purposes served by adoptions at varying historical periods. He noted that adoptions in ancient times were primarily a practice of the ruling classes, and agreed with Kadushin (1990) in tracing adoption back to the time of Sargon in Babylon, 2800 B.C. Adoptions in ancient times took place in order to ensure a male heir, or to link two families (like in marriage) and join land holdings (Berland, 1990). Adoption practice varied in different cultures and civilizations. Islam, for example, was, and is, strongly opposed to adoption, on the basis that "Allah knows all and therefore cannot be misled by the fiction of adoption" (Berland, 1990). The Chinese tradition, on the other hand, provided for the adoption of a future daughter-in-
law, in order to help her to be prepared for her role (Berland, 1990). Adoptions in these ancient times were clearly developed to meet the needs of the adults, and little consideration was given to the children involved. A notable exception was the code of Hammurabi, which acknowledged some of the potential difficulties: "It deals with some of the risks inherent in every adoption: that the adoptive parents will treat the child differently from a natural child; that the child will suffer from a change in caretaker; that the adopted child and the family will be unsuited to each other." (Benet, 1976, p.23). The code of Hammurabi was also exceptional in that it mentioned adoption at all. Most of these ancient societies did not have any legal guidelines for adoption (Kadushin & Martin, 1988). Smith and Miroff (1987) look at the religious and legal contexts of adoption, and how these have changed yet remained the same.

"It should be noted that there were two distinct elements of ancient adoption practices. First, the primary purpose of adoption was the continuity of the adoptor's family. There was no visible concern for the "best interests" of the adoptee. The child's welfare was not deemed important at that time in our history. Second, there was the religious emphasis inherent in the practice. The adoptee was severed from the religion of his biological family and took the religion of the adopting family... These two elements are relegated to a secondary consideration in modern American law." (Smith & Miroff, 1987, p. 12).

This focus in adoption of meeting the adult's, rather than the child's, needs remained in effect until fairly recently.

THE HISTORY OF ADOPTION IN THE WESTERN WORLD

There were no laws governing adoptions in the Western World until the mid 1800's (Kadushin, 1988). Until that time, children in need of a home, whether orphaned or due to their parent's poverty, were accommodated through
the apprenticeship system or the "poorhouse". In the poorhouse they were kept in unsavory conditions along with any other members of society who happened to be down on their luck. In the United States, children were adopted as a means of providing child labour to prairie farmers who needed as many hands as possible to work the land (Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1976). Clearly these arrangements were for the benefit of the adults, not the children. As the welfare of the child began to be seen as important, laws were implemented, beginning with Massachusetts in 1851 (Smith & Miroff, 1987). The first adoption legislation in Canada was enacted in 1873 in New Brunswick. These early adoption statutes were designed primarily to ensure that the transfer of the child was properly done; i.e. that the biological parent(s) consented, that the adoptive parents were desirous of the adoption, and that the adoption effectively cut the child's ties with his/her natural family (Kadushin, 1988). There was, at that time, no requirement that the adoptive parents meet any specific criteria to ensure that they would provide a suitable home for the child. The focus was on the parent's rather than the child's needs.

By the early 1920's to 1930's every State and Province had some form of adoption legislation, and some of these had documented certain criteria which would ensure that the placement was in the child's "best interest" and that the adoptive parents had passed some level of scrutiny before placement took place (Sorosky, Barran, & Pannor, 1976).

ADOPTIONS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

The British Columbia Adoption Act was first passed in 1920 (MacDonald, 1984).
"It contained no provision for secrecy of adoption records. No report to the court was required on the fitness of the adoptive parents, although notice of application for adoption was required to be served on the Superintendent of Neglected Children." (MacDonald, 1984, p. 45)

In 1935, the Adoption Act was amended, adding the following new provisions:

a) ensuring adoption documents were kept secret
b) an investigation into the circumstances and character of the petitioner
c) ensuring the petitioner is fit to assume the responsibilities of adoption
d) enquiring into the fitness of the child for adoption
e) inquiring about the mental and physical fitness of the child's natural parents
f) a probationary period of one year was introduced (Berland, 1990)

Cosgrove and Silzer (1991) completed an historical sketch which highlights significant developments in adoptions in British Columbia from the implementation of the Infants Act in 1901 to the present (see Appendix B).

The "as if born" clause, which was introduced in 1957, remains in place in the current legislation. The intent of this clause was to ensure that the inheritance rights of the adoptee were protected, but this clause had other repercussions which will be discussed in "the history of secrecy" section of this chapter.

The 1960's were a period of note in the history of adoptions in British Columbia. Contrary to the current situation, at that time there was an excess of children to be placed in comparison to the number of homes available. The first adoption conference was held in 1967 to develop strategies for recruitment of adoption homes. By 1971, there was a significant increase in homes and a diminishing number of children available for adoption (Cosgrove, 1991).

Cosgrove attributes this shift to a number of societal factors: accessibility of birth
control, increased availability of abortion, and greater acceptance/support of single mothers. The decrease in the number of infants available for adoption caused a shift in adoption placements. In recent years there has been a greater focus on placement of "special needs" children, i.e., children who are physically or mentally disabled, or who are older, sibling groups, or children with significant emotional or behavioral problems. The focus in recruitment of adoption homes shifted from the need for homes for infants to the need for homes for children classed as special needs.

The 1980's (see Figure 1) saw a shift from predominantly Ministry placements to predominantly private placements by the early 1990's (Daly & Sobol, 1992). Additionally, the number of international adoptions (both private and government) saw a significant increase. This is not so much a shift away from government service delivery as it is an effort, on the part of prospective adoptive parents, to explore the full range of alternatives in obtaining a child. Private adoptions involve greater expense and risk to adoptive parents but are balanced by a shorter wait (Daly & Sobol, 1992). International adoptions usually involve a myriad of "red-tape" and documentation as well as even greater expense than private adoptions, but if the adoptive parents are successful in negotiating the legal requirements, they are rewarded with an even shorter wait. Currently, there is an increasing number of private international placements through agencies in the United States. These are usually transracial placements of Afro-American babies into Caucasian homes. The birth mothers tend to choose Canadian homes because they believe their child will be less subject to discrimination in Canada. This is only one example of how adoptions change and are influenced by societal trends which impact both the birth parents and the adoptive parents.
Figure 1. Public and Private adoptions in Canada

Public and private domestic adoptions as a percentage of all domestic adoptions.

Another trend is increasing age in adoptive parents. As couples have been marrying later and starting their families later, their discovery of infertility and subsequent application to adopt will also be delayed. Until 1989, if either adoptive applicant was over the age of 40 at the time of the homestudy, they were no longer eligible for placement of an infant. A supreme court ruling in 1989 changed this. Sobol and Daly describe the profile of an adoptive applicant as follows:

"A typical adoptive applicant is Caucasian, married, Protestant, between 31 and 35 years of age, infertile, with at least high school education and no prior parenting experience. Applicants who pursue adoption in the private sphere are older and better educated." (Sobol & Daly, 1992, p. 5)

If the typical applicants are between 31 and 35, they will be between 37 and 42 at the time of placement (there is currently an average wait of six to seven years in B.C.). Adoption legislation in British Columbia is currently under review. The new legislation will make provision for open adoptions and will virtually abolish private adoptions.

SECRECY IN ADOPTION

The issue of secrecy, or the sealing of adoption records, is central to the controversy around adoption reunion and openness in adoption. It is difficult to separate developments regarding disclosure of information from other trends in adoption. For the purpose of this thesis, however, it is necessary to track how disclosure of information in adoptions has developed to date, to gain a better understanding of the issues, not only from the adoptive parents', birth parents', and adoptees' perspective, but also from the perspective of all those touched by adoption (including extended family members, social workers, politicians, etc.).
As noted previously, the original Adoption Act in British Columbia did not carry a provision for secrecy. This was introduced in the amendments to the Adoption Act in 1936 (Berland, 1990, and Cosgrove & Silzer, 1991). Before the Act was introduced, and prior to the 1936 amendment, an adopted child's history was often common knowledge in the community. This knowledge was coupled with value judgments, usually regarding the birth mother's promiscuity, or negative family traits of the birth parents. The idea of sealing records was introduced as a means of addressing the problem. By sealing the records, the birth mother would be protected from others knowing of her "transgression", the child would be protected from the stigma of illegitimacy, and the adoptive parents were protected from the threat of the birth mother resurfacing to reclaim the child (Sorosky, Barran & Pannor, 1976). It seemed, at the time, the ideal solution to problems encountered by all members of the adoption triad.

The "as if born" clause, introduced in 1957, not only ensured the child's inheritance rights in the adoptive family, but also that all contact and knowledge of the child's origins were effectively erased. Spronk (1992) noted that "all efforts were made to make the adoptive family synonymous with the nuclear biological family" (p.6). Sorosky, Barran & Pannor (1976) note that this change was made with the best intentions.

"Their attitude and goals were commendable. Why should any person carry the lifelong burden of a birth certificate, stamped in large indelible letters "illegitimate"? Why should anyone have to accept that his/her father is listed as "unknown"? Why should one human being be made to feel different and less acceptable by being labelled "adopted"?" (p.37; Emphasis on original text).

From this point on, upon finalization of the adoption, a new birth certificate was issued for the child, eliminating all reference to the child's circumstances of birth, and identifying him/her only as the child of the adoptive
parents. Many adoptive parents, at that time, did not tell the child s/he was adopted, taking the "as if born" clause quite literally.

In the middle 1940's, there was a shift in the advice given to adoptive parents. They were now advised to "tell" at any early age, using the "chosen child" story (Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1975). Adopted children were typically told that their birth parents had died, and that the adoptive parents had chosen him/her from among the various children on display. In providing only verbal information at the time of placement, having been "edited" by the social worker, the adoptive parents were likely to forget much of what was told to them. Even if parents did not use the "orphan" story, but attempted to provide the adoptee with some sense of their origins, often the information passed on was minimal and/or incorrect (Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1975). In the 1950's in the United States, out of growing concern regarding the type of information to be provided to adoptive families, the Child Welfare League of America made a policy statement to ensure that information, emphasizing the strengths of the birth parents, was provided to the adoptive parents (Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1975). The adoptive parents and adoptee continued to be sheltered from any unsavory background factors such as mental illness, criminal behavior, alcoholism, etc.

Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1975) described the controversy over the amount of information to be released. Between the 1950's and the 1970's, experts in the adoptions field held varying and contradictory views about the amount and type of information which should be released. Adoptive parents, then, were given varying instruction, depending on who they spoke to. Sorosky, Baran and Pannor illustrated their point by noting how two social workers advised that adoptive parents should have as little information as possible in order to reinforce the bond between them but two years later had revised their
view, noting that family secrets were harmful. They concluded by stating,

"Much of the professional literature since the 1950's reflects a growing concern with the need for honesty and clarity in the relationship between the adoptive agency and the adoptive family. These concerns, however, are not always translated into practice, and differences continue to exist, from agency to agency and state to state." (Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1975, p. 35)

Paton's (1954) work is nothing short of amazing, given this historical setting. A social worker and adoptee, Paton engaged in a search for her birth mother and found her when she was 47 and her birth mother was 69. Paton then wrote and lectured, advocating for disclosure of information to adoptees. Her work opened the discussion, from the adoptees' point of view, of the natural need for information. Prior to Paton's book, adoptees who wished to search were seen as disturbed or poorly adjusted. Paton helped others to understand that the desire for information about and/or contact with one's birth parents was normal, rather than unnatural.

In Canada, David Kirk's (1964) work advocated abandoning the "as if born" myth, and recognizing that adoptive families are inherently different than biological families. In Kirk's view, it is important for adoptive parents to recognize the adoptee's background, rather than to try to function as if the child's only beginnings were in the adoptive home.

In British Columbia, the report of the Royal Commission on Family and Children's Law (1975), known as the Berger Commission report, took an in-depth look at adoption policy and practice in this Province. The Royal Commission made 53 recommendations in the area of adoptions. Of these, six were specifically related to the collection and disclosure of information. Some significant other recommendations related to, a) obtaining the birth father's consent, b) provision for assisted adoptions, and c) ensuring placement of native
(aboriginal) children in native homes, as well as d) recognizing native custom adoptions. These are significant in that they have only recently, in the last five years, been instituted (a & b) or are currently being considered (c & d). As Berland (1990) noted, this is a tribute to the vision of the committee members. With regard to the secrecy issue, the most significant recommendation was as follows:

"New legislation should require that a written summary of non-identifying background information be given to all adoptive parents, and, upon request, to those who have adopted in the past. Legislation should also affirm the right of every adopted person to receive from the Superintendent such non-identifying information."

(p.40)

While the provision of written background information to adoptees is not currently incorporated into the legislation, it has, virtually since the Royal Commission report, been part of Ministry practice and policy. The Annual Report of the Ministry in 1975 noted an increase in requests for post-adoption information (Cosgrove, 1992). A specific division, Post-Adoptions Services, was formed in 1978, its purpose to research and provide background information upon request to adoptees and adoptive parents. The Royal Commission discussed, in their report, the idea of a reunion registry and recommended against it, recommending instead that access to identifying information only be obtained through application to the Supreme Court. Even the fact that they were considering the possibility of a reunion registry at the time was threatening to some individuals. The Commission received submissions from various groups, and studied the available literature (including Baran, Pannor & Sorosky's early work (1974), and Triseliotis' study (1973). It is clear that submissions by adoptive parents and adoptive parents' groups formed the bulk of the resistance to the implementation of a reunion registry. The commission heard their
concerns and noted that a reunion registry would, in some people's view, nullify the "as if born" section of the adoption order and subsequently nullify the order itself. Regardless of their recommendation, the notion of a reunion registry had been opened up, and support for the registry has grown in the intervening years. Parent Finders, an organization which facilitated adoption reunions was established in 1975.¹

Judy Pollard,² (who worked for a short time as an adoptions social worker with the Ministry of Human Resources, as it was known at the time, in the mid 1960's, and has been an adoptions social worker with the Ministry on an ongoing basis since the mid 1970's), noted attitudes toward information sharing and reunion have shifted gradually over the years. Both she and Delma Hemming,³ Deputy Superintendent and Adoption Programme Manager, note that there was a time in their practice when they assured prospective adoptive parents that reunions are rare.

In 1988, a passive registry was established in British Columbia (Cosgrove & Silzer, 1991). This, again, was done after submissions from interested parties were received and reviewed. The passive registry, administered by the Department of Vital Statistics, allowed for the reunion between birth parents and adoptees where both parties expressed, in writing, their desire for a reunion. "As of March, 1991, after three years of operation, the Registry had received 2,149 registrations and made 97 matches." (Cosgrove & Silzer, 1992).

Parallel to the move toward provision of information to facilitate reunions, has been the move toward openness in adoptions. Open adoptions involve

¹ Information received from the Forget-Me-Not Society, February, 1993
³ Conversation with Delma Hemming, Deputy Superintendent and Manager of Adoptions Ministry of Social Services, January, 1993.
some level of information exchange between birth parents and adoptive parents. The various forms of openness and their implications for practice is discussed in Chapter 3. The Royal Commission (1975) did not address the notion of open adoption. Ministry policy currently does not make provision for it, so that open adoptions in British Columbia only occur privately. Recently, however, there has been a move toward more openness in Ministry adoptions. A Operational Directive, dated July 1992, allowed for birth parents to provide adoptive parents with pictures of themselves, and for birth parents and adoptive parents to share with each other the given name they chose for the child. While this may be seen by some as a small step, it nevertheless indicates a trend toward more openness. Perhaps more significant is the report of the Community Panel on Family and Children's Services (1992). They recommend open access to adoption records, on the basis that adoption be re-defined as "the life-long transfer of custody and care of a child while retaining kinship (the bond between the child and the birth family)" (p.99). In February 1993, a discussion paper on open adoption was circulated, and it seems evident that some form of openness will be available in Ministry adoptions in the near future.

In 1991, legislation allowing for an active reunion registry was passed, and the active reunion registry was implemented. The active registry allows adult adoptees and birth parents to request a search for each other. Counselling is provided to either party upon request. The active registry also allows for adoptees to search for siblings if the birth parent has died or they were adopted separately. The passive registry was also expanded, at this time, to include other birth relatives of an adoptee, for example, aunts, uncles, grandparents, siblings, etc. (Cosgrove, 1992). The registry, administered under contract with the Ministry, by the Family Services of Greater Vancouver, has
facilitated over 1,000 reunions to date\textsuperscript{4}.

It can be seen from this review that adoption practice has changed, particularly in recent years, and continues to change. These changes are often responses to a changing societal climate. It is evident to me that any changes made have been incorporated with the best of intentions, and the best interests of the adoptee in mind. While some see this as paternalistic and demeaning (eg. Fisher, 1973; Maxtone-Graham, 1983; and Redmond & Sleightholm, 1982 for example), especially when the adoptee reaches adulthood, I believe that this was not the intent. Adoption is a highly complex issue involving a number of individuals, both directly and indirectly. This is especially true regarding adoption reunions. The next chapter reviews the literature on adoption reunion and discusses the controversy regarding availability of adoption records.

\textsuperscript{4} Information received from Ken Derby, Program Director, Family Services of Greater Vancouver.
CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW

At the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time
"Little Gidding"
T.S. Elliot, Four Quartets

Adoptions involve an interweaving of complex issues which impact and are impacted by, not only members of the adoption circle, but by the social, political, historical and legal context. In discussing adoption reunion, it is important to first address the complexity of issues involved in adoptions generally. This chapter begins by addressing, from a variety of perspectives, the issues involved for the core members of the adoption circle: the adoptee, the adoptive parents, and the birth parents. Grief and loss are common themes for all parties. A discussion regarding open adoptions will follow, as there is a close relationship in the literature on open adoptions and adoption reunion. The author views open adoption practice as a preventative measure (i.e. reducing future loss issues), and adoption reunion as a retroactive measure (i.e. a means of addressing loss issues people have experienced to date).

Prior to the reunion, there is the adoptee's search for his/her birth parent(s). This can be a long and gruelling process. There has been much speculation regarding adoptee's motivation to search and the responses of the significant others in their lives. There has also been much controversy over the birth parent's right (or lack of it) to conduct a search. This chapter reviews the arguments and the evidence in this regard.

The literature on adoption reunion can be divided into several categories; a) beginning studies and stories, anticipating the impact of reunion on members of the adoption circle, b) testimonials, c) policy reform studies, assessing the
costs and benefits, and d) studies or stories illustrating the impact of reunion on a wide range of individuals, not only members of the adoption circle. Some works fit into more than one of these categories.

In concluding this chapter, I will address the gaps in the literature, and how these have led to the current study.

PROBLEMS IN ADOPTION

Just as the historical context is important when discussing adoption reunion, so, too, must adoption issues in general be addressed. The need for adoptees and birth parents to reunite arises out of the fact that secrecy has been a cornerstone in adoption practice for the last 50 to 60 years. What is the legacy of this secrecy? Depending on one's theoretical perspective, the legacy varies, but most would agree with Annette Baran's statement "secrecy in adoptions is the failed experiment of this century."\(^5\) Certainly in the setting in which she spoke these words (a conference billed as the first Canadian Conference on Adoption Reunion)\(^6\) her view could not be denied. At this conference there were many people present; adoptees, birthparents, adoptive parents, people who simultaneously belonged to more than one of these groups, and related others, who testified of the pain, anger, and frustration resulting from this failed experiment (i.e. closed adoption records). Yet there remain professionals and members of the adoption triangle who staunchly defend the need for secrecy. As recently as 1986 an issue of Public Welfare was devoted to the controversy over openness in adoptions (Public Welfare Vol 44, No 2).

\(^5\) From Annette Baran's presentation at "Let's Talk About Reunion", February 5, 1993
\(^6\) In fact this was not the first conference in Canada on adoption. One took place in Waterloo, Ontario in April, 1991 - Information received from Children's Aid Society, Ontario, who hosted the April, 1991 conference.
Churchman reported the following comment from an adoption professional: "There must be closure in adoption. The adoptive family needs closure, or else it becomes a semipermeable membrane, not an adoption. And the birth mother needs to make a decision." (Churchman, 1986, p.13). Current Ministry policy prohibits open adoptions or provision to the adoptive parents of any identifying information. Change is imminent, however, as adoption legislation is in the process of revision. The report of the Community Panel on Family and Children's Services makes the following recommendations regarding adoption:

"Government must adapt its information practices regarding adoptions to the principles on access to information contained in this report" (British Columbia, 1991, p.42).

"The term 'adoption' must be defined as the life-long transfer of custody and care of a child while retaining kinship, which is the bond between the child and the birth family. Adoption, as defined in this report, must be incorporated into new legislation following a thorough review of all issues related to adoption. This review and integration must not delay the new legislation" (British Columbia, 1991, p.100).

Before further discussing or understanding the need for openness in adoption it is important to identify and address the issues arising out of traditional closed adoption practice.

**Issues for Adoptive Parents:**

For many adoptive parents, the decision to adopt arises out of the discovery of the couple's infertility. Several authors (for example Melina, 1986, Kadushin, 1986, Small, 1987, Smith & Miroff, 1987; Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1975, Winkler et. al., 1988) identify the adoptive couple's infertility, and their ability to accept or deny the impact of infertility in their lives, as a key issue in adoption. Infertility is in itself a complex issue, but when the choice to adopt results from it, the complexity is enhanced. Discovery of their infertility can
result in a number of emotional reactions: feelings of helplessness, shifts in one's image as a sexual being, loss of self-esteem, obsession with becoming parents, or marital strain (Berman & Bufferd, 1986).

At the core of the infertility issue is grief and loss. Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1975) state that "the psychological reactions (to infertility) are similar to those characterizing the grief experience in a death. ..... The process of grief, in essence, is for their loss of reproductive function and the loss of the biological children they had expected, but could never have. When they have resolved their own feelings of loss, they are in a better position to help the adopted child deal with the loss in his/her own background" (Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, pp 74-75). DuPrau (1990) refers to the stages of grief (denial, sadness, frustration, anger) as adoptive parents begin to come to terms with their infertility. Feelings of inadequacy because they have no control over their infertility or power to change it are also common to adoptive parents (DuPrau, 1990).

For some adoptive parents, adoption is seen as a "cure" for their infertility, because upon placement they are no longer childless (Small, 1987). Or, in a similar vein, "a popular myth, still widely held, has it that the best way for an infertile woman to become pregnant is for her to adopt" (Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, p.76). In both of these instances, the adoption is part of a denial of their infertility, rather than an alternative means of becoming parents. In these circumstances couples might have a stronger investment in seeing themselves as no different from other families. Melina (1986) links the phenomena of post-placement blues with a resurfacing of the adoptive parent's grief over the loss of the biological child they will not have. Berman and Bufferd (1986) similarly made this link, "since the reality of placement is tangible proof that the couple could not bear a biological child" (Berman & Bufferd, 1986, p.4). Annette Baran
(1993) feels that unresolved feelings about infertility will impact adoptive parents particularly in how they relate to the child. They may feel, for instance, that since they are unable to conceive, they are not really "entitled" to the child or that they have in essence "stolen" the child. Smith and Miroff (1987) discussed this notion of entitlement (or the adoptive parent's feelings that they lack entitlement) in relation to infertility. They state:

"A partial sense of entitlement may manifest itself in certain areas: problems of discipline; difficulty with allowing the child a measure of independence and individualization from the parents; or difficulty discussing the adoption." (p.26)

Kadushin, (1988) too, discussed the issue of entitlement:

"The adoptive parent may be concerned about his entitlement to the child, possibly feeling somewhat equivocal about the completeness of his relationship to the child. There is a feeling that a social-emotional relationship between biological parent and child.... the problem for the adoptive parents is that of really feeling the child 'belongs' to them." (pp 486-487)

Melina sees developing a sense that the child belongs in the family and their entitlement to that child as a crucial task for the adoptive parents. One indicator that this is taking place is "claiming" behaviors; identifying ways in which the child is like them even though these likenesses do not have a genetic origin. If the issue of belonging or entitlement is not resolved by the adoptive parents, adoption reunion can pose a very real threat (Baran, 1993).

Melina (1989) identified some of the impacts of infertility on the adoptive parent/adoptivee relationship. Because infertility puts the goal of parenthood out of reach (or at least more distant) for the adoptive couple, they tend to value that goal more. When they do become parents, three things happen; a) they expect they will live "happily ever after", having reached their goal, and are invested in
projecting the perfect family image to the rest of the world as well as themselves; b) when difficulties arise, they are harder on themselves, having passed the "test" of the homestudy and accepted society's view of them as "super-parents"; c) they attempt to be perfect parents, often overcompensating and overprotecting the child. The unspoken message of their insecurity is passed on to the child, and can impact the parent-child relationship. Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1975) also noted that adoptive parents are, as a group, more insecure and overprotective as parents. They are invested in proving themselves, and their right to the child. Berman and Bufferd (1986) note that, regardless of the couple's ability to have a biological child, adoptive parents often feel the need to be perfect parents. They see this tendency as a direct result of the rigorous approval process all adoptive parents experience. These authors also note that, whether or not they are able to have a biological child, the fantasy of the birth parents impacts their relationship with the child. Their perception of the child as a product of the birth parent, the desire to make the child like them (the adoptive parents) or the tendency to blame heredity when the child is difficult, are all possible outcomes of this fantasy.

Melina (1986), an adoptive parent herself, viewed the extra challenges of adoptive parenthood, described above, in a positive light. She noted that adoptive parents are often characterized by professionals as "intensely concerned, deeply committed parents who believe strongly that they can make a difference in their children's life." (p.83). Melina contends that their stronger commitment to parenthood, feelings of disentitlement (and resulting desire to prove themselves 'worthy'), and focus on environmental factors shaping individuals, all noted by other authors, can combine to help (rather than hinder) adoptive parents to be the best they can be. The key, from Melina's viewpoint,
is that the adoptive parents expectations of themselves are realistic.

Kirk's (1965) landmark work on adoption took another view. Kirk, also an adoptive parent, felt that the key in adoption is in acceptance, rather than rejection of difference. In his view, it was not only adoptive parents and adoptees, but society as a whole which needed to recognize that adoptive families are inherently different from non-adoptive families. Kirk also noted that adoptive parents do not have a role model for adoptive parenthood, making it difficult to recognize and find solutions to hurdles they share with other adoptive parents. Written at a time when adoption was seen as a cure for infertility and adoptive families believed the myth that they would all live happily ever after, this work was seen as radical. Today, almost twenty years later, Kirk's book is being recognized as the valuable piece of work that it is, and his message is almost taken for granted (Kaye, 1990).

Issues for the Adoptee:

Just as the impact of adoption begins before placement for the adoptive parent, the same is true for the adoptee. Henley (1993) argued that the bonding process and subsequent attachment begins in utero, and is disrupted when the adoptee is removed from the birth mother's care. The longer the delay before the child is placed, and the higher the number of intermediary caregivers (e.g. foster parents), the more the child's subsequent attachment to the adoptive parent is hampered. This may result in placement of an infant who is grieving the loss of his/her birth mother and any subsequent caregivers and is thus resisting the formation of any further bond. Henley characterized such children as stiff, resistant to cuddles, and crying incessantly. Henley stated it is important for adoptive parents to recognize signs of grief in their children's behaviour, even when the child was placed in infancy, so that they can respond
appropriately.

Grotevant and McRoy (1990) noted that "Although infant adoptions may be considered 'low risk',... agency workers must be aware of the potential influence of ... the child's prenatal environment and the quality of care the child received in preadoptive placements on how the child will adjust in the adoptive family." (p.185). Risk (and success) factors in adoption outcome are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

A critical consideration, from the child's (and adoptive parent's) perspective is the "telling", i.e. when, how and what s/he is told about her/his adoption. In both of her books, Melina (1986 & 1989) discussed this topic extensively. In Making Sense of Adoption: A Parent's Guide she devotes five chapters to this topic. Small (1987) noted "How and when to tell children of their adoptive status is the most common topic at adoptive parent workshops and discussion groups of prospective adoptive parents." (p.37). This was not always the case. Winkler, Brown, van Keppel, and Blanchard (1988) described the growth of interest and varying opinions of professionals beginning in the 1950's. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into a great deal of discussion regarding how parents communicate the fact of their adoption to the child, especially since this topic has been adequately covered by a number of authors (for example Melina, 1986; Melina, 1989; Kadushin, 1988; Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1985; Lifton, 1979; Winkler et.al., 1988, etc.). There are, however, some salient points to be made. There is general agreement that the telling is a reflection of how the adoptive parents feel about themselves and how comfortable they are with the topic of adoption generally. As Small stated, "the difficulty associated with informing children of their adoptive status tells us a great deal about how adoption is perceived. If telling children about their
adoption were perceived as 'good news', the difficulty would be obviated." (Small, 1987, p.37). The debate regarding the timing of telling continues (Winkler et. al., 1988; Kadushin, 1988). Of consideration is the balance between ensuring the child is told early enough that none other than the appropriate persons (i.e. the adoptive parents) gives him/her the information, and late enough that the child is able to develop a positive understanding of the information given. The when and how of telling about adoption are strongly linked, since, as Small (1987) noted, adoptive parents who are uncomfortable with the topic are likely to put it off and tell in a hurried and self-conscious way. For many years adoptive parents were advised to use the "chosen baby" story as a means of communicating to the child that s/he is special and compensating for their rejection by their birth parents (Kadushin, 1988). While the motive of wishing to communicate a positive image to the child is admirable, recent authors have identified the pitfalls of the chosen baby story. Lifton (1979) noted that these stories were often

"filled with errors in fact, improbable details, implied horrors, as well as gaping omissions. Even when the story is seemingly benign, it has menacing undertones... In fact many adoptees have told me that the stories made them feel twice rejected: by the natural parents who didn't keep them and by the adoptive parents who couldn't have a baby of their own. Being chosen meant being second best." (Lifton, 1979, p.23)

Kadushin (1988) said the chosen child myth puts pressure on the child to live up to some undefined, and unrealistic expectations. He noted, also, that the story is essentially false. Small (1987) noted that the story is blatantly untrue, and it is in fact the adoptive parents, not the adoptee, who is chosen. She proposed using the statement "we are an adoptive family", since adoption is something that happens to both the adoptee and the adoptive parents. "The child is no
longer singled out as though adoption only happened to him or her. This
communication assigns responsibility to the parents for having initiated the
adoption. Adoption becomes a way to build a family." (Small, 1987, p. 38)
Kadushin (1988) developed six principles of "telling" which were essentially
based in the adoptive parents' comfort with themselves as parents and an open,
honest pattern of communication between the adoptee and the adoptive parents.
These principles seem to be the generally accepted advice given to adoptive
parents today.

Both attachment issues and communication about adoption are linked to
the child's self esteem and identity (Hoopes, 1990). These issues resurface
when the child reaches adolescence and begins to struggle with his/her identity
(Berman & Bufferd, 1986). Hoopes stated "though identity problems may reach
a crisis stage for any adolescent, there is no consensus as to whether these
problems are more severe for adopted individuals who are perhaps preoccupied
with the fact that they are adopted." (Hoopes, 1990, p.149). Hoopes went on to
review the literature, however, and found that the prevailing view is that the
adoption adversely affects the adolescent identity struggle. She noted that
"statements relating to the intensification of typical adolescent conflicts abound." (p.150). A number of other authors have discussed how the identity crisis is
enhanced for adoptees (Melina, 1986 & 1989; Lifton, 1979; Sorosky, Baran &
Pannor, 1978; Langlois, 1981; Berman & Bufferd, 1986 are some examples).
Lifton (1979) noted that the adoptees she had met described adolescence as
unbearable. Melina (1986) noted that those who espouse an Eriksonian
perspective would not be surprised by the increased difficulties of adolescent
adoptees. One task for adolescents in Erikson's model is to establish how one
is different from one's parents. Adoptees have two sets of parents to be different
from, and the information about one set, if not completely lacking, is minimal. Lifton (1979) expressed her belief that it is only common sense that adoptees have additional problems, beyond those experienced by the general population in adolescence, since you can't know where you're going if you don't know where you came from. Another aspect of identity formation is developing a sexual identity. Berman and Bufferd (1986) noted that this, too, is especially difficult for adoptees. The adoptive parents' infertility may impact their feelings around their own sexuality, and may keep them from providing adequate and objective information to the adoptee. Additionally, the adoptive parents may be concerned about the potential for the adolescent adoptee to repeat the birth parents' pattern, i.e. to become pregnant. These authors state this is not an unfounded fear on the part of the adoptive parents since a disproportionate number of adoptees become pregnant as teenagers. They hypothesize that this may be an effort to form a genetic link with someone or it may be a means of dispelling a fear that they, like their adoptive parents, are also infertile.

The adolescent adoptee's struggle for independence is also complicated by the adoption. (Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978). Adoptive parents, who might be insecure in their relationship with the adoptee, are threatened by their adolescent's attempts to gain independence. Sorosky et. al. explain that adoptive parents "tend to view any disengagement from themselves and an attachment to others as an abandonment and a return to the lonely insecure feelings associated with the parents' preadoption childless period. This may result in a last-ditch attempt to prevent his/her emerging individuation. The adolescent is thus pushed into a heightened state of rebellion against his/her parents in order to maintain a sense of integrity." (p.106).

Related to the discussion as to whether or not adoptees experience a
greater identity struggle is the issue of adoption outcome. Lifton (1988) described how Marshall Schechter’s work in the 1960’s was criticized by social workers because he observed that adoptees were overrepresented in his clinical population. He had dispelled the myth that adoption was a story that ended with everyone living happily ever after. Since that time the volume of research assessing adoption outcomes has grown rapidly. Kadushin (1988) and Hoopes (1990), have both conducted extensive literature reviews in this area. Hoopes stated that even though definitions of success or failure varied from study to study, there appeared to be a consensus in the work she reviewed that there was approximately a 70% success rate. Kadushin (1988) focused on factors which were found to contribute to the success or failure of the adoption. Kadushin dismissed the adoptive parent’s age, socioeconomic status, education, income, the length of their marriage, their motive, their religion, their attitudes toward infertility and the number or status of siblings, as factors impacting adoption outcome. The factors most clearly related to outcome are an acceptance and satisfaction with adoptive parenthood as well as a warm accepting attitude toward the child. Likewise, parental rejection was most closely associated with difficulty in adoption. Kadushin also found that male adoptees were more likely to be maladjusted than female adoptees. Further, the various factors interact with one another and it is ultimately the configuration of factors that determines outcome.

Several authors have suggested that there is a relationship between adoption outcome and the desire to search. These studies are reviewed in the section in this chapter on the search, and the motivation to search.

Issues for the Birth Parents:

It is important to identify the issues experienced by the birth parents as
these will later impact the reunion. Berman and Bufferd (1986) describe birth parents as a hidden population. They state, "the birth parent, like the adoptee and the adoptive parents, has a profound loss, with no appropriate way to mourn. This is further complicated by the implicit message to birth parents to keep their experience and pain a secret." (p.6). The implicit message referred to by Berman and Bufferd was, in many cases, explicit, i.e. birth parents were told to "go away and forget it," or that having given up their child for adoption they have taken care of "the problem" and should now carry on with their lives. Watson's (1986) discussion is a comprehensive account of the issues faced by birth parents. He noted that often when we refer to birth parents we are in fact referring only to the birth mother. Further to this, he said that birth fathers are generally seen as irresponsible scoundrels who abandoned the birth mother during her time of need. Pannor, Massarik and Evans' (1971) work remains unique in the depth to which they examined issues and services for birth fathers. These authors indicate that in 80% of the adoptions through their agency, the birth father was available for an interview with the agency. The turmoil birth fathers experience is an area that remains an issue for further study. Throughout this study reference is made to birth parents, rather than birth mothers. Even though there is limited information available regarding the birth father's experience, the author expects they share with birth mothers many of the same emotional repercussions.

According to Watson (1986), the key issues for birth parents are the interference with the grieving process inherent in the adoption procedure, and the overwhelming guilt (and resulting damage to self-esteem) that birth parents feel. Watson argued that because adoptions have traditionally been based in denial, the birth parents are not even permitted to begin the grieving process.
By negating the child's history before placement, we are effectively negating the birth parent. Often the subject of the adoption is closed within the birth parent's family and support network. They are seen as having made a terrible mistake which has been corrected by the adoption. The societal view is one of people who are irresponsible, immoral, and undeserving of any sympathy or understanding. Both of these positions have changed as the number of unmarried parents has increased and societal values around sexuality have become less judgmental, but for birth parents who are now experiencing reunion, these were very common attitudes which may resurface at any time. If they are successful in proceeding beyond the denial stage, Watson says they are quite likely to get stuck on guilt. With most losses, Watson says we have no control; it is something that happens to us. For birth parents, however, the guilt is intensified because they have actively been involved in the decision to surrender the child. As a means of reducing their guilt, birth parents may project the decision onto others or blame external circumstances. A repeated theme, however, when birth parents are wishing for a reunion is their desire to ensure "it turned out all right". (i.e. to reduce their guilt). Watson noted that the anger stage of the grieving process is distorted because birth parents are expected to go away quietly - and often have a great deal of anger toward the agency or their parents for their part in the adoption process. The grief experienced by birth parents often intensifies, rather than recedes, over time.

Two central themes, then, for all parties in adoption, are loss and grief, and secrecy. In fact, adoption is a program based on loss, and yet because the losses have traditionally not been acknowledged, there has been little support to those involved. This is beginning to change but for many of the people who have been impacted by adoption these changes are a long time in coming.
Berman and Bufferd (1986) say that mourning losses in adoption can be extremely difficult because each family member experiences a different type of loss and these may interfere with each other. When the adoptee mourns the loss of his/her birthparents, for instance, s/he may feel disloyal to the adoptive parents. Adoptive parents, in mourning the loss of their biological child, may feel they are negating their relationship with the adoptee. Berman and Bufferd feel it is important to work with the adoptive family as a unit so that they can recognize the losses of one another and also so that the potential for protecting family secrets inherent in adoption, can be negated.

The place, and damage, of secrecy in adoption cannot be overstated. As well as interfering with the grieving process for all parties, as described by Watson (1986), it impairs communication within the family. As was noted by Small (1987), fear and shame are associated with most family secrets. When a secret is discovered, trust is threatened. The legacy of this secrecy, in its impact on all members of the adoption circle, has been well illustrated by several authors but of particular note are Paton’s (1956), Kirk’s (1965), Sorosky, Baran and Pannor’s (1975), and Lifton’s (1979) works upon which much of the subsequent literature is based. As a result of these cornerstone works, and in an effort to reduce the damage done by secrecy in adoptions, the movement toward openness in adoptions has taken place and is gaining momentum. Additionally, reunions are becoming, in effect, a retroactive measure or grandfather clause for those who were not able to be party to an open adoption. Whether or not, in future, there will be cause for as much criticism of openness in adoptions as there has been for the closed adoption procedure, only time will tell. The remainder of this chapter will review the literature discussing openness in adoptions, the searching process and motivations for searching, and, finally,
adoption reunion.

OPEN ADOPTIONS

Open adoption can be broadly defined as "the sharing of information and/or communication between adoptive and biological families linked by an adoption" (Berry, 1991, p.638). Baran and Pannor are more detailed in their definition of open adoption:

"Open adoption is a process in which the birth parents and the adoptive parents meet and exchange identifying information. The birth parents relinquish legal and basic childrearing rights to the adoptive parents. Both sets of parents retain the right to continuing contact and access to knowledge on behalf of the child" (Baran & Pannor, 1990, p.318).

Demick and Wapner (1988) break open adoptions into four types: 1) Restricted open adoption, where information is shared, on an ongoing basis, with the help of a third party. Identifying information is not shared and the two sets of parents do not meet. 2) Semi-open adoption, where the two sets of parents do meet but identifying information is not shared. 3) Full open adoption, where both parties meet and share information. 4) Continuing open adoption, where birth parents and adoptive parents meet and establish a plan for ongoing contact.

Open adoptions are a new development, largely resulting from adoptees lobbying for reunion and unsealing adoption records (Berry, 1991). They have developed differently in different areas as influenced by the biases and philosophy of the agencies putting them into practice (Baran & Pannor, 1991). Baran and Pannor were at the forefront of the movement toward open adoptions, beginning in the early 1970's. They received a great deal of resistance and criticism from other social work professionals, but, a decade later, found that the move toward open adoption was gaining momentum. Like the opportunity for
reunion, the move toward open adoptions is steeped in controversy. Studies examining open adoptions, both as a means of addressing the ills of closed adoptions or on their own merit, are scarce and inconclusive. This is largely due to the fact that open adoptions are such a new phenomena, and there has not yet been time to fully explore and compare the implications of the variety of forms of open adoptions now in place. Baran and Pannor (1990) stated:

"Currently there is little research evaluating the practice of open adoption placements. Yet the growth of open adoption must not wait for the results of long-term empirical studies. However, there is no question that we are moving continuously in the direction of more openness, which should not be reversed" (Baran & Pannor, 1990, p.330).

Smith and Miroff take the opposing view:

"There have been many changes in adoption practice over the years, including some that are extremely controversial and, from our point of view, questionable because they have never been tested out in any systematic, empirical manner. Into this category falls the practice of open adoption..." (Smith & Miroff, 1987, p.182).

Berry's (1991) recent article reviewed the studies that have been conducted on open adoptions to date. She began by postulating the effects of the various forms of open adoption described by Demick and Wapner (1988). Berry identified, as an advantage to adoptive parents, the potential for more babies to be available through open adoption, since birth parents may be more comfortable with the notion of adoption if they are able to maintain some level of contact. An advantage to the birth parent is a greater sense of control and a reduction of their guilt. Berry cited a number of authors who postulate that open adoption will facilitate the adoptee's identity formation. With regard to risks in open adoption for the adoptive parents, Berry suggested that their unease with regard to entitlement to the child may be enhanced. Additionally, birth parents
may place added strain on the adoptive parents by using the adoptive parents as surrogate parents for themselves. Berry cautioned that the biological parents may be unable to resolve their grief in an open adoption and may therefore feel ambivalent or confused. The greatest risk, Berry noted, is to the adoptee, who, prior to adolescence, may have difficulty understanding their dual identity, which might in adolescence intensify, rather than reduce, his/her struggle with identity formation. Berry proceeded to report the results of the studies conducted which, she noted, were primarily based on information gained from adoptive parents. She concluded: "the empirical evidence supports the argument that open adoption holds the most benefit for the biological parents, particularly the mothers, and holds the greatest risk for children, especially young children." (p.649).

Adoptive parents' experience with open adoption varied depending on their sense of entitlement; the more secure in their belief that the child in fact "belonged" with them, the more open the adoption was likely to be and the more comfortable the adoptive parents were likely to be with regard to openness. Berry (1991) recommended caution in proceeding toward openness in adoption, and stated that adoption workers must be prepared to maintain a high level of involvement with all parties.

Open adoptions in Canada, like the United States, are gaining popularity (Shinyea & Edney, 1992). Because adoptions fall under provincial jurisdiction, practice varies from province to province. Currently, Saskatchewan is the only province that provides for open adoption in government placements (Shinyea & Edney, 1992). Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario all regulate private adoptions and
the level or format of the openness available\(^7\). In Alberta all private adoptions must be open (Shinyea & Edney, 1992). Under the current regulations, there is no way of identifying the proportion of adoptions in British Columbia where some level of openness exists, but consensus among the Lower Mainland Adoption workers is that the majority of private adoptions involve some level of openness\(^8\).

Ministry adoptions in British Columbia are changing rapidly in regard to the level of openness available. As was noted in Chapter 2, moves toward greater information sharing were introduced in an operational directive in July, 1992. In November, 1992, the Report of the Community Panel recommended a recognition of the child's kinship with his/her natural family, and in February, 1993, a discussion paper on open adoption was circulated to Ministry staff. As noted earlier, it is clear from this discussion paper that some form of openness will be available in Ministry adoptions in the near future.

The exact format of this openness is yet to be determined. It is hoped that, in future, when more empirical data regarding open adoptions is available, the decisions made now will prove to benefit all parties, particularly the adoptees. The primary focus of the Ministry in all programs remains "the best interests of the child" (British Columbia, 1992), and I expect this will be the guiding principle in implementing new policy toward openness in adoption. Unfortunately, as is clear in Berry's (1991) article, the best interests of the child are not easily determined.

THE SEARCH

As is evident in Chapter 2, for adoptees who are now adults the option of

\(^7\) Conversation with Delma Hemming, February, 1993
\(^8\) Conversation with Delma Hemming, February, 1993
openness in adoption was not available. Many of these people (particularly those placed prior to 1975) did not have any written background history. Any history that was provided was "benevolently edited" by social workers who wished to ensure information was positive. Adoptive parents were receiving conflicting advice about what to tell, when to tell, and how to tell. As was well documented by Lifton (1979), many of these adoptees were left with information about themselves that was contradictory, disjointed, and lacking in credibility. Some began to search for their birthparents, without the support of the law, in order to clear up some of the mystery and to gain a clearer sense of themselves.

As indicated above, a pioneer in this regard was Jean Paton, a social worker who went on to educate others through writing about her experience (Paton, 1954), and lecturing. Even though Paton normalized the desire to search, speculation grew regarding adoptees' motives in undertaking a task that was monumental and where the emotional repercussions were undetermined. A central theme in all of the literature on the search, is the adoptee's motivation. Paton's (1954), Fisher's (1973) and Lifton's (1979) books all illustrated the intense emotional experience involved in searching, the overwhelming barriers, and the way in which the search takes on a life of its own. Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1978) noted that the search does not always end in reunion, nor does reunion necessarily involve a search. The latter is particularly true in British Columbia since the implementation of the reunion registry. The question then arises, what is the cost/benefit ratio for adoptees who become involved in a search? This question returns us to the earlier issue of adoptees' motivation to search - are they meeting the need that drove them to search in the first place?

Triseliotis (1973) was able to study search and reunion in somewhat unusual circumstances considering the time at which his study was conducted.
At that time, Scotland and Finland were the only countries known to have open adoption records (Triseliotis, 1973). He conducted his study in Scotland, where adoptees over the age of 17 were able to obtain their birth records which provided them with the names and occupations of their birth parents. Triseliotis interviewed 98 adoptees (47 male and 51 female) who obtained their birth records up to two years prior to the interview. Triseliotis felt there was a clear distinction in his sample between those who were wishing to meet their birth parents, and those who were seeking only background information. He discussed with his subjects the age at which they were told of their adoption, what was revealed to them, their perceptions of their family relationships, their perceptions of themselves, the timing of their quest for information, their hopes and expectations, and their experience of search and reunion. A surprising finding in Triseliotis' study is the late age at which the majority of them were told of their adoption (two thirds were told at age eleven or older). Triseliotis noted that this information is retroactively reported and therefore dependent on the subject's memory, but more than half of them learned about their adoption from outside sources. Triseliotis speculated that those who learned of their adoption late may be more likely to seek information and/or a reunion. In fact, he noted that two thirds of the subjects who learned of their adoption after age ten were seeking to meet their adoptive parents. Triseliotis (1973) also found that adoptees whose parents did not acknowledge the adoption, or were reticent or hostile in providing information, were much more likely to seek a reunion than those whose parents provided information in a positive way. He further found that adoptees who saw their adoption as unsatisfactory or partly satisfactory were more likely to seek a reunion with the motive of finding a more satisfactory family relationship. With regard to family relationships, Triseliotis (1973)
concluded:

"Though good relationships were associated with fair to considerable information being made available and poor relationships with none or hostile information, there were exceptions showing that withholding of information was not always an indication of insecure relationships. The indications were, however, that a secure and stable relationship made it possible for the adoptive parents to share information without fear and anxiety." (p.78).

In discussing his subjects' self-perception, Triseliotis (1973) noted that those wishing contact with their birth family generally had a poor self-image which they attributed to a poor family relationship and feelings of shame or embarrassment regarding their adoption. Adoptees who were seeking only background information were found by Triseliotis to have a better self-image and a more satisfactory home-life.

Triseliotis found that most of his subjects began to think about searching in adolescence, but did not take action until their adult years. The decision to search was motivated by some crisis or significant event in the adoptee's life. These crises or significant life events were usually tied to loss or abandonment in the adoptee. The search, then, was initiated in an effort to "fill the void".

Triseliotis again differentiated between those seeking to obtain background information, and those wishing contact, with regard to motive and expectations. Those who were seeking contact were looking for information about why they were placed for adoption, and whether they had been loved. Those seeking background information, on the other hand, were hoping to receive information which would give them a greater sense of self.

Sorosky, Baran and Pannor's (1978) study focused primarily on reunion, and its effect on members of the adoption circle. Their findings in this regard are
discussed in the section on reunion in this chapter. With regard to the search, and motivation to search, these authors were relatively brief. They agreed with Triseliotis’ findings that a significant life event usually triggers a latent desire to search, but were more extensive on the types of experiences which would serve as a trigger. These include adolescence, attaining legal status, engagement and/or marriage, need for documentation (e.g. birth certificate), pregnancy, death of adoptive parent(s), separation or divorce, mid-life crisis, or approaching old age. With regard to motivation for the search, they concluded:

"Different adoptees search for different reasons. For some, the decision to search may come out of anger that they are being penalized for being adopted and have no access to records that they consider their property. For others it is only a quest for additional information. There are many who harbor secret desires to search but lack the strength to initiate action. Fear of hurting adoptive parents restrains large numbers of adult adoptees."


Lifton (1979) took issue with Triseliotis’ (1973) view that searchers were psychologically disadvantaged or were unhappy in their adoptive families. She believed that there are no conclusions to be drawn with regard to who searches. She noted that some adoptees who had a positive adoption relationship might be more likely to search because they have the self-confidence and strength of character needed to do so. On the other hand, anger and guilt may prevent unhappy adoptees from undertaking a search. The strongest determinant, she felt, is the adoptees' level of curiosity. Lifton also felt that the majority of adoptive parents are threatened by the phenomena of adoptees searching. Lifton (1979) felt the decision to search was an important turning point for the adoptee, and was as important, psychologically, as the outcome of the search.

Lifton (1979) described the stages of the search. She began by noting
"every search has a life of its own." The stages outlined by Lifton are as follows:

1) Crossing the threshold - this is the beginning stage where the adoptee collects all the information available to him/her.

2) Obsession - At this stage, the adoptee is involved in the search for its own sake. (Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1978) alluded to this in noting that for some the search is an end in itself).

3) Limbo - This is a time when the information flow seems to have ceased, the adoptee has run up against a brick wall, or is waiting for more information to arrive. During this time the adoptee may choose to hold on to her/his fantasies or to continue to move on.

4) Penetrating the veil - The information allowing for contact becomes available, and the adoptee takes the final step toward contact.

More significant than the stages postulated is Lifton's view that the experience is universal. Themes regarding the adoptees' feeling of isolation and concerns regarding their sanity are prevalent in several discussions of search and reunion (Edgar, 1976; Fisher, 1973; Redmond & Sleightholm, 1982; and Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978).

Like Lifton (1979), Marcus (1981) saw the decision to search as a critical step. She stated: "Having admitted openly for the first time to another person that they have a need to know and that they intend to pursue this need until it is satisfied, they are aware that a breakthrough has been made and the search has now started in earnest." (p.87). She discussed the risks faced by adoptees undertaking a search and noted that a great deal of courage was required. She
identified for the adoptee the risk of exchanging fantasy for reality and the risk of being rejected by the natural parents. In discussing adoptive parents' attitudes toward the search Marcus, expressed the belief that, for the most part, their resistance to access to information was imposed on them by the system. She cited references advising adoptive parents to discourage their children's desire to search. She also noted that the belief that only disturbed or unhappy adoptees desired a search contributed to the adoptive parents' concern. The natural assumption was if their child wished to locate her/his birth parents, the adoptive parents have somehow failed. Marcus asked "Having had such counsel,...how else could adoptive parents react to questions about origins, but with fear and concern?" (p.74)

Melina's (1986) guide for adoptive parents suggested they support the adoptee in their search. Melina's work is a reflection of how attitudes in adoption have changed over the years. She indicated that the adoptees' desire to search, as suggested by Marcus, is a reflection of the individual's level of curiosity and is not unusual, nor does it reflect abnormal adjustment. She advised adoptive parents that discouraging the search may alienate the adoptee, while giving permission for the search is important, as is providing the adoptee with all the information the adoptive parents have.

Andersen (1989), a psychologist and adoptee, examined varying perspectives in the literature regarding adoptees' motivation to search. He developed his perspective from his observations of more than one hundred adoptees known to him through his belonging to a search group. He felt that searchers could be placed into three categories, based on their strategy and expectations in the search. He noted that the categories were overlapping rather than mutually exclusive.
First, for some adoptees, the search was seen as an adventure. For these individuals, the experience was the primary consideration. "Search in this view is uncomplicated, naive, and appealing. It takes life at face value. Adoptees with this view hope to pick up life where it was interrupted, and to capture that which remains." (Andersen, 1989, p.624). This view, Andersen noted, is predominant in the reunions depicted in the media.

Second, the search as cure, or therapy, Andersen noted, can be divided into the medical model and the psychological model. The scenario in the medical model is most clearly illustrated by Triseliotis (1973). "In this view, adoptees are seen as suffering from a deficiency of something that exists outside themselves that, if it can be obtained ... will bring about a resolution and cure of the adoptees' problems... The most significant elements implicit in this view are that the adoptees: (1) need to take something into themselves; (2) this something is external; (3) the process is relatively passive; and (4) resolution is complete." (Andersen, 1989, p.626).

Andersen expressed reservations regarding this view. He was suspicious of the notion of pain free emotional growth inherent in this model. He questioned whether the discovery of "truth" is, in itself, therapeutic. He expressed the view that the information gained from the reunion is not necessarily as revealing as was expected. For instance, receiving confirmation from the birth mother that the adoptee was loved does not negate the fact that the child was placed for adoption. He further argued that incorporating information received is an active, rather than passive, process, and is influenced by the past experience of the adoptee. Finally, he stated that "it seems somewhat naive to think that a family reunion, dramatic though it may be, can readily alter the experience (of the years prior to the reunion)." (p.629).
Andersen espoused, instead, the third view, which he termed the psychological model. In this model, the adoptee is seen as having experienced a trauma, and the treatment, in the form of the search and reunion, consists of acknowledging the trauma, responding to it, and changing it from an experience that was passively endured to one that is actively mastered. In this view, resolution in incomplete. This view is compatible with Marcus and Lifton's belief that the decision to search and the search itself is at least as important as the reunion.

Perhaps the most extensive and comprehensive discussion of the meaning of the search for the adoptee is that provided by Schechter and Bertocci (1990). These authors based their discussion on twelve previous studies of search and reunion (including Triseliotis, 1973, and Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978). They developed a conceptual understanding of the fundamental issues underlying the need to search, which seems to reconcile the findings of all of the previous studies. Schechter and Bertocci (1990) identified five issues related to or motivations for search. These are: 1) the adoptee's attempt to address loss and attachment issues through reunion; 2) envy and jealousy in the adoptive family as contributing to searching behavior; 3) developmental blocks in the adoptee which impact his/her sexual identity; 4) cognitive dissonance regarding body image and/or locus of control, and; 5) an innate driven need to search as a means of attaining human connectedness. These issues are interrelated. The identification, by Schechter and Bertocci, of cognitive dissonance regarding body image was an interesting notion. In an earlier study, these authors explored the significance of lack of physical similarity between the adoptee and members of the adoptive family. They found that "sixty percent of the respondents indicated that the lack of perceived similarities had been a
significant factor in their sense of frustration, embarrassment and insecurity as an adoptee." (Schechter & Bertocci, p.68).

The combination of issues identified by Schechter and Bertocci (1990) resulted in what they identified as a drive state. "On the basis of what we have learned about the strength of the desire to search and about its intrapsychic sources, we submit that the need to experience human connectedness through one's family of origin has innate (constitutional) origins in complex, interrelated sequences involving perception, cognition, emotion, and active response. In this sense the need for an internal sense of human connectedness meets the criteria of a drive state." (Schechter and Bertocci, 1990, p.64-65).

It is evident that we are continuing to learn about adoptees' motivation to search, and our understanding of this phenomenon will continue to develop as more evidence is gathered. While early studies (particularly Triseliotis, 1973) identified those wishing to search as being dissatisfied and emotionally disadvantaged by adoption, later studies see the desire (or drive) to search as a normal reaction to abnormal circumstances. This discrepancy is unlikely to be related to the effort needed to pursue the search. Even though Triseliotis' (1973) study was one of the first on the topic, he was able to draw his subjects from an area where attitudes toward access to information was liberal for the time. The discrepancy may, however, reflect a cultural difference (between Great Britain and North America), or it may be a reflection of the fact that there now exists a strong pro-access movement, which has effectively normalized the notion of the search. If so, then Paton achieved her goal in opening up the discussion with her first book. A review of the literature regarding access to adoption records will shed further light on this matter.
THE SEALED RECORD CONTROVERSY

Intertwined in discussions of open adoption, search, and reunion, is the debate over sealed records: if adoption records are to be opened, who should have access to information, at what age, under what circumstances, etc. Several authors who wrote their personal accounts of their search and reunion include a "plea for reform" (Clark, 1989; Fisher, 1973; Lifton, 1975; Marcus, 1981; Maxtone-Graham, 1983; and Redmond, 1982). Others who investigated the topic of search, reunion, or open adoption from a broader perspective, include a discussion of the issues included in the debate over unsealing the records (Kadushin, 1988; Sachdev, 1984 & 1989; Smith & Miroff, 1987; and Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978). The argument presented by those whose personal stories led them to advocate for change (i.e. unsealing records), is that adoptees suffer from the lack of knowledge about themselves. Additionally, their argument usually includes the comment that in denying adoptees information they remain children forever in the eyes of the law. Redmond (1982) and Maxtone-Graham (1983) and Lifton (1979) make this point forcefully. In these personal accounts of search and reunion, assumptions are made regarding the adoptive parents' attitudes toward unsealing of records, which seem to be a reflection of the adoptees' relationship with their adoptive parents. Redmond (1982), for example, saw the adoptive parents as the major adversaries in the struggle for more openness. In one of the case histories she described, a passive registry was available where access to records was granted provided all three parties (birthmother, adoptive parents, adoptee) gave their written consent. Redmond (1982) commented "How many adoptive parents, however liberal, would volunteer to sign such a list? Few of their own free will." (p.54). Lifton (1975) and Marcus (1981), on the other hand, seem to have had more positive...
relationships with their adoptive parents and take a more balanced view regarding the adoptive parents' attitudes to unsealing records.

Discussions in the literature reviewing the controversy over sealing or unsealing records vary in their perceptions of the adoptive parents' attitudes, but generally concur that the adoptive parents are the group most likely to resist access to information (Kadushin, 1988; Sachdev, 1984; Smith & Miroff, 1987; and Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978). The most comprehensive of these discussions is Sachdev's (1984). A key consideration, Sachdev pointed out, is the adoptee's motivation for seeking information. Sachdev began by reviewing the literature regarding the adoptee's identity formation. He noted that child development studies which recognized the adolescent task of identity formation were a significant factor in generating the controversy over unsealing records. After reviewing the literature, Sachdev concluded that the adoptees' desire to know their biological roots is universal, and normal to their development. Whether or not one acts on the desire to know is another matter.

Smith and Miroff (1987) stated "the controversy basically centers around a conflict of rights between birth parents, adoptees, and adoptive parents." (p.162). Those who support the status quo believe strongly in the confidentiality and anonymity of traditional adoptions, and feel a change would essentially be a violation of their trust. Birth parents who support sealed records state that closure is important in order to get on with their lives (Smith & Miroff, 1987). Adoptive parents express conflicting fears; that they will lose their child, or, conversely that the child will be hurt by a second rejection by the birth mother (Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978). Adoptees who support sealed records express concerns for both the adoptive parents, who deserve their loyalty, and birth parents, whose decision (to surrender) should be respected (Sorosky,

The arguments in support of unsealing records have been presented in this chapter in the discussion of adoption issues and open adoptions. By opening adoption records it is hoped that adoptees will be able to better address their identity issues, birth parents guilt and loss issues will be addressed, and adoptive parents will have to acknowledge the inherent differences between adoptive and biological parenthood.

In addition to Sorosky, Baran and Pannor's (1978) work, I was able to locate three studies which systematically examined the issue of unsealing adoption records (Feigelman & Silverman, 1986; Sachdev, 1989; and Smith & Miroff, 1987). Sorosky, Baran & Pannor (1978) compiled data received from various sources. They solicited public comment on the sealed record controversy through newspaper articles and interviews. Of the letters received, they chose 38 birth parents (36 birth mothers, 2 birth fathers) to be interviewed. One of the authors (Pannor) ran a support group for adopted adolescents, and reported on their beliefs around sealed records. Pannor also interviewed sixty adoptive parents who belonged to an adoptive parents' group. Finally, these authors interviewed 50 adoptees (41 female, 9 male) who had responded to newspaper articles describing Sorosky, Baran and Pannor's work and requesting interested parties to contact them. They also interviewed some of these adoptees' birth parents. Sorosky, Baran and Pannor's greatest contribution, in my view, is their ability to reflect the diversity of views and intensity of emotion surrounding the sealed record controversy. Their findings with regard to reunion

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9 Sorosky, Baran & Pannor published several other articles on this topic, prior to the release of their book (Baran, Pannor & Sorosky, 1974; Baran, Pannor & Sorosky, 1975; and Pannor, Sorosky & Baran, 1974).
are reported later in this chapter in the section on adoption reunion. With regard to the sealed record controversy, their work was conducted early, in that adoption reunions were quite rare, there were no active reunions in place, and only a few passive reunions, so that the controversy over sealed records was in its beginning stages. The concerns expressed by all parties and conversely the anticipated benefits, could not be tested at that point. The emotion tied to this issue (anger, pain, loss, fear, joy), however, came through with great clarity.

Sachdev (1989) reported on two Canadian studies which aimed to examine the apprehensions and concerns of members of the adoption triangle (his term) around the unsealing of adoption records. In the first study (termed the disclosure study) Sachdev interviewed 152 adoptive parents who adopted at three different time periods (1958, 1968, 1978), 78 birth mothers, 53 adoptees, and 17 adoption personnel. By comparing the three groups of adoptive parents, Sachdev was able to gain insight as to whether views toward openness changed over time. The second study (called the reunion study) examined pre and post reunion experiences of adoptees and birth parents. The results of this study are discussed in the reunion section of this chapter. Sachdev reported that the majority of adoptive parents (69.7%) favored disclosure, with the younger parents being more supportive than the older parents (74% compared to 62%). However, probes revealed that their support was on an impersonal level. When the potential for disclosure was personalized, they expressed that they would feel threatened or fearful. They qualified their support on the basis that the information would meet a need (not a whim) on the part of the adoptee, and that the adoptee was not out for revenge and was emotionally ready for a reunion. Birth parents interviewed by Sachdev were also supportive of disclosure (88.5%) but also expressed concern about the adoptees' motives, so suggested their (the
birthparent's) consent be obtained before identifying information is released. Adoptees were less supportive of the birth parent's right to access information. Only 56.6% were in support of release of information, but this number increased to 80% if the adoptee's prior consent was obtained. They expressed concerns that they would be harassed by the birth parent or that her appearance would be disruptive to them.

Feigelman and Silverman (1986) mailed a questionnaire to adoptive parents who belonged to adoptive parent groups, or who had been affiliated with an agency known to the researchers. The representativeness of their sample is questionable, particularly since 80% belonged to the adoptive parents group. (One might argue parents belonging to such a group would be more informed and aware of adoption issues, as well as more able to acknowledge the difference between biological and adoptive families.) Their sample was large (372 responses) and included a range of adoptive circumstances, including transracial, international, older child, and special needs placements. They recognized that infertile couples might respond differently to the idea of unsealing records than fertile couples, so addressed the responses of the infertile couples separately. Feigelman and Silverman (1986) found that the majority of adoptive parents in both groups (fertile and infertile) supported some level of access information (61% and 56% respectively). Conversely, 34% of the infertile adoptive parents, and 26% of the fertile adoptive parents felt that records should remain sealed. Also, few of the adoptive parents surveyed by Feigelman and Silverman supported the birth parent's right to have contact with the adoptee in adulthood (25%) or to updated information about the child's progress (19%).

Smith and Miroff (1986) used a questionnaire with a Likert scale to
examine adoptee, adoptive parent, and birth parent attitudes toward unsealing records. Their sample consisted of 57 adoptive parents, 20 birth parents and 30 adoptees. These authors did not indicate how subjects were solicited, but note that they consciously chose not to include members of search or anti-search organizations. Using nine questions, some of which were worded in a pro-open form and some in a pro-closed form, Smith and Miroff essentially "tested" respondents' attitudes toward openness. They found that with a possible summary score ranging between 9 and 45, the majority in all groups were scored as pro-open (a score about 27). 60% of adoptive parents, 80% of adoptees, and 95% of birth parents achieved a pro-open score. Despite the fact that Smith and Miroff found that the differences between the summary scores were significant, it is interesting that the summary scores of all groups were pro-openness, although the margin was slight (27.2%) in the adoptive parent's group. It should also be noted that it is the birth parents who achieved the most extreme scores. In light of the studies discussed previously, one might wonder how these respondents were solicited.

In contrast to Sorosky, Baran and Pannor's (1975) earlier study, the three more recent studies indicate that the majority of adoptive parents support, rather than reject, the notion of unsealing records. Their support, with the exception of Sachdev's study, is not as strong as adoptees or birth parents, but neither have they been found to be as resistant as was earlier anticipated. The fact that these studies used a diversity of methodology and obtained their samples from varying sources suggests that, in the absence of further study, and with certain qualifying conditions, adoptive parents are not as resistant to the possibility of reunion as they were presumed to be.
LITERATURE ON ADOPTION REUNION

For the purpose of this discussion, I have categorized the literature on adoption reunion into two types; a) personal accounts including autobiographical, journalistic and qualitative studies (Clark, 1989; DuPrau, 1990; Fisher, 1973; Gediman & Brown, 1991; Lifton, 1975; Lifton, 1979; Marcus, 1981; Paton, 1954, Redmond & Sleightholm, 1982; Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978; and Triseliotis, 1973), and b) empirical studies designed to assess the impact of adoption reunion on various members of the adoption circle (Campbell, Silverman & Patti, 1991; Depp, 1982; Rosenweig-Smith, 1988; Sachdev, 1989; Sachdev, 1992; Silverman et. al., 1988; and Stevenson, 1975). In the first group, the strong emotional impact of adoption reunion is well illustrated. The second group gives a more generalizeable insight into the phenomena of adoption reunion. Both types of studies make an important contribution to our understanding of this issue.

Personal Accounts:

Autobiographical accounts

Paton (1954), is acknowledged as the pioneer in this field of study having conducted her search and written about it almost twenty years before anyone else. Hers was the first reunion to receive public attention and hers was the first voice (and pen) raised to advocate for change. Despite her lengthy and exhausting search to locate information and subsequently her birth mother, the fact that she accomplished her goal is nothing short of amazing.

Fisher's (1973) struggle to obtain her birth information was no less intense than Paton's, indicating that in nineteen years not much had changed. While the legal barriers they faced were similar, the laws vary from country to country, state to state, province to province. Based on her experience, Fisher
founded an organization (A.L.M.A. - Adoptees' Liberty Movement Association) to help adoptees locate identifying information, and to lobby for change.

Lifton's (1975) description of her search and reunion is exceptional in her insights into her emotional and psychological state throughout the search. She refers frequently to the support received from her husband, a psychologist, who, contrary to the therapist encountered by Fisher (1973), appeared to have a strong understanding of his wife's need to search. Lifton (1979) went on to write about the experiences of other adoptees, and to develop a conceptualization of search and reunion. These are discussed more fully later in this chapter.

Clark's (1989) description of his search for his daughter is notable on two accounts; it gives the birth parent's perspective, and more notably, the birth father's perspective. While the majority of birth parents who seek a reunion are birth mothers (Sachdev, 1992), there has not been a similar autobiographical account of a birth mother's struggle for reunion. This leads me to wonder if the shame and guilt experienced by birth mothers, and the strongly negative image held in society, continues to prevent them from identifying themselves publicly as an autobiography would. According to Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1978), birth fathers were generally not seen as negatively, although neither were they expected to display the level of interest and emotional turmoil described by Clark (1989). Clark wrote his book, like Paton (1954), Fisher (1973), and Lifton (1975) in an effort to advocate for change.

Maxtone-Graham's (1983) book illustrated how far the movement toward access to adoption records had progressed in the ten years since Fisher's (1973) work, and how far they have yet to go. Like Fisher, Maxtone-Graham's marriage did not survive her search. One might argue that these marriages were not secure in the first place or conversely, one might suggest that the attachment
process impaired by the adoption affected their ability to form a secure relationship and issues which resurfaced with the search proved more strain than the marriage could bear. To my knowledge there has not been a study examining the impact of search and reunion on significant relationships in the adoptee or birth parent's life.

A common thread throughout these studies is how the search and reunion impacts not only the key players (i.e. adoptee, adoptive parents, and birthparents), but also a multitude of others. These searchers invariably encountered bureaucrats (social workers, judges, etc.) who felt strongly against access to information or could not comprehend their desire for more knowledge. These individuals quite clearly believed that the confidentiality and anonymity on which adoption was based, was paramount. Also, in conducting their searches, these authors (particularly Fisher, 1973; Lifton, 1975; and Maxtone-Graham, 1983) clearly illustrate the desire to meet not only the birth mother, but also the birth father and other relatives. As Maxtone-Graham showed, even meeting with her birth father's best friend (her birth father was deceased) was an important event. The desire for connection goes beyond blood ties. Generally, particularly in quantitative or empirical studies, we tend to focus only on the central parties (adoptive and birth mother usually, sometimes including birth father and adoptive parents). These personal histories illustrate how adoption reunion is like a stone thrown into water; the ripples continue to expand involving an ever-growing number of involved parties.

Journalistic studies

This section includes works that compile the results of a number of interviews with adoptees or involved others, but where the information was not, nor was it intended to be, collected in compliance with any formal methodology.
Included in this group are DuPrau (1990), Gediman and Brown (1991), Lifton (1979), Marcus (1981), and Redmond and Sleightholm (1982). These books are aimed at the general public and are written in a conversational, sometimes simplistic (DuPrau, 1990) tone. More than anything else, their purpose appears to be to provide adoptees with the knowledge that they are not alone if considering a search. Lifton (1979) and Marcus' (1981) books have the added distinction of organizing their information in a way that provides some order to the experience of search and reunion.

DuPrau (1990) appeared to have geared her book to the adolescent adoptee (or his/her parents) who is struggling with identity issues. She used large type and simplistic language to summarize literature on the subject and interviews she conducted with members of the adoption circle.

Redmond and Sleightholm (1982) told the stories of five adoptees who had searched and reunited with their birth mother. Additionally, they included the story of one adoptive family and three birth mothers. It is interesting to note that none of the adoptees in this book had positive relationships with their adoptive parents. Given that the evidence in the literature suggests that 80% of adoptions could be termed as successful, or positive (Kadushin, 1990), it would seem that Redmond and Sleightholm's work is rather biased. Additionally, the adoptive family included in their book had a very negative experience with the way in which the adoption took place and therefore did not trust "the system" to be able to positively accomplish adoption reunions. Finally, the birth mothers interviewed also typically had nightmare experiences at the time the child was placed for adoption. The lack of balance (positive and negative experiences) in Redmond and Sleightholm's (1982) work, in my view, is a disservice to potential readers. Those whose experience is not so negative are prone to dismiss the
points made by these authors because there is no common experience for them to relate to.

Lifton (1979) incorporated interviews with numerous adoptees, birth parents and adoptees with information gathered from personal conversations a number of psychologists and social workers, and other experts. An author by profession, Lifton was able to trace the adoption experience from the beginning onward, from varying perspectives. She provided a well-rounded view of not only search and reunion, but also adoption issues discussed earlier in this chapter, and typical societal or public attitudes. In an easily readable style she presents psychological models for understanding the experiences of members of the adoption circles. As noted earlier, she identified typical stages of the search (crossing the threshold, obsession, limbo, and penetrating the veil), as well as some typical post-reunion experiences. She noted (as did Schechter and Bertocci, 1990) that there is no relationship that parallels one formed through an adoption reunion. She also illustrated how each reunion is unique, as well as identifying some commonalities. The initial meeting, she noted, is usually so intense that no one remembers clearly what was said. Post reunion issues which tend to surface include a) questioning who owes what to whom; b) sexuality issues; c) what if one does not feel love for the other party (and can anyone be expected to)?; d) the feeling of being let down; and e) the issue of forgiveness. She called the reunion with the birth father a "mini-search", stating that this usually takes place as a final stage, after reunion with the birth mother has taken place. Lifton went on to address typical concerns expressed, primarily by birth parents and adoptive parents, regarding reunion. Her discussion of their concerns was empathic and insightful. She expressed the view (which this author challenges) that adoptive parents generally are anxious about the
prospect of reunion. She stopped short of interviewing adoptive parents whose
grown children had experienced a reunion, so was unable to identify if their fears
regarding the potential of reunion were based on experience.

Marcus (1981) provided a Canadian perspective and a similar discussion
to Lifton's (1979). Also an adoptee, Marcus interviewed other adoptees, birth
parents, adoptive parents and adoption professionals. She described her book
as "a roundtable-like discussion in print, easily read by anyone rather than a
select audience" (p.i). For someone involved in a reunion her descriptive
headings provided the opportunity to peruse the book to find some experience
with which to identify. Like Lifton, Marcus interviewed adoptive parents
regarding their views on search and reunion. She too failed to interview
adoptive parents to explore their post-reunion experience. The quotes she
included, including some from adoptive parents who supported or facilitated the
adoptiveee's search, were the adoptive parents' anticipation regarding reunion, not
their experience of it. She included the adoptees' interpretations of their
adoptive parents' experiences, but not the adoptive parents' own experience.

Gediman and Brown (1991) focused their work on the post-reunion
experience, primarily from the birth mother's perspective. Gediman, a journalist,
was fascinated with her friend Brown's experience as a birth mother who had
been found. They decided to work together to explore post-reunion issues.
They obtained their interviewees from members of the search movement, and
through word-of-mouth. After interviewing over one hundred reunited
birthmothers, they included thirty stories which they believed typified the rest.
They also reviewed the literature and consulted with numerous experts.
Gediman and Brown (1991) began by recounting the early adoption placement
experience, reviewed the difficulties imposed by the closed adoption structure,
and went on to identify post-reunion patterns and themes. They noted that adoption and reunion are a life-long process, and it is on this premise that their work is based. They described the first meeting as climactic. In their discussion of post-reunion they addressed "the stranger who's not a stranger" (p.120), the "honeymoon phase", and expression of negative feelings. While their information source is primarily birthmothers, they included insights from adoptees and birth fathers. They also devoted a chapter to adoptive parents and post-reunion. In this chapter they included quotes from adoptees and birth mothers regarding the adoptive parent's reactions and response to the reunion. Even though they did not talk directly to adoptive parents, their presentation of adoptive parents was more balanced than that presented by Lifton (1979) and Marcus (1981). Whether this is because theirs is a more recent work and adoptive parents are becoming more responsive to the adoptees' need for reunion or because their focus is post-reunion is a matter for speculation and further study.

**Qualitative studies**

In comparison with the studies listed above, the studies in this category (Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978; and Tresiliotis, 1973) are characterized by a scientific rather than journalistic orientation. They are written by social work professionals whose interest in the area, rather than being personal is a quest for knowledge. In the following section these studies are discussed extensively because, as noted earlier, they provide the baseline from which further research has progressed.

Of the 98 adoptees interviewed by Triseliotis (1973) only 11 had engaged in a reunion with a birth relative at the time they were interviewed. Only four had reunited with a birth parent. Two had made contact with their birth mother, one
with the birth father, and one with both birth parents. The remainder had connected with a sibling, grandparent, or aunt. Even though Triseliotis' subjects had access to identifying information, this information did not include a current address for the birth parent. As such, the adoptee was still required to undertake a search if s/he desired contact with the birth parent (or other relative). Triseliotis (1973) did not distinguish between those who had made contact with a birth relative, and those who had not, when assessing the helpfulness of the search process. Of his total pool of subjects 80% felt the search was helpful, while 20% felt either unsure or regretted having been involved in the process. Triseliotis' study is primarily focused on access to information and the impact of that information. As such it is not really a reunion study. It was included in this section, however, because his findings are often cited by subsequent researchers.

Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1978) primary goal was "to investigate the outcome of consummated reunions between adoptees and birth parents." (p.193). They interviewed 50 adoptees (41 female, 9 male) who responded to their public request, through newspaper articles, for subjects. They presented both anecdotal information (excerpts from their interviews) and statistical information about the outcome of these reunions. The anecdotal information gives a clear sense of the emotions involved and the individual differences.

"Romance, drama, pathos, mystery, and all the joys and sorrows within the range of human emotions characterize the reunion experience for adoptee and birth parent. Each story merits a book in itself." (Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978, p.157)

The themes they identified in their discussion are congruent with those identified by Lifton (1979), Marcus (1981), and Gediman and Brown (1991); recognition of genetic similarities, resurfacing of loss, grief or abandonment issues, fear of
rejection, less connection than was expected, decline of interest (by either party) after the initial contact, and an attempt to meet emotional deficiencies through the reunion. Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1978) found that ninety percent of their subjects (adoptees) were satisfied with the outcome of the reunion, while eighty-two percent of birth parents contacted responded positively to the reunion. With regard to adoptive parents, 34% were either deceased or not told of the reunion, 36% were supportive or understanding, 20% were mildly upset, and 10% were quite hurt. It should be noted that the adoptive parent’s response was reported to the researchers by the adoptee. Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1978) give the sense that adoptive parents are generally threatened and fearful of the reunion, yet their results show that of those who were involved, the majority were supportive. They justify their interpretation by suggesting that if the adoptee did not include the adoptive parent or waited until they were deceased, they had likely been given a verbal or nonverbal message by the adoptive parents that the topic was uncomfortable or threatening. While there may be basis for their argument, further study might be warranted in this area.

One of the most significant findings of this study is that where a good relationship existed between the adoptee and adoptive parent, the reunion enhanced the relationship, whereas, if there was strain between the adoptee and adoptive parents, the reunion gave the adoptee some insight regarding the origin of this strain.

"One feeling, however, was shared in some measure by all adoptive parents: they feared losing the love of their adopted child to the birthparent. Not only was this fear unfounded, but if one statement can be made unequivocally, it is that a primary benefit of the reunion experience is the strengthening of the adoptive family relationship" (Sorosky, Baran and Pannor, 1978, p.192).
Empirical Studies:

In reviewing these studies, it is most helpful to follow them in chronological order, rather than by methodology. It is interesting to note that all of the early work is in autobiographical, journalistic or qualitative form. This is not an unusual pattern in research and is, in fact, the preferred sequence (Patton, 1980).

Stevenson's (1976) study is significant because it was the first Canadian study on adoption reunion and was conducted in British Columbia. His preliminary findings were reviewed by the Berger Commission (British Columbia, 1975), and were integrated into the Commission's recommendations. Stevenson interviewed eleven of the twelve British Columbian adoptees known to have engaged in a reunion at that time. Eight of the eleven were interviewed personally, while three were interviewed briefly by telephone. Stevenson compared his results to Sorosky, Baran and Pannor's (1978) and Triseliotis' (1973) studies. Contrary to Triseliotis but congruent with Sorosky, Baran and Pannor, Stevenson found that the majority of his subjects sought a reunion out of a sense of "genealogical bewilderment" rather than being psychologically disturbed. Of note, however, is that he described three of his subjects as psychiatrically disturbed (two marked and one moderate) and these same three had poor life experiences (two were placed at an older age - 4-5 - and one's adoptive parents died when she was ten). Their experience of the reunion was less satisfactory, perhaps because they had hoped the reunion would provide a "cure" and were disappointed in this expectation. Stevenson (1976) clearly acknowledged the limitations of his study resulting from the small sample size and the fact that research in the area was only just beginning.

Depp (1982) reviewed the results of questionnaires sent to twelve
adoptees who had experienced reunions, six adoptive parents whose adult child had been reunited with his/her birthparents, and three birthparents. Subjects were recruited through their involvement with an agency that had been facilitating reunions (if requested by the adoptee) for approximately six years. Of the adoptees, four described their relationship with the birth parent as good, three described it as poor, and three described it as neutral. With regard to the adoptee/adoptive parent relationship following the reunion, eight adoptees described it as unchanged, while two said it had improved. Depp is one of the few researchers who have obtained post-reunion feedback directly from adoptive parents. Half of the adoptive parents had been opposed to the reunion before it occurred, and half were in favor of it. After the reunion, four saw the reunion as positively impacting on the adoptee, and two saw it as negative for the adoptee. Four saw their relationship with the adoptee following the reunion as unaffected, one felt it had improved, and one felt it had deteriorated. Despite her small sample, Depp (1982), like Stevenson (1976), felt that her results were congruent with Sorosky, Baran and Pannor’s, (1978) results, particularly with regard to the adoptee/adoptive parent relationship. Depp stated, "As a group, adoptive parents have felt most threatened by reunions and so it is surprising that they perceived the reunion experience in as positive terms as they reported. Perhaps the reality of the reunion was not as bad as they imagined it would be." (p.118).

Silverman et. al. (1988) reported on questionnaires received from 170 reunited birth parents (5 of whom were birthfathers). "The results were examined, including and excluding male respondents, and the presence or absence of fathers in the data did not significantly affect the findings." (Silverman et. al. 1988, p.523). They distinguished between birth parents who had instigated the search and those who had been found. They linked the birth
and surrender experience with the desire to search, noting few differences in this area between the birth parents who searched and those who were found. They found, however, that birth parents who felt coerced into placing the child for adoption were more likely to search. Another difference between searching birth parents and those who were found, is the involvement of an agency to facilitate the reunion. Searching birth parents, perhaps because of their experience at the time the child was placed, were less likely to use an agency. The majority of those who were found were initially contacted by an agency, or other intermediary. This may be attributed to fear of rejection on the part of the adoptee, or perhaps on the adoptee's recognition that the birth parent's life would be impacted by contact and the intermediary would absorb the birth parent's initial shock at being contacted. Both searching and non-searching birth parents seemed to have benefitted from the reunion. Also, they concluded, "contrary to expectation, reunions do not seem to disrupt the lives of the participants. Even birth mothers who did not search and who still would not do so were pleased to be found. At least from the point of view of the birth parents the reunion, even if unsuccessful, seems to enhance their lives." (Silverman et. al., 1988, p.528)

These authors also examined reunion from the adoptee's perspective (Campbell, Silverman & Patti, 1991). They received 133 returned questionnaires from adoptees who had reunited with birth parents (including 11 males). They wondered if the fact that all of the men in their study initiated the search was a reflection of a changing trend for male adoptees. They noticed that the most striking difference between adoptees who searched and those who were found was age; searchers tended to be older, indicating a certain level of maturity must be attained before an adoptee feels ready to search. These
authors found that contrary to Triseliotis' findings, adoptees who sought reunions were generally satisfied with their adoption. They note that the search is easier when the adoptive parent is supportive. As with their earlier study on birth parents, they found that the reunion did not seem to be disruptive to the participants whether or not they initiated the search.

In both of these studies the authors identify limitations resulting from their sampling, a problem inherent in adoption research (Maas, 1965; and Smith & Miroff, 1987). Their sample was self-selected, and members of search/support groups were over-represented. These authors note they also recruited responses to questionnaires from adoptive parents (Silverman et al., 1988), but to my knowledge these results have not yet been published.

Rosenweig-Smith (1988) examined the relationship between certain independent variables (adoptees' age at the initiation of the search, grief resolution, and attributing blame for relinquishment to the birth mother) and the success of the reunion. She developed a questionnaire using a Likert scale which she mailed to adoptees who had initiated a search through an agency. She had 31 respondents; twenty-six female, 5 male. Motivation for the search, as indicated by her subjects, fell into two categories; a) information and b) wishing to fill a void. Two of her hypotheses were not supported; she found no significant relationship between the success of the reunion, and the age at which the reunion was initiated, or the success of the reunion and the resolution of grief. She did find, however, that when the birth father was seen as the instigator of the relinquishment, there was a better relationship between the adoptee and the birth mother. She noted that her study was exploratory and non-generalizeable, and encouraged further study in the area.

As noted earlier, Sachdev (1989) conducted a two part study on search
and reunion. The reunion study involved 107 adoptees and 50 birth mothers who had been reunited in Ontario, two to five years prior to Sachdev's study. Sachdev did not identify the number of females and males in this study. In the reunion study, Sachdev (1989) found that all members of the adoption circle demonstrated concern for the feelings and interests of the other parties. He contrasts this to the finding, in his "disclosure" study, that members of the adoption circle expressed concern about each others' motives. He found, congruent with the previous studies cited (Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978; Depp, 1982; Silverman et. al., 1988; and Campbell, Silverman & Patti, 1991), that adoptees and birth parents were not seen to be intrusive in each others' lives, the reunion was not, in fact, a threat to the adoptee/adoptive parent relationship, and members of the adoption circle were generally considerate of one another when a reunion took place.

Sachdev (1992) conducted a second study on adoption reunion, again in Ontario. Subjects were solicited through a search and support group, and Sachdev obtained 124 returned questionnaires from adoptees (105 females, 19 males). In this study, Sachdev (1992) found that most adoptees were motivated to search in order to attain a more cohesive identity. Another motive was to make up for time lost. A small number of adoptees identified the following motives: a) assure the birth parent they were alright; b) to fill a void in their lives; c) curiosity; or d) a wish to express resentment to the adoptive mother. The majority of adoptees (61.8%) in Sachdev's (1992) study informed their adoptive parents of the search. Two-thirds of the adoptive parents expressed concern that the adoptee might be hurt, 35.8% were pleased to hear of the search, while 34.3% felt the search signified their failure as parents. 93.9% of the adoptees surveyed by Sachdev in this study had no regrets following the
reunion. Two feelings identified by adoptees following the search were, a more cohesive sense of identity (93.3%), and relief that the search was over (85.4%). 78.1% of the adoptees in Sachdev's study had made contact with other birth family members.

In reviewing these studies on reunion, several reoccurring themes emerge. These are:

1) The majority of adoptees who searched were not generally found to have a poor relationship with their adoptive parents, nor were they found to be emotionally or psychologically disturbed.

2) The bulk of the studies identify the primary motive for reunion on the part of adoptees as a desire to attain a clearer sense of self.

3) The reunions were generally not found to be intrusive by either the adoptees or the birth parents.

4) Birth parents and adoptees generally reported satisfaction with the outcome of the reunion.

5) Females consistently outnumbered males in undertaking a search and/or reunion, and in responding to calls for subjects in reunion studies. There has been much speculation about the reason for this imbalance, but it remains just that; speculation.

6) The research, to date, does not differentiate between reunions involving special needs adoptees, interracial placements, international placements, or adoptees who were older when placed. There is some distinction between private and agency placements, but this could be further explored.

7) While adoptive parents expressed concerns in anticipation of the search in a number of studies, only one study (Depp, 1982) solicited post-reunion information from adoptive parents. Her sample size was very small, but her
results indicated that their fears were unwarranted. This is clearly an area for further study, and the results of Campbell, Silverman and Patti's continuing research should shed more light in this area.

As noted earlier, the bulk of the beginning work on adoption reunion took the form of autobiographies or compilations of personal stories, followed by two qualitative studies. Because Depp's (1982) is the only study which solicits post-reunion information directly from adoptive parents, I feel, qualitative methodology is warranted in this thesis. As with the other early studies, I believe the adoptive parents stories are valuable in and of themselves. Further, I feel an in-depth interview is more likely to successfully bring out experiences or issues which have not, as yet, been identified.
CHAPTER IV: METHOD

"Truth is a funny thing. Everyone seems to claim to have a 'handle' on it, but when it really comes down to it, what is felt to be the truth is no more than a perception (of the truth) at best, a myth or an outright lie at worst." (Smith & Miroff, 1987, P. 151)

METHOD AND DESIGN

The primary purpose of this study is to begin to develop a better understanding of adoption reunion from the adoptive parents' perspective. Grinnell (1981) noted that exploratory research focuses on distinct or unique characteristics of a phenomenon. Reid and Smith (1981) stated, "research takes on an exploratory-formulative function when it is used to gain preliminary understanding of a phenomena or to stimulate the development of concepts, hypotheses, and theories. In this context generalizations are not so much demonstrated by empirical inquiry as suggested by it" (Reid & Smith, 1981, p. 85).

A qualitative design is well suited to exploratory research. Hakim (1987) included exploratory studies as one justification for choice of a qualitative design. Qualitative research offers the opportunity to gain insights into the emotional depth of the subject's experience.

"It offers richly descriptive reports of individuals' perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, views and feelings, the meaning and interpretations given to events and things, as well as their behavior; displays how these are put together, more or less coherently and consciously, into frameworks which make sense of their experiences; and illuminates the motivations which connect attitudes and behavior, the discontinuities, or even contradictions between attitudes and behavior, or how conflicting attitudes and motivations are resolved in particular choices made." (Hakim, 1987, p. 26)

The experience of adoptive parents whose grown child reunites with
his/her birth parents, is an appropriate choice for an exploratory qualitative study. Baran (1993) has suggested that adoptive parents give non-verbal messages to adoptees regarding their acceptance or rejection of the notion of reunion. She further proposed that the majority of adoptive parents, through nonverbal messages, make it clear that both background history and adoption reunion are unsafe topics in the adoptive home. A qualitative study allowed the researcher to be watchful of inconsistencies in the adoptive parents' reports, and also, as is noted by Hakim (1987), to learn how conflicting attitudes or motives might be resolved.

A qualitative study might be used as preliminary research in which theories are generated for later quantitative exploration, or the study may have value in itself as a means of gaining better understanding of issues that have previously been examined (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This study hopes to achieve both these goals. It was expected that one of the primary contributions of this study would be the generation of a conceptual model, and questions for further study. With regard to building on previous work, Depp's (1982) study is the only study which solicited post-reunion information directly from adoptive parents. Her use of a questionnaire, however, left many questions unanswered and room for speculation that important considerations to adoptive parents might have been missed. For instance, her study does not indicate whether adoptive parents change their attitude regarding adoption reunion after they have actually experienced it, as was suggested by Sachdev (1989).

The stories generated by a qualitative design can be seen to have value in themselves (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). This is an important consideration for this study. As noted in the introduction, adoptive parents have experienced many of their parenting challenges, including adoption reunion, in isolation. By
collecting the stories of an admittedly small number of individuals and couples who have experienced the adoptee's reunion, the intent was to open up the discussion of this topic.

**SELECTION OF ADOPTIVE PARENTS**

In approaching this topic, it became apparent that there were a variety of sources from which to derive a sample. Through speaking with co-workers and adoptees known to the researcher, a list was generated of adoptive parents who expressed interest in the study. In February, 1993, the Forget-Me-Not Society sponsored a two-day conference on adoption reunion (referred to earlier in this paper). Through networking at the conference, the researcher became acquainted with a number of adoptive parents who were pleased to learn of the study. The Adoption Reunion Registry, when approached by the author as a source of potential subjects, initially suggested that the researcher conduct a support group for adoptive parents and draw subjects from that pool. There are a number of support groups operating in the Lower Mainland whose focus is adoption reunion, through which subjects might have been recruited: (for example, Parent Finders, Triad, and the Forget-Me-Not Society). It was the researcher's belief that recruitment of subjects through these groups would result in an unnecessary bias.

The intent was to obtain a small group of adoptive parents which would be most likely to reflect the majority of adoptive parents who would, at some future point, face adoption reunion. With the establishment of the Adoption Reunion Registry, it is no longer necessary for individuals adopted in B.C. to engage in a search prior to reunion: They need only to register with the Adoption Reunion Registry. This alters the character of the population to some
extent. As was illustrated in the literature review, the search, for many adoptees, takes on a "life of its own". The presence or absence of a search would alter the reunion experience of not only the adoptees, but also of the other members of the adoption circle, and in particular, the adoptive parents. The majority of subjects obtained through word of mouth, the reunion conference, or the support groups, would all likely be influenced by the search experience. Also, these sources present a biased sample because belonging to any one of these groups suggests a special interest in the topic.

Subjects were recruited through the Adoption Reunion Registry in the hope of drawing from a pool which most closely reflects the population of adoptive parents in British Columbia who have experienced or will experience their adoptees' reunion with birth parents.

The Adoption Reunion Registry provides service primarily to birth parents and adoptees. As such, they do not maintain records which provide access to adoptive parents. In order to recruit subjects through the Adoption Reunion Registry it was necessary to write to adoptees asking them to relay the information to their adoptive parents. Due to restrictions regarding confidentiality, the Adoption Reunion Registry staff reviewed the eligibility criteria with the researcher and then established a mailing list. The researcher had no knowledge of the individuals receiving the letters. A copy of the letter to adoptees is included in Appendix C. In some cases the adoptees responded to the letter to obtain more information prior to passing the information to their parents. In essence, these adoptees gave the impression that they were "checking out" the researcher. In light of the discussion of the developmental stage in the findings chapter, it is interesting to note that the adoptees who first called the researcher fit into the older group. The adoptive parents of the
younger group contacted the researcher directly. Seven sets of adoptive parents were contacted and interviewed. The researcher intended to interview the adoptive parents as couples. The majority, however, were no longer part of a parenting couple. One adoptive mother was divorced, two adoptive mothers and one adoptive father were widowed, and one adoptive mother, though married, chose to be interviewed on her own. The remaining two sets of adoptive parents were interviewed as couples. An initial mailout of 25 letters generated six subjects, and second mailout of fifteen letters generated an additional subject. Taylor and Bogden (1984) noted that in qualitative research neither the number nor the type of informants are determined ahead of time. This was true to some extent in this research, but some restrictions regarding the participants were pre-determined.

There were certain qualifying variables restricting the selection of subjects. Due to travel restrictions, on the researcher's part, all subjects resided in the Lower Mainland. In an effort to restrict the factors that would impact the adoptive parents' experience, only parents of adoptees who were of the same race, placed in infancy, and not defined as special needs, were included. In an effort to ensure that the report of the post-reunion experience of the adoptive parents was not caught in the intensity characterizing the initial meeting, only subjects whose adoptees' reunion had occurred at least six months previously were included.

It became apparent after responses to the letters were received that the method of recruitment predisposed the respondents to be those who felt positively regarding the reunion. Upon reflection, the researcher recognised that adoptees who felt their parents were unsupportive or threatened by the reunion, would not pass the letter on. As a result, all of the adoptive parents interviewed
expressed support for the reunion. While this was, at first, disappointing, the researcher soon recognised that this group could provide valuable insight into the perspectives of adoptive parents who support reunion.

The researcher felt strongly that the gender bias evident in other adoption reunion studies needed to be addressed in this study. There was no cause in this study, however, to make a determined effort to select subjects according to gender. While previous studies tended to have a significant overrepresentation of females involved in reunion, the same could not be said of this study. Information received from Ken Derby, Director of the Adoption Reunion Registry, is that 65% of adoptees registering are female. Of the adoptees whose reunions were the focus of this study, 5/7 were males. The researcher could speculate as to the reason for this response (eg. are males more likely to serve as intermediaries when this kind of recruitment is used?), but any ideas presented would only be speculation. The adoptive parents interviewed also presented more of a balance in gender than is normally reported in adoption reunion studies. Two couples were interviewed and one adoptive father (widowed) was interviewed on his own. This, of course, left four adoptive mothers interviewed on their own, but given that this topic seems to have been generally regarded as more significant to females, the fact that males took part in 3/7 interviews is a reasonable attempt (given the small number of subjects) to include gender factors in the composite picture of the positive reunion experience of adoptive parents.

Appendix I further elaborates on the salient characteristics of the sample.

DATA COLLECTION

Face-to-face interviews with the adoptive parent(s) took place in the
adoptive parent's home, and were audio tape recorded. All interviews were conducted by the primary researcher, using an interview guide. (See Appendix D for a copy of the interview guide). The interview guide was divided into four general areas; Part 1 allowed for the collection of descriptive data which would give a sense of the variety of backgrounds of the people interviewed. Included in this section were age (of the adoptive parents), occupation, number of children (divided into number of adopted children, and number of children born into the family), whether or not the placement was private or government, age at time of placement, and length of time since the reunion occurred. These questions were closed and were not meant as part of the larger interview, but served an introductory purpose as well as establishing baseline information. Part 2 of the interview guide focused on the adoptive parents' view of their relationship with the adoptee. The questions focused primarily on describing, from the adoptive parents' perspective, the growing years of the adoptee. This portion of the interview gave insight into the adoptive parents' attitudes toward adoption, their level of openness regarding adoption, and how they felt their views were translated to the adoptee. Part 3 focused on the reunion itself and the adoptive parents' views regarding the adoptees' desire for a reunion. In this part of the interview, I learned from the adoptive parents how involved they were (or desired to be) in the reunion, and what emotions were elicited regarding the reunion. Part 4 explored the adoptee and adoptive parents' post-reunion experiences. The adoptive parents' level of post-reunion involvement and the impact on the adoptee/adoptive parent relationship was the focus of this part of the interview. This was also an opportunity to check on the level of congruence between the adoptive parents' attitudes regarding openness, described in Part 2 of the interview, with their actual behavior in this regard following the reunion.
The primary purpose of the interview guide was to explore adoptive parents' experiences both pre- and post- reunion. In constructing the interview guide there were several underlying questions which arose out of the literature review. These were:

1) From the adoptive parents' perspective, is there a relationship between the "success" of the adoption, and the desire for a reunion? 
2) What issues face adoptive parents when the adoptee is involved in a reunion (e.g. loss, betrayal, support, etc.)? 
3) How does the reunion affect the adoptive parent/adoptee relationship? 
4) What are the adoptive parents' expectations of the reunion, and have they been met? 
5) Does gender impact either the adoptee or adoptive parents' experience?

A face-to-face interview was used in order to gain a better opportunity to explore this emotionally laden topic in a way that allowed the participants to address it more fully than would a structured interview format. The interview guide also allowed the researcher to pursue areas raised by the adoptive parent which might have been missed in a structured interview.

The content of the interview guide was based on the salient points regarding adoption reunion identified in the literature review. By structuring the interview chronologically, the interviewer felt the stories would flow more easily so that content would be determined as much by the subjects as by the researcher. A "trial run" of the interview was conducted with an adoptive parent who had expressed her interest to the researcher after learning of the study through word of mouth. The guide was altered to accommodate her input, and the data from this interview were included in the discussion of the findings.
DATA ANALYSIS

Although the information gathered and emerging themes generated from each interview impacted subsequent interviews, the formal review of the data began after the first interview had been transcribed and at the point where four interviews had taken place. The fifth, sixth and seventh interviews provided an opportunity to pursue patterns and categories which had emerged in the earlier interviews.

Of the first four interviews, two were chosen to be transcribed on the basis of their diversity from one another. These were then coded according to the guidelines set out by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Beginning with a line by line review, salient points are identified and coded. These points become concepts as similarities become apparent, taking the data up one level of abstraction.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined concepts as "labels placed on discrete happenings, events and other instances of phenomena" (p.61). In the framework used in this thesis, these concepts or codes are called types, conditions and circumstances. The initial step was to examine the data closely to determine the range of incidences, reactions, emotions, etc. expressed by the adoptive parents. Once this list was established, it was reviewed, to determine properties and categories as discussed by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Categories result from reviewing the concepts to determine similarity between them. A group of similar concepts become a category. Properties are the attributes or characteristics of a category (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The data (transcripts and tapes) were reviewed several times to determine linkages and relationships between the properties and categories that had emerged, as well as to refine the definitions and variations among the
categories. Fieldnotes were used to identify linkages and to further refine the
ies and categories. Through this process it became apparent that the stories of
the adoptive families and adoption reunion were diverse, but the themes which
emerged were amazingly similar. In order to maintain a level of focus when
reviewing the data, it was helpful to construct vignettes of the families and their
experiences, highlighting the differences among them. These vignettes are
contained in Appendix H. It was then easier to focus on the concepts,
properties, and categories which were repeated throughout the data.

The following examples of coding, taken from interview #1, might add
clearly to the process described above. Line by line coding involved taking each
line, noting each salient point, and ascribing a descriptor to it as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{happy memories} & \quad \text{timing} & \quad \text{historical context} \\
\text{It was exciting, it was great. Just before, she was born in} & \text{September of '71...} \\
\end{align*}
\]

As common types, conditions or circumstances became apparent, the
researcher coded larger groupings, i.e. sentence by sentence:

"That story I probably started to tell her when she was
\begin{align*}
\text{early telling} & \quad \text{importance of background} \\
\text{about a year old, or maybe even before that, I don't} & \quad \text{openness} \\
\text{know, it was always there.}" \\
\end{align*}

Subsequently larger groupings, paragraphs, were coded as a whole:

"M Central park. Oh that was funny because she drove over to
\begin{align*}
\text{circumstance} & \quad \text{adoptive control} \\
\text{Central Park to meet B.M. and gets there and there was some meet} & \text{do you want me to go with you. No, I want to do this myself. I} \\
\text{on or something and to try and find a place to park, and I can just} & \text{thought fine, but I said but phone me as soon as you can because} \\
\text{imagine what's going through her mind, because I had said to her} & \text{because}
\end{align*}
we want to make sure you're all right you know, because you don't know. So, anyway, she said she got there and she had to walk about a mile to get into the Park because she couldn't get in, there was no parking, and this seemed to go actually it went very well just at the very beginning.""

As is evident in these examples, some of these initial codes are in the framework in their original form (telling, circumstance, adoptee control), while others were incorporated into another descriptor, to form a new type, condition or circumstance. Timing, for example, became part of fate, or circumstance. Historical context also became part of fate. Importance of background became part of empathy, fact finding, or bucking the system, depending on the context in the interview. Fieldnotes were used to track the way in which codes did or did not fit together.

An initial conceptual framework was developed after reviewing the first transcript, and revised after reviewing the second transcript. The remaining interviews were thoughtfully reviewed (listened to) several times to define the boundaries of the categories, note differences within and between categories, identify examples and, where appropriate, establish new properties and categories. As previously noted, the three later interviews were opportunities to further develop the data, being mindful of the categories which had thus far emerged. The framework continued to be revised throughout the writing of the results section (Chapter V), as examples and properties were scrutinized before being discussed in the paper.

In this way, a "grounded theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was developed. Strauss and Corbin defined a grounded theory as "one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and
There emerged, in fact, two distinct but related phenomena. These were the adoption legends and parental philosophy. Parental philosophy is the underlying basis which shaped the adoptive parents' experience. Strauss and Corbin (1990) noted that when two phenomena appear to be equally important or interesting, it is important to choose only one. The phenomena of the adoption legends has been incorporated as a part of the parental philosophy and experience, but could easily be developed into a separate study. For the purpose of this study, the legends are discussed as part of the parents' philosophy. The parental philosophy and experiences of the adoptive parents are broken down into four categories. These categories, their properties, and their relationships to one another are discussed in the following chapter.

LIMITATIONS

The most easily identifiable limitations of the study have to do with the sample obtained. Clearly the small sample size means that the findings are not generalizable. The study has identified certain themes and trends, and a theory has been proposed, but further study is required before the findings of this study can be validated in the population of adoptive parents. Not only is the sample small, but it is clearly biased in a number of ways. All adoptive parents interviewed were Caucasian. All adoptees whose reunion experience was discussed had been placed in infancy (before age 2) in a home of the same race. Two of the families did have adoptees of a different race within the family, but their experiences were not discussed or explored in detail. All the adoptive parents reside and spent the majority of their family's formative years in the Lower Mainland. Perhaps the experiences of adoptive parents in rural or
isolated communities are different. Finally, as has already been mentioned, all of the adoptive parents expressed that they were supportive of the reunion. Additionally, the study relied solely on the adoptive parents’ retrospective reports, and no attempt was made to verify their accuracy.

Many of these limitations were purposely made. It should be noted, and has been, that no assumptions can be made regarding those adoptive parents not represented in this study. There may be cause to believe that reunion experiences of adoptees placed later in childhood or of a different race may, for example, be different. In the first circumstance the child may have memories of the birthfamily, and in the second example cultural issues may play a role. This study purposely excluded these circumstances, however, since their examination and the opportunity for comparison would require more resources in time and access to records than were available to the researcher. The intent of the study, when it was designed, was to include adoptive parents who were opposed to reunion as well as those who supported it. It soon became apparent that the method used to obtain subjects was found, in hindsight, to prohibit participation of adoptive parents who disagreed with the opportunity for reunion or whose experiences were negative. A comparison of both positive and negative adoptive parents would have been helpful, and should remain a goal for future research. Careful consideration would have to be given to find a method which would encourage participation of those who feel threatened and are likely to be less willing to discuss the issue. Some suggestions this author has considered is to recruit adoptive parents directly and randomly through the Ministry of Social Services. This would be time consuming and difficult however, since access to Ministry records is severely restricted, and there would be no way of knowing which of these adoptive parents have adoptees who have reunited with
birthparents. Another method would be to solicit respondents through the newspaper, Adoptive Parents Association, and other special interest groups. It is difficult for this researcher to anticipate difficulties and biases which might arise from this method of recruitment. The limitation of this study, resulting from the absence of input from adoptive parents who do not feel positively about adoption reunion, is recognized, and the author recommends that an attempt be made, in the form of another study, to explore this further. The author believes, however, that the information gained in this study is no less valuable than if the "other side" had been represented. This study has provided the opportunity to hear from adoptive parents whose views might have otherwise not been known. In having homogeneous sample, commonalities were easily identified and explored.

Another means of gaining clearer insight into the adoptive parents' experiences would have been to speak to the adoptees concerned and compare the information received. In fact, many of the adoptees, in making initial contact with the interviewer, expected to be included in the interview process. The author gave serious consideration to this idea. The advantage would have been the opportunity to check for consistency between the messages the adoptive parents thought they were giving, and the messages actually received by the adoptee. Upon reflection, however, it seemed to the author that the adoptees' views and experiences were being well represented in the literature. One of the premises of qualitative research is to accept the information given as having face validity. One of the primary purposes of this study was to receive input from adoptive parents. The author determined (whether or not correctly) that including adoptees in the interview might have "watered down" the results, as it might appear that the adoptive parents' account, on its own, was not good
enough. Additionally, a comparison of messages given with messages received, might have introduced informations which would serve to "muddy" rather than "clarify" the waters.

The author recognizes some of her own biases and assumptions which have impacted the choice of study design and the value and interpretation placed on the information received. Two theoretical schools have influenced the researcher and are seen by her as complimentary. These are developmental psychology, particularly the work of Erik Erikson, and family systems theory. Both of these theoretical orientations are evident in the results of the study: developmental theory in the identification of a category solely based on the adoptive parents' developmental stage, and family systems theory in the identification of legends, the importance of openness (recognizing the damage of family secrets), and recognizing the "ripple effect" of reunion (the variety of others impacted). The author's strong belief in the adoptee's right to information and support of openness in adoption are also likely very evident throughout this paper. The author does not doubt that another researcher with a different theoretical orientation might have identified different categories or results. This is both a value and a limitation inherent in qualitative research. Every individual approaches research with biases. That the researcher be aware of and identify these biases is critical. One's theoretical orientation offers a structure. How that structure is developed should be based in the data. The author was careful to be aware of her biases and to ensure through checking and rechecking that each category, property, etc. identified was clearly evident in the data, and not a figment of her optimistic imagination.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS

"My birth parents gave me the reality of birth and heritage. My adoptive parents gave me the reality of parenting and values. Neither replaces the other."

Alison Anderson
Vice-President
Forget-Me-Not Society

The vignettes contained in Appendix H illustrate the diversity among the stories of the adoptive families. This chapter focuses on the similarities identified and the resulting categories and properties. There emerged from the data four principal categories which are related to the adoptive parents overall philosophy regarding parenting. The first category, legends, told by the adoptive parents served as metaphors for their values and beliefs regarding parenting generally, and more specifically adoptive parenting. The attitude of openness prevalent among these adoptive parents is illustrated not only in their willingness to discuss adoption but also in their willingness to accept others into their lives. The adoptive parents recognition of the impact of reunion on others, and their willingness to face reality are also important properties of their open attitude. The category of non-ownership recognizes that children are not owned, but are guided toward independence (whether adopted or not). It is this philosophy which allows these adoptive parents to support and recognize the value of reunion to the adoptee. Finally, their parental philosophy has developed over time and is a reflection of their developmental stage. This category recognizes that the adoptive parents' experience of adoption reunion might have been different had it occurred at a different point in their lives or the adoptees' lives.

This chapter describes the various properties of the categories described above. Using examples, the meaning of the properties are illustrated. The discussion of the properties focuses on their interrelationship within the
categories as well as how the categories are interdependent with one another. Finally, the overall parenting philosophy of these adoptive parents and how it is the same or different from the literature is discussed.

It has been noted that all of the adoptive parents interviewed felt positively about the reunion. Not only did they unanimously agree that the opportunity for reunion should be a right for all adoptees, but they all felt that their personal experience of reunion through their son or daughter had been beneficial. This discussion, then, can only shed some light on the experiences of adoptive parents who feel positively toward reunion. Whether they are different or how they are different from adoptive parents who regard reunion negatively is not known at this time, because none who object to reunion volunteered to be interviewed in this study. The value of this study, then, is to give some insight into the commonalities between adoptive parents who responded positively to their son or daughter’s reunion.

CATEGORY 1: LEGENDS

The adoptive parents at various points throughout the interview were asked to recall significant memories regarding the adoptee. These stories were clearly shaped by the memories of the adoptive parent, just as the adoptive parent’s memory was shaped by the story. It was evident that the stories have evolved into family legends in that they are tales that have been repeated many times and have a place in the family history. They carry messages about the adoptee’s place in the family as well as the adoptive parents feelings about adoption and their investment in the child. The analysis revealed three main properties of these stories. The "grand entrance" or arrival stories had a larger than life quality to them. The property of "adoption related memories" alludes to
the fact that the childhood stories told about the adoptees seemed to be in some way related to the fact of adoption. These legends contained "reoccurring themes" so that a theme in the arrival story was usually repeated in the story of the reunion. The legends presented mirrored how the adoption relationship had developed so that where the adoption was seen as problem free or beneficial to all, this was reflected in the legends. Where the adoption was seen as problematic either for the adoptee or the adoptive parent, this too was evident in the stories.

The Grand Entrance:

In much the same way as other families have stories about the child's birth, these adoptive families told stories about the child's arrival into the home. What is significant about these stories, in addition to their existence, is that they are usually "larger than life"; there are strong elements of fate, circumstance, (including timing and destiny) in these stories which transfer a message to the adoptee about his/her belonging in the home. One of the elements of the grand entrance is the preparation. There is a minimal reference in these stories to the preparation and wait inherent in adoption, and there was, in fact, minimal preparation for adoptive parents at the time these adoptions took place, especially in comparison to the lengthy wait and homestudy process which typify today's adoptions. The element of preparation appears to be oversimplified, however, giving the impression that these children essentially landed on the doorstep. References to the importance of the preparation in establishing the tone of the adoption is evident in the following comments. The first was a
reflection of a positive experience, the second of a more difficult adoption:¹⁰

Our social worker came to talk to us. Her name was S.W. We enjoyed her and kept in touch even after we adopted A. When A. was 21 we went to lunch together so S.W. could see how A. had turned out. One day she phoned us to say there was a little baby girl waiting for us... (AM #4)

We had asked to adopt in May, but they came to us desperate; would you please take him earlier, take him in March. I had things on my plate as a volunteer in the community I wanted to wind down but it was push, push, push, please take this boy out of this place. So we took him early, and that was the first difficult thing. (AM #3)

Another element of these stories is the idea that the child's arrival was a matter of fate. These stories suggest that the adoptive parents had little control over the child's placement in the home. These stories, too, had a positive and negative element, which was an indicator of the adoption experience of the adoptive parents. In some cases the fateful element had to do with a suggestion that someone else (besides the adoptive parent) was responsible for the child's arrival in the home. In other cases, the fate and timing were closely related; i.e. the idea that "the time was right". In these stories, the idea of a stork delivery is almost given credence.

As we were leaving we said to the social worker, "well, it really didn't matter whether we had a boy or a girl first, you know as long as it's a reasonably healthy baby, that was all", and she said, "I don't think it's going to be really long before you get a baby." And then, Sunday night when, that was on Thursday, and on the Sunday night before we, A.F. was on holidays, before he went to bed, I said "wouldn't it be neat if we got a phone call in the morning

¹⁰ Throughout this chapter, in the quotes, there are a number of individuals discussed. The following will aid in identifying the person being referred to: AM - Adoptive Mother, AF - Adoptive Father, A - Adoptee, AS - Adopted Son, AD - Adopted Daughter, AB - Adopted Brother, A.Si. - Adopted Sister, BM - Birth Mother, BF - Birth Father, BS - Birth Sister, BB - Birth Brother, SW - Social Worker.
to say they had a baby for us", and sure enough, Monday morning I was just waking up and the phone rang, and I answered the phone and it was a Social Worker to say they had our baby for us. Oh, we were so excited. And we picked her up on the Tuesday. (AM #1)

The following example is one which presents the other side, that is where the adoptive parent felt less positive about adopting this child and was almost forced into it.

When A.Si. was around 2, the S.W. said "I've just got the brother for A.Si." I said, "well, I don't know whether we want a boy or not" I said "my husband really prefers girls". So she said, "oh, no you want one of each" and she said that it was a baby and it was nine months old and that we didn't have to decide right away, we could go and see him. And we went and saw him and he had a runny nose, and very pale but a big baby though. So we had told A.Si. that we were going to see her baby brother, and we had named him A., my dad's name was the same, and I liked the name. So we looked at him and they told us to go think it over. So we went and sat in the truck and were talking it over, and A.Si. said "Well, when's my A coming home? And I said to my husband, "well what can we do? We can't do anything else, we'll have to take him." (AM #6)

The adoptee's fateful arrival was also a matter of circumstance. Some outside event seemed to trigger or be triggered by the child's arrival. The memory of the child's arrival and the legend which developed was tied to some other event in the adoptive parent's memory. This, too set the tone of the adoption. The following is an example of a positive circumstance.

We had been waiting for over nine months, which seemed to us a long time. We were living in Port Hardy and our M.L.A. came to visit. We went and talked to him and told him how long we had been waiting. I don't know whether he had anything to do with it or not, but that week we got a call saying there was a boy waiting for us. We were so excited (tears). (AM #5)

In contrast, the circumstance for the adoptive parent below was less positive.
The weekend that he came or the weekend after he came we all got the flu, myself included, and I will never forget that weekend to my dying day, sitting in a rocking chair rocking this baby who felt strange to me and I obviously felt strange to him and my other two lying sick on the sofa. (AM #3)

The level of emotion tied to the adoptive parents' recollections of the "grand entrance" is also notable. It was not uncommon, as in interview number 5, for the adoptive parent to become tearful or at least highly emotional when telling of the child's arrival. In those adoptions where there were difficulties, however, this intensity of emotion was not evident. The expression of such strong emotion with a story that has been re-told many times and related to an event which occurred 20 to 45 years prior, is a clear indication of the investment these adoptive parents have in their children.

The examples used thus far are illustrations of the elements, dimensions and characteristics of the grand entrance. In themselves they are not necessarily exceptional, but when combined, as in the following example, the legend becomes remarkable.

Our S.W. used to come down to talk to us. One day she phoned us to say that there was a little girl, baby girl, waiting for us in Vancouver. A.F. was down the line, so I phoned down the line and told him that we could go in a couple of days, as soon as he got back, and pick up the baby. So I was really excited, and it took me ages to get him excited. We had just arrived, and it was his first practice, and medicine was his first love. So then I had gathered some clothes together, and we got in the car, probably the next day, and drove down to Vancouver, and told them who we were, and they took us into the nursery they held this little baby up, and, long, lean and lanky, I called her. She was yawning. I thought, oh she's nice and quiet, you know. Anyway we got her dressed and then we took her out. Took her to A.F.'s brother's place, who lived in Burnaby then, and got some formula made, and then we started out the next day in the car to go back to Lilloet. We got to Lytton, and this would be March 3... and it was 47 miles of windy road, and there was and always has been the big slide. Well, the big slide was pounding rocks down. And A.F. got out of the car, and I
was holding A. in my arms, and there was one big rock blocking the car, and he pushed it out of the way, and he said "Let's get the hell out of here". So we kept driving, and then about nine miles out of Lilloett the cars were all stopped and there was a big slide down. So I don't know how many hours we sat in the car, but I warmed her bottles by the heater in the car with my foot. And she slept the whole way, she never woke up. So we saw lights coming over the slide, and it was the Department of Highways man. He said "Hi, doc", and we said "we went down to get the baby, and now we can't get through." So he said "Well, pick her up, get her stuff and walk over the slide and get into my car and take my car home, and I'll bring your car back when we've cleared the slide." So that's what we did that, knee deep in the stuff, we walked through the slide, took his car and went home. And it was about 10 or 11 o'clock at night and she still hadn't fusssed or anything, and I thought "what a child". And we told her that story many times, she just loved it. (AM #4)

Adoption Related Memories:

When the adoptive parents were asked to relate stories of the adoptees' childhood, it was surprising to see that these were frequently linked to the adoption and in particular acceptance of the adoption by someone in the family. The adoption related memories of these families characterized an uneventful childhood while noting ways in which the adoptee was different from other members of the adoptive family. An important part of the parents' memories was telling the child of adoption, and the child telling others, as a sign of their mutual acceptance of the adoption. In their descriptions of the adoptees' childhoods, the adoptive parents often saw them as uneventful. They felt it was important to identify the child and the family as unexceptional as a means of illustrating the child's integration into the family. Even when significant problems were experienced, these were given little attention. In the first interview, the adoptee had surrendered a child for adoption twenty-six months previously. There was little attention given to this event by the adoptive parents in the interview, and they described their daughter as follows:
AT What were her growing years like?
AM Oh, fine
AF Fine, she was a good,
AM Good yah
AF She never really caused us any problems at all, even like right from a baby
AM She was a dream of a baby,
AF She was a good kid.
AM Yah, she really was.
AF Yah, no problems (Interview #1)

Throughout our discussion, this view of the adoptee as "very good" and her subsequent years as unexceptional remained consistent.

Even in families where the adoption was viewed as difficult, the difficulty is understated. The adoptive parents and adoptive aunts and uncles in the third interview are all very high functioning. They have obtained a high level of education and have made significant achievements in their careers. One of the adoptive mother's siblings has received the Order of Canada. Both adoptees in this family dropped out of school and one (not the reunited adoptee) is involved in a lifestyle shaped by drug and alcohol addiction. In describing the difficulties, however, the adoptive mother chose to focus on the positive, and in particular the way in which this person fits but doesn't fit into the family.

He did have attention deficits, he did have troubles with school right through and he's a drop out, a grade ten drop out. And, I've sort of tried to convince him, he reads books, he can come out with stuff that's as right on as I mean everybody sort of drops their dentures out every once in a while because A. says something that's so profound, and nobody ever expects him to. (AM #3)

By maintaining the image of a uneventful childhood, or at least minimizing the problems, the adoptive parents are in essence maintaining the image of specially approved parents imposed on them through the homestudy process.

Some adoptive parents used childhood stories to illustrate how the adoptee was different in some unexplainable way from the rest of the family.
These differences were usually exceptional talents or abilities which were not typical of the adoptive family. The following example indicates the adoptive parents' acceptance that the child has origins other than the adoptive family and these origins are both positive and non-threatening.

She was quite good at things. I can remember when we always used to get things inside cereal boxes that you put together. She immediately dived for those and put them all together. So whenever, as she grew older, whenever there was anything I needed done, I used to say to her, "put this together for me". And she could do it, like that. I always remember that. She had a very alert mind." (AM #4)

The adoptive parents were asked to recall when and how they told the child of adoption. All of these adoptive parents felt it was important to tell the child at the earliest time so that the child would accept adoption as a "fact of life". The common view of these adoptive parents is best summarized as follows:

First to reiterate our views about adoption. A child should know as soon as possible, and we would tell them bedtime stories. So the word (adoption) was never ever traumatic. It was just a word that they understood before they ever knew what it meant. Which I think is the fairest thing to do. (AF #7)

On the other side, adoptive parents who adopted in the 1940's to 1960's were careful to note the use of the word adoption. They had been instructed to do so by their social worker or another adoptive parent. Their attention to this detail indicated that the word adoption was seen at that time as something which had to be handled delicately, implying a negative connotation.

The bedtime stories told by the adoptive parents alluded to in the quotation above either centered on the child's "grand entrance" (as illustrated in the grand entrance section of this chapter), or the adoptive couple's infertility
and their desire for children (specifically this child). For example:

"It was just about a mom and dad who wanted children very much but couldn't have them and another mom and dad who had one too many..." (AF #7)

In most cases, one of the most significant childhood stories had to do with the child telling others of their adoption, thus indicating a mutual acceptance of adoption in the family.

We were visiting friends when A was 6 or 7, and we had three young children, and the other family had three young children, and A was the oldest, and this boy was the eldest, and the other boy said "you're adopted, you know." A. said "I know" and it was as simple as that. (AF #2)

This acceptance of adoption as a fact of life carried with it a tone that the attitude in the home was different from the larger society's view on adoption, as in the following example:

I remember when E. (teacher) phoned me that time. Just after the kids changed schools and she knew that A. was waiting for A.B. at school and his teacher said to A., she said, "you two don't look very much alike", because some kids, of course, they look so much alike. A. said "oh no, that's because we're adopted", and she just came home, never thought more about it... The phone rang a little while later and it was this teacher, very concerned that she'd upset A. And I said "well why?" So she told me what had happened and I said "oh no, it's just that's the way things are at our house." So it's never been a problem. (AM #1)

Implicit in the adoptee's easy acceptance of their adoption is their acceptance of their adoptive parents. In presenting these stories, it is almost as if the adoptive parents are presenting evidence that although the family is formed through adoption, their ties to one another are unquestionable.

One adoptive parent noted that an extended family member had difficulty with the concept of adoption (specifically the adoptive father's father). This
presented obvious difficulties for the adoptive parents. They credited the adoptee with overcoming the adoptive grandfather's resistance because the adoptee was exceptionally charming. This story contains a strong emotional level, and is like the grand entrance story, indicative of the adoptee's special place in the family.

You asked before about my favorite memory of A's childhood. I think it was the time that I realized that he had won his grandfather over. I told my wife, I said "Well, I'm not going to worry about it, we'll see what A. does with it." Rather than try to force any ideas on my father, we stayed cool, we stayed in the background, and it worked out fine (teary, very emotional). When I saw my father a) accepting him and b) wanting to have him around... which took, I don't know how long, it took months or years, but it worked, or, it happened. (AF #2)

It appeared that the childhood stories reinforce to the adoptee that adoption doesn't matter with regard to the adoptive parents' commitment to the adoptee, and yet by choosing these stories the adoptive parents are recognizing that adoption was a significant fact in their lives. The following example illustrates the significance of adoption both for the adoptive parents and the adoptee, and how the legend is used to pass on the seemingly contradictory message that the child's pre-adoption history is important, but that the child belonging in the adoptive family is unquestionable.

I decided he needed to be told that he's adopted before he heard it from someone else. So on his fifth birthday, I sat him on my knee and told him the story. I told him that his mother was young, and wasn't able to raise him. I said we really wanted a boy, and we chose him. After that I told him bedtime stories about his background and how exciting it was when we finally got him. One time one of his friends pointed out to him that he was adopted. He said, "yeah, I know, I'm lucky". He was always interested in his background, and when he was a teenager we gave him the history we had been given. (AM #5)
Reoccurring Themes:

The legends told by the adoptive parents were characterized by themes which reoccurred throughout the stories. These themes included adoption acceptance, following the script and coincidence. It is reasonable to assume that the reunion stories will, in time, also become legends in these families and will incorporate or alter the themes already present. They, too, reinforce the uniqueness of the family while at the same time demonstrating the strength of the family bond. The themes in the stories told by the adoptive parents varied, and gave insight into the adoptive parents' parenting philosophy as well as the adoptee/adoptive parent relationship. The thematic link is strongest between the grand entrance legends and the reunion stories, but the thread is also carried through the adoption related memories stories.

In interview #6, the child's arrival is characterized as unexpected. The grand entrance legend includes themes of ambivalence and rejection (see page 94 to review this story). The adoption acceptance stories centred on the child's predisposition to running away, and his early flight from the nest of the adoptive home (his birthmother, too had left home early, but his adoptive sisters had not). In all of these stories, underlying themes of ambivalence and rejection, are evident first on the part of the adoptive mother and now demonstrated by the adoptee. The adoptive mother tells of the adoption reunion as follows:

He got the letter from whoever it is that sends out the letter, saying that she was trying to contact him. He said he didn't know what his reaction was at first, he thought it over, he didn't know whether he wanted to or not. And it was up to him to phone her. He phoned and told me, and wondered how I felt. I said it didn't make any difference to me. I said "you're 45 years old now," I said, "I've had you that long," I said she can have you now for the next 45". (laughs) (AM #6)
In essence, this adoptee was "following the script" that had been set out for him in the grand entrance legend. The legend, of course, contains a wealth of messages, and the adoptee's interpretation is likely very different from his mother's or from this author's, but it is interesting to identify how the stories contain a common thread.

As was noted previously, many of the grand entrance stories contained an element of fate or coincidence. In the reunion stories, too, coincidence was evidence of outside influence or similarities between the families. Note the following example:

My maiden name was "B" and I discovered there was a "B" on A's side of the family and also in A.Si's birth family. (AM #4)

This "coincidence" is, in fact, a metaphor for this adoptive parent's view that both of her adopted daughters' birth families are now part of her family. This adoptee also took a leadership role in her family with regard to adoption issues. The following adoption acceptance story illustrates this.

I can remember when A.Si. came in one day. She had been playing with some kids, and she said "mom, I've got three mothers, haven't I, my mother that gave me up, my mother in heaven, and you." A was there, and she said, "Never mind, A.Si., I'll tell you all about it. (AM #4)

Even though the adoptee's sister had been more interested in reunion, it was this adoptee whose reunion "coincidentally" took place first (the reunion was initiated by the birth mother). Additionally, the child who had been a model child in her grand entrance (see page 94) was also a model of consideration when it came to reunion:

She sat me down, I can't remember if she gave me a glass of wine or not, and she said "mom, I've got something to tell you, and I've been stewing about it for a week. I got a call the other day, and my
birth mother wants to meet me..." I guess she was worried because A.F. had just passed away, and I wasn't well..." (AM #4)

A final example of how themes concerning the legends are repeated in stories of reunion, is evident in interview #5. The grand entrance story for this adoptee had a political element (see page 93). The reunion story, too had a political element as well as a large component of timing, fate and coincidence.

He had registered with the registry about two months before. We went out for dinner to celebrate his birthday, the day before mother's day. He went downstairs and was flicking through the channels before the sports came on. A news item caught his eye about some people picketing the legislature. Turns out it was about adoption reunion and the release of information. Then he sees a sign with his name on it, we kept the name his mother gave him, and his birthday, and it was his birthmother. He didn't come upstairs right away, which surprised me. He kept it to himself. The next morning he came upstairs and told me about it. I thought he must have dreamt it. He hadn't even copied down the number. Later that day A.Si. came over and they contacted the television station and got the number...

Byng-Hall (1988) described family legends as:

"those colored and often colorful stories that are told time and time again... Although they are ostensibly told because they are interesting, the way they are told frequently indicates how the family should behave - a form of moral tale. Within each telling of the story the current rules of the family are encoded." (p.169)

Because adoption, particularly at the time of these adoptions, was considered to be a sensitive issue, it is interesting that these family legends were all adoption related. They illustrated how adoption was to be discussed in the family and the meaning of adoption in these families. In this research they served as a window through which the researcher could gain some insight into the adoptive parents' philosophies or attitudes regarding adoption. Within the families themselves and for each individual member, they would hold a different meaning.
Freeman (1992) stated, "People's relationships are shaped by their family stories" (p.11). Clearly, this is evident in the stories presented in this section.

Byng-Hall (1988) also noted "What neither narrator nor audience are usually aware of, however, is that legends are continually being re-edited by altering the metacommunication or reshaping the content in order to build up a story that fits present family attitudes." (p.169).

The grand entrance legends, then, are evidence of the importance and role of the adoptee within the family. The adoption related memories serve to firmly establish the adoptee as a member of the family, while at the same time providing evidence of the adoptee and adoptive parents' recognition of the adoption. The reoccurring themes in the legends give further evidence of the roles of the various family members. The very existence of these legends, however, is indicative of the adoptive parents' openness toward adoption. The legends clearly indicate that adoption was a topic for discussion (with varying levels of comfort) in these families.

CATEGORY 2: OPENNESS

Whether or not it is evident in the adoptive family legends, all of the adoptive parents interviewed demonstrated a remarkable level of openness, both regarding adoption and in their relationships generally. Again, it is important to remember that these adoptions, particularly the earlier ones, took place at a time when secrecy in adoption was paramount. The parents of adoptees adopting in the 1940's and 1950's were adopting at a time when the issue was not as much what to tell the adoptee about the adoption, but whether or not to tell the adoptee at all. These "older" adoptive parents were aware of other adoptive parents who had chosen not to tell the adoptee of the adoption.
The openness of the adoptive parents interviewed was evidenced by their actions: they told the adoptees about the adoption at an early age; they demonstrated an empathic understanding of the adoptee's desire for a reunion; they were open in their relationships and willing to expand their families to include others; they recognized the impact of adoption reunion on other birth and adoptive family members; and they were willing to face the reality of birth parents who, until the reunion, had remained a shadow. Although the way in which they told the adoptees of their adoption evidenced a level of openness, it was this author's view that the "telling" fit more appropriately in the data as a legend, and was discussed under the property of adoption related memories. The properties of empathy, inclusion, ripple effect and a reality testing were evident in this category.

Empathy:

All of the adoptive parents interviewed discussed an understanding, acceptance, and willingness to share with the adoptee in the experience of adoption reunion. The reunion, like the adoptee's arrival, was seen as a very emotional experience, and the adoptive parents shared in these emotions. Most adoptive parents expressed an initial concern for the adoptee, which was essentially a fear of the unknown. This fear may have been based in previous experience, but was more likely a normal protective attitude on the part of the adoptive parents. Expression of concern regarding the outcome of the reunion by the adoptive parents may easily be interpreted as evidence that they are themselves threatened by the reunion. Their protective concerns, however, appeared to be genuine, based on their knowledge of the adoptee. Perhaps the greatest fear expressed by the adoptive parents is that the birth parents will be unwilling to have contact with the adoptee.
A.M. I only had one fear. That they wouldn't want to acknowledge him. Because he was adopted at birth. And they had four others who wouldn't have known about him, which they didn't. And that was my only fear, that when they contacted her, she would say no, A. who? That was my one fear that they wouldn't acknowledge him. But once that hurdle was over it was good. And it seems that he had a similar fear because he said, "well, they are divorced so now I have two chances. Well, I had always put that fear in him, that they may not want to know where he was or... because of what they had to do when he was a baby, you know, so I had to put that fear there that it might not work out so that his expectations weren't so high and then he fell on his face. It was just to guide him to the point that well, you know, that you could get hurt out of this, it might not work, but by all means try, and if they will see you, good luck.

A.F. He's very sensitive and if he had not been able to make this connection because of their rejection it would have been bad for him. Because he's very sensitive to these things. (Interview #7)

It seems clear that this concern on the part of the adoptive parents, which was expressed to some degree by all the parents of adoptees who initiated a reunion, is centered not on the adoptive parents' needs but on the needs of the adoptee.

The adoptive parents often shared in the excitement of the reunion with the adoptee, and their excitement appeared to be almost as intense as that of the adoptee.

A.M. When he met them it obviously was such a heavy experience for him and he hadn't had the least clue that he would be affected at all and he was just riding high you know he was on cloud nine because here were all these people that for whom they gave him the copies of the family tree so he found that he looked just like them that he and all these things that he had never known mattered were a new experience to him and it was really fun to see it happening for him. Well, I was re, I was really happy for him. I was a little sort of thinking, oh God, why did they have to be bikers, and in jail and, I mean he's used to having a sibling in jail, that's no new experience for him, but they sort of reinforce all his, but of
course, that's what it was all about hey, so I was really pleased that 
they welcomed him like they did and that he could fit. And he's got 
an 11 year old nephew who looks a lot like him apparently, and it 
has meant something to him. He does need to share, he knew I'd 
be excited too, and that was neat, we shared that for sure. (AM #3)

In sharing the excitement of the reunion with the adoptee, the adoptive 
parents gave the impression that they felt privileged to be involved in the 
experience.

On the other hand, some of the reunions were disappointing for the 
adoptee. This disappointment was that the reunion resulted in less of a 
relationship between the adoptee and the birth parent than was originally 
anticipated. The adoptive parents are aware of the adoptees' wishes regarding 
the relationship, and when it doesn't occur, they share in the disappointment. 
Adoptive parents' comments regarding this disappointment are similar to that of 
the adoptive mother in interview #1:

I've been annoyed a few times with B.M. because it's made A. 
unhappy sometimes" (AM #1)

The adoptive parent's gift for empathy, however, includes the birth parents in 
these circumstances. In all cases where the birth parent/adoptee relationship 
was somewhat disappointing, the adoptive parents attempted to understand and 
interpret the birth parent's viewpoint to the adoptee. In the fourth family 
interviewed, the second daughter, also an adoptee, had registered with the 
adoption reunion registry. In contrast to the reunion of the adoptee who 
received the letter, this adoptee's birth mother refused contact, but the birth 
grandmother was willing to meet the adoptee. The birth mother was 
corresponding with the adoptee, but had, thus far, refused a meeting.

A.Si's mother has not told anybody, so she only makes contact 
through the grandmother. So I wish that A.Si's was a little better. 
She just sort of brushes it off, you know, "I don't care". It was the
grandmother that was wanting the contact. So the mother said contact only through the grandmother. But she sends beautiful letters, and cards. She sent a card at Christmas time telling her how much she thought about her and loved her and so on. I said to A.Si. "That's beautiful, dear," I said "35 years ago that was a no no, you went out of town and nobody knew you had a baby. You have to be compassionate with her, this is a very traumatic thing for her to all of a sudden face this. And this is what B.M. said to A. She said "I gave you up, and I never expected to see you again."

(AM #4)

The primary focus of the adoptive parents' empathy however, is in their recognition and understanding of the meaning of the reunion for the adoptee.

All of the adoptive parents expressed the sentiment that if they had been adopted they would likely have wanted a reunion. The following example is typical of the view expressed by the adoptive parents:

My reaction was that I would like, well, I suppose that if I had been adopted (my wife is adopted), I would want to know. I do a little genealogical searching. I've got my mother's background in Norway back to 1695. I have my father's background in England back to the 1800's. You see, and I've got a lot of the family circumstances. This was an interest of mine before I got married, you see, but A. can't do that. I guess he could start now. I started to soft pedal it because my wife has no idea of her background. I had no basic reaction except to think that if I was adopted maybe I would be interested, maybe I wouldn't. A. didn't pursue it until it became open. A.D. spent a lot of time and effort and even money, her urge was that strong. (AF #2)

In their understanding of the adoptee's desire for a reunion the adoptive parents also recognized their children (if there was more than one adopted in the family) as individuals whose needs and desires differ.

A.F. (referring to reunited adoptee)
"I knew it was a void that he needed to fill and encouraged him to do it"

A.F. (referring to adopted daughter)
"She has absolutely no desire to contact her birth parents."
Much as A. has tried to convince her, she has no desire. (Interview #7)

As such, their understanding of the adoptee's wish for a reunion seems genuinely based on the adoptee's needs, not in fulfilling some need of their own through the adoptee. A notable exception to this is in interview 3, where the adoptive mother initiated the reunion in an effort to compensate for the difficulties the adoptee had experienced. She noted that she would do the same for her adopted daughter if the daughter was able to maintain a stable address.

The property of empathy, on the part of the adoptive parents, tends to run throughout the interviews and is not captured in a single comment or story. The following quotes from interview #1 illustrate this:

A.F. "I've always tried to put myself in her shoes and I think I would be the same, you know, I don't think I'd want her to go through life wondering, if she had the chance that she could find them, at least give it an effort and if she didn't at least say she tried. I've always encouraged her to do that.

A.M. I know myself that if I was adopted I would be dying of curiosity.

A.M. I was really pleased for her. I can honestly say I was really pleased for her.

A.F. I think I felt a little bit of concern in the back there, not for myself but for A. more than anything, that I wanted to make sure that it came out OK you know, you just have that little bit of I think it's too bad because B.M. could have a nice relationship with A. but she's um I'm sorry for A., I'm sad for A. in that situation because it could be a nice relationship, but it's um because of

A.M. I feel badly for B.M. I think B.M. could use a lot of, probably she needs a lot of help, counselling of some sort...

A.F. And I just remember feeling happy for her, I never thought about anything else, I just remember, I was hoping it would all work out, that's really you know, I don't uh, that was my, thinking back in it now I just remember A. was being so happy.
A.M. A little concern that you hope that things were OK, a little concern that you hope that things were OK, of the unknown of course, we were a little concerned about the unknown, and I think that's the way I felt, I just, I was, she got that phone call and she was so excited and just I was just really really pleased for her.

Inclusion:

The adoptive parents interviewed had an inclusive attitude toward their families, meaning they feel it is both normal and appropriate to welcome members of the birth family into the adoptive family (i.e. mingling). This attitude of inclusion extends to others as well, so that "family" for these adoptive parents includes not just the nuclear family members, but also extended family. These adoptive parents typically had strong extended family relationships which demonstrated this inclusive attitude. The adoptive mother in interview number 3, for example, has custody of her two year old grand-daughter. She is currently making arrangements to buy a house in the country with her sister, and together they (along with a niece) will care for one another and share in caring for the child. In some cultures, these arrangements are the norm, but all of the adoptive parents interviewed were Caucasian, the families having been in Canada more than one generation, and the Canadian culture is more oriented toward the nuclear family. The strong extended family relationships evident in these families appeared to easily accommodate acceptance of the birth families.

Of the seven sets of adoptive parents interviewed, six had met with some, or all, of the birth family. In the seventh family, the adoptive parents (particularly the adoptive father) have made it clear to the adoptee that they would like to meet the birth parents, and are bewildered as to why the adoptee has not yet made arrangements for such a meeting.

The fact that these adoptive parents were receptive to meeting the birth families is significant in itself. Through actions (i.e. meeting with the birth family)
they have demonstrated, more than they could with words, their openness to the reunion. Not only were they receptive to meeting, but the adoptive parents themselves generally valued these meetings highly. The meetings could best be described as "mingling" as they usually included (with the exception of the family in interviews #2 and #3) all members of the birth family and all members of the adoptive family. The timing and circumstances of the meetings between the families varied and was again a reflection of the adoptee/adoptive parent relationship as well as an indication of the adoptive parent's level of openness. The ongoing level of involvement between the adoptive parents and the adoptee was strongly related to the previous level of involvement between the adoptee and his/her adoptive parents. For example, those adoptees who were living with their adoptive parents at the time of reunion included their adoptive parents in their relationship with their birth family while adoptees who were older and more independent introduced their adoptive and birth families, but essentially maintained separate relationships with the two families. The range of mingling is best illustrated in the following two examples:

During the first week, A. and B.M. talked on the phone for an hour every night. I talked to her too, it was very intense. We found out B.M. lived near A.Si., so we arranged for all of us to go over there. B.M. went to A.Si's the night before and looked at photo albums, and just talked. It was really exciting the next day when we all met. It was so neat. She brought B.Si., too, and her husband. After dinner, they invited A. to stay with them for a few days. We thought that was great, so he packed his bags and stayed with them overnight. I think it's really important to be there... (AM #5)

In the second interview, the adoptee who responded to the letter was 41 and had been away from home since his late teens. His sister, also adopted, had reunited with her birth mother ten years previously, and the reunion had not gone particularly well. The adoptive father had this to say about the meeting:
They both (the adoptee and his sister) made the arrangements for me to meet their birth mothers. "K" (adoptive father's wife of four years, also an adoptee) has not met A.'s birthmother. A. arranged for me to meet her. We went to Stanley park and he took his children and his birthmom to Stanley Park, and I met her there, once, just once." (AF #2)

Regardless of the number of meetings or the level of involvement between the adoptive and birth families, the adoptive parents demonstrated a genuine interest in the members of the birth family, and talked about them in the same way as they would extended family members. Whether the adoptive parents described them as "new friends" (interview #7), or "a broadening of family" (interview #2), or "part of us" (interview #5), they were interested in their current functioning. In some cases they provided help through troubled times or included them in traditional family times such as Christmas (#5) or family events (#2). The following examples again clearly illustrate how the birth families are incorporated as extended family. In the first interview, the adoptive mother brought the researcher a picture which the adoptee had arranged to be taken. The picture was of the adoptee and her birth siblings. The adoptive mother identified each of the individuals in the picture for the researcher, and the picture was placed in a prominent location in the home.

In interview #4, the adoptee found she had three brothers in her birth family. One of these brothers lives in a town near the adoptee's sister.

And A.Si. is very pleased with them. She's met them all now. B.B., the one that comes to visit her, she says, "oh he's just like my brother, I tease him and everything else." (AM #4)

Even though the adoptive father in the second interview has had little contact with his son's birthfamily, he still thinks of them in the context of family as is evidenced in the following:
I liken them to some of the things that perhaps I've done. I've become acquainted with fifth cousins in Norway. This is like finding another branch of the family. This is to me, what A. has done, he's found another branch of the family. It doesn't affect anything... It's just a broadening of the family. If some big event occurred and they invited all the family, I'd go. (AF #2).

The inclusiveness of these adoptive families appears to be characterized by a broader definition of family than is perhaps typical in our Caucasian Canadian culture. They are open to not only recognizing others who might have family ties (however distant) but welcoming and incorporating them as part of the family in some way. Whether or not the relationship with the adoptee was seen to be positive, the tendency to be inclusive was evident. One might argue that the first step toward such an attitude is to adopt in the first place. In doing so, adoptive families incorporate someone into the family, with all the rights and privileges of a family member, who is not linked by a blood relationship. The author expects, however, that there are some adoptive parents who do not hold such a welcoming attitude and who are not as receptive to the side effects of (i.e. relationships with members of the birth family) adoption reunion. Another study might further explore what proportion of adoptive families give evidence of an inclusive attitude and what this means with regard to their attitude toward the birth family.

Ripple Effect:

Another property of the openness evidenced by this group of adoptive parents, is their recognition that adoption reunion impacts others beyond those generally considered to be members of the adoption triad. The adoption triad is generally assumed to include the adoptive parents, adoptee, and birth parents, with, in fact, little consideration given to either the birth father or the adoptive father. The other group who are most likely to be impacted by the reunion are
siblings. This includes adoptive siblings (whether adopted themselves, or born into the family) and birth siblings. In fact, in several of the reunions discussed the discovery of birth siblings and development of relationships with them, as well as the possibility of altered relationships with adoptive siblings was a topic for much discussion. Where there were other adopted siblings in the home, the reunion brought to the surface the issue of whether or not the adopted siblings also wished to engage in a reunion. If adopted siblings had also reunited, but their reunion was not as positive, old issues within the family such as sibling rivalry may intensify. While these adoptive parents did not feel threatened by the reunion, some of the adoptive siblings might feel they are being replaced, particularly if the adoptee discovers a strong connection with a birth sibling. The complexities of sibling relationships could be endless. Also impacted are other members of the adoptive families (grandparents, aunts, uncles), as well as birth relatives (grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.). The metaphor of ripples caused by a stone thrown into a pond (the ripples are ever expanding) is a particularly appropriate description of the impact of reunion on others.

The adoptive parents who had other adopted children (as in 6 of the families interviewed) noted that the reunion brought the issue of reunion for the other adoptees (to the fore). In total, there were 7 other adoptees in the families interviewed. Of these, two had also reunited (one before, one after), one had not yet reached the age of majority, and the remainder had, to this point, stated that they are not interested in reunion, although one would like to meet her birth sibling and one would like more medical information. The interview involved only the adoptive parents, so only the adoptive parents' interpretation of the impact of the reunion on these siblings was available. They have not dismissed the possibility of a reunion for these adoptees, as the following example
illustrates:

I've asked them all if they're interested in reunion quite often. A.Si. (eldest) always said she would like to know more of her background because of her health reasons, she has quite a few things wrong with her, and she said that's the only reason she would. And A.Si. (youngest), well, she said I have a brother somewhere, and she said I'd just like to see what he's like. (AM #6)

Even the adopted sister in the seventh family who was earlier described as completely uninterested in reunion, was thought by the adoptive parents to be receptive to a reunion if it was initiated by the birth parents. Again, the adoptive parents' open view is reflected in their reflection of the adopted sibling's view regarding reunion.

For adoptive siblings who are not themselves adopted, the impact is somewhat different. They may feel threatened, or fear being replaced as is evidenced in the following:

But for my son A.B., this is his only brother and here his only brother is talking about his brothers, he's got four of them. His four other ones, yah right, he's got five, but A.B., I think was like by my ex-husband is uh not always the easiest person to communicate with, it's not easy and uh um he's a pain, Dutchman of the first order, and so A.B. doesn't have an easy relationship with his father so the one male that is closest to him in terms of family is A. and here was A. going off, well I sorry I'm busy with B.B., or B.B., or one of the other guys and uh and A.B. talked about it to me at one point. He was finding it quite, he was a bit lonely there about you know feeling a bit strange and left and put out. I talked to A. about it. I said, "hey A. with A.B. a little reassurance that you're not going to desert him, you're the only one he's got", so he did. (AM #3)

The impact for birth siblings is similarly complex. If they were told of the adoptee's existence, they might push for the reunion (as in #4). In the stories told by the adoptive parents, the birth siblings were all eager for contact, sometimes overwhelmingly so. The adoptee, who might be prepared for a
relationship with his/her birthparent(s), is not necessarily equipped to incorporate new siblings. Some of the adoptees (#2, #3, and #7) found the birth siblings' desire for a relationship strange and overwhelming.

I think A. is being careful with respect to not getting overwhelmed in this sudden change in his background that he's suddenly got another full family out there. He voices a little bit in the way of reservations of getting involved too deeply with his birth mother and his half brothers and sisters. He says several of them he relates to better than others, which is natural. A. has said they seem to want to start involving him with all their family things, with him, his wife and their kids. He's not sure to what extent he wants to. He says he finds it a little heavy going. He finds it strange to have this woman whom he's never met before, who's his sister and he's not sure whether to give her a hug or what to do... (AF #2)

Other adoptees found the birth siblings to be one of the biggest benefits of the reunion (particularly #1 and #5) as is evidenced in the following:

I think the biggest thing is her sister, someone she talks about most of all. You know, how how nice it is that you know how she feels that she's got a you know sister. Because they do things you know, they go out and do things and you know. (AM #1)

An important element in relationships with birth siblings seems to be the identification of likenesses. The autobiographical literature on adoption reunion refers repeatedly to the importance of being able to identify physical similarities or similarities in personality. The presence of siblings allows the adoptee a broader range of people with whom to identify.

We had this little lunch, and we talked away. And A.B.'s wife was telling him something, and he said "now wait a minute, wait a minute," and he wanted to get the whole history of the thing, and I said "Oh, you're just like A. when I go to tell her something she says now hold it Mom, hold it, she's got to get all the details first, and I'm ready to get to the conclusion before she... and he started to laugh. I said boy, you're like A. So he said to A. after he said "boy she's got us pegged". But that was one instant, he was exactly like her. (AM #4)
From this description it appears the birth sibling was as pleased with the identification of a similarity as the adoptee would have been. The fact that the adoptive mother was open enough to recognize and comment on the similarity is further evidence of the level of openness characterizing the adoptive parents interviewed.

**Reality Testing:**

The reunion, of course, is an opportunity to clarify and correct the information provided at the time of placement (fact finding), as well as to dispense with the fantasy of the birth parents and face who they are in reality (measuring up). If the adoptive parents had not been open with the adoptee throughout the years, if they had altered or withheld information, the reunion could easily have been a threat. These adoptive parents shared what limited information they had been given, and recognized the value of the opportunity for the adoptee to receive complete information and to develop a stronger sense of self. For both the adoptee and adoptive parents, the reunion served a fact finding function. In some cases the information provided at the time of the adoption varied with the information the adoptee received through the reunion, as in the following example.

A's birth mother tells a different story than what I had written down about them. And he argues that he knows, so, I don't say anymore, but... but according to A. the birth mother tells a different story. And yet I had a friend arguing with him about it this last Boxing Day at my brother's place. She was the legal stenographer that handled all my adoptions, and she knew what was written...

(AM #6)

It is hard to know which version is "correct", both the adoptee and adoptive parents are justified in believing their version. The adoptive mother believes that since it was written at the time, it must be correct, while the
adoptee believes that since he has the information "from the horse's mouth" his must be correct. This is one example of how, when faced with reality, the truth is still a question.

The adoptive parents described how most of the adoptees' personal stories, i.e. the circumstances leading to their placement for adoption were positive and fairly typical, for the time. Usually the adoptee was either a teen mother or they came from a family which was experiencing extreme difficulties. One of the stories, however, fell into the category of an adoptee's worst fear about their origins:

His background is such that they can't trace it (his medical history) anyway. He was the product of a gang rape. He's got his mother's background but they don't know who his father was. I think A. was very brave, there he is discovering this. But I think he's been rewarded in meeting people, learning there were people out there who always had a little celebration on his birthday. It's another dimension for him. All her children knew about him and all were happy to meet him... but I think it's been rewarding for them, and they've both said (adoptive and adopted sister) that it turned out better for them that they were adopted. Both have the benefit of a different type of childhood than if they hadn't been part of this family. They would have been adopted somewhere, but it turned out to be good for them that they ended up with us. (AF #2)

Even though these origins would be difficult for the adoptee to come to terms with, there is a positive side. The child was cared for and his memory held a place of honour in the birth family.

Given that these adoptive parents adopted at a time when birth mothers were heavily stigmatized, their positive presentation of the adoptees' stories and their positive regard for the birth parents is notable. In holding a positive view of the birth parents, expressing compassion for the decision they made, they are reflecting their positive regard for their son or daughter. Despite this, however,
all of the adoptive parents pointed out differences between themselves and the birth families as they are presently functioning. All of the birth families were described as having more difficulties, being of a lower socio-economic group, and generally being less successful than the adoptive families. In essence, the birth families, as much as the adoptive parents might like them, never quite "measured up" to the adoptive families. Some adoptive families noted that the adoptee was somewhat surprised and disappointed by this difference, as follows:

I think now he feels kind of sorry for her in her predicament. She's not as old as I am, I don't know how old she is, but she's not as old as I am, and she hasn't had as easy a life as I have (AM #6)

I think he sees how life would have been. She's very nice, but very immature and has had a hard life. He knows how his half sister was raised, and I think he is glad he came to us. And his birth mother has told him how lucky he is, what a good home he has. (AM #5).

It seems that one of the benefits of the reunion for both the adoptee and the adoptive parent is the recognition, when faced with the facts, that the adoption has turned out to be beneficial for the adoptee. In hindsight, after meeting and learning about the birth family, the adoptive parents felt that the adoptee believed they obtained a better quality of life through the adoption. Sometimes this was acknowledged by the birth parents, and all of the adoptive parents stated that the adoptee had found this to be true.

By facing the reality, not only of the child's origins, but also of the birth family's current functioning, the adoptee is taking a risk. In being open to share the experience, the adoptive parents are also taking a risk. These adoptive parents invariably felt the risk was worth taking and that they had in fact benefitted because the adoptee recognized how life could have been, and
expressed their pleasure regarding the adoption.

The category of openness illustrates how this group of adoptive parents was open in several ways. They were open and receptive to the emotional experiences of the others involved, showing empathy for both the adoptee and the birth parents. They were open to including others and extending their family relationships. They were open in their recognition that the impact of reunion on the adoption circle including adoptive siblings, birth siblings and extended family members as well as the adoptee, adoptive parents and birth parents. Finally they were open to the reality of the adoptee's history and willing to face the reality of the birth family as it currently is. This level of openness is a reflection of the parental philosophy of these adoptive parents, and is further elaborated upon in the following discussion of their non-ownership attitude toward the adoptee.

CATEGORY 3: NON-OWNERSHIP

Non-Ownership refers to these parents' philosophy that a child (adopted or not) is not property, or something that is owned. For these adoptive parents, a parent's role is to help the individual toward independence. This view carries with it certain assumptions or attitudes and allows a certain amount of freedom for the parent. As the child grows older the parent not only expects, but encourages, the child to form other attachments. As evidence of this, these adoptive parents, at various points before the adoptee reached adulthood, gave the adoptee permission to engage in a search. An attitude of ownership assumes exclusiveness; i.e. that an individual can belong in only one family. A non-ownership attitude accepts the concept of multiple belonging, i.e. an individual can belong in several families. This allows adoptive parents and
adoptee the freedom of not always having to "be there" for one another, yet
gives them the freedom to demonstrate caring for one another when they are
together. This philosophy of non-ownership also assumes a certain respect for
the individual; if the adoptive parents were unable to assist the adoptee towards
independence, they would have more difficulty demonstrating their respect for
the adult the adoptee has grown to be.

Permission:

As has been noted several times in this thesis, adoption issues are
complex. Communications in adoption are evidence of this complexity.
Frequently, it seems, adoptees do not raise topics related to adoption with their
parents for fear of hurting them, as if in doing so they are in some way
undervaluing their relationship. Adoptive parents tend to exercise the same
cautions; they don't raise adoption related topics out of concern that the adoptee
will be hurt, and in some way feel rejected. Each interprets the other's silence
as discomfort with the topic and accepts it as evidence that it is threatening to
the other party. Perhaps the most threatening topic for either the adoptee or
adoptive parent is the topic of reunion. In this context, the fact that these
adoptive parents made the effort to let the adoptee know that reunion would be
okay with them is noteworthy. How and when this permission was given, are
also important considerations, and will impact how the message was translated
by the adoptee. The exploration of how adoptive parents give permission for
reunion, and how it is interpreted by the adoptee, could easily grow into a study
in itself. In this study, only the adoptive parents' views of how permission was
given are available, and are accepted at face value.

The adoptive parents generally felt that their views regarding the
adoptees' right to complete background information (including reunion) were
different from the norm. They cited comments from other adoptive parents or social workers as evidence. In some cases, as in the following, they were given the clear message that they were "bucking the system".

I tried when he was very small, we were actually given these little things from the health unit, and the address and I had the name of the foster mother that he'd lived with and phoned her at one point and said to her look, if A. when he is 18 or adult or the equivalent thereof, wants to know what his birth name was or some contact, can you give it to him if he can't get it through the Ministry or something. Well, she phoned and told the children's aide that I was bothering her about this so I got right royally told off. (AM #3)

After the reunion, as well, the adoptive parents have found that others cannot understand their receptiveness to the reunion.

But I know another girlfriend of mine in Abbotsford. We were at a first of July dinner, and I know that her girl is adopted, similar to A., it was about the same time. And I was excited about it, you know, I had told this exciting story so many times you know, and everybody cried and everything and she said, oh, she said that would never do in this house. She said "D" (her husband) says that's his kid, nobody else's. I said oh, how sad. She said, oh no, we would never go through that. I said oh, it's been the most exciting thing that's happened this whole summer... (AM #4)

It seems evident that the non-ownership attitude of the adoptive mother interviewed was not shared by her friend. By sharing in the excitement, and sharing the experience with others, the adoptive mother is demonstrating that the permission she gave the adoptee earlier, was sincere. This adoptive mother said the following, with regard to the permission she had previously given:

I always thought of her (birth mother) on birthdays, you know. And I always left it to them. I always said if they wanted to make the contact, it was quite alright with both of us. But I always left it to them. When they were getting close to 21, because that's when I thought they could get the information, I said, if you think you'd like to, go ahead. (AM #4)
In most cases, the parental permission went hand in hand with recognizing the importance of one's roots for the adoptee, or identifying that the adoptee was in some way incomplete before the reunion. The examples of empathy cited earlier refer to the adoptees' normal desire to know more about his or her roots. Several adoptive parents noted that they thought that the adoptee felt some part of themselves was missing, and that the reunion filled the gap.

I've always felt that it would be good for him to find his birth mother. It was like there was something missing for him. So we always told him, if he wants to look for her, we would help. (AM #5)

One adoptive father was particularly concise and to the point with regard to the property of permission.

I think I probably even annoyed people at the (Parent Finder's) meetings. Because of people's apprehensions about it. Because we didn't have any apprehensions at all. I knew it was a void that he had to fill and encouraged him to do it." (AF #7)

Multiple Belonging:

A custodial attitude recognizes that it is possible for a person to "belong" in several places, or families, and is not the exclusive property of any of them. For these adoptive parents, this attitude frees them to recognize how the adoptee "fits" into the birth family. Just as they were able to welcome and include the birth family as part of their extended family, so were they able to allow the adoptee to join the birth family without seeing it as a threat. They referred to this as completing the circle (this term was used by more than one adoptive parent) recognizing not only that the adoptee gains a sense of completion, but that the adoptee's re-introduction to the birth family gives that family a sense of completion. Also, in recognizing the adoptee's belonging in
the birth family, they are free to give and receive thanks - if they had felt the child belonged exclusively to the adoptive family, there would be no need for thanks on either side. This is referred to as giving or receiving bouquets, and in at least one case, this took place literally as well as figuratively.

The adoptive parent's recognition that the adoptee lends a sense of completion to the birth family was unexpected. It seemed normal, from the literature and from discussions with adoptees, that the reunion could help the adoptee to feel more complete. It was surprising, however, that not only the birth mother but the birth family felt that the adoptee was a "missing piece", and that the adoptive parents were able to recognize that the adoptee completed the circle without feeling they must then lose the adoptee to the birth family. The following example illustrates this clearly:

This is a family, BBQ thing that the family have every year, and everybody comes, all the, everybody that's possibly involved with the family. Well, A. was there, A. and A.B. and I but A.F. was working and I was looking at her in the middle of the group and I thought "she just fits" she was the missing piece and the link is there now and it just, she's just there, so I'm really pleased for her. (AM #1)

The value of giving or receiving bouquets varied between the adoptive parents interviewed. Either by noting that the child had a better lifestyle than the birth parent could have provided, or by recognizing to the adoptive parents how well the adoptee turned out, the birth parent (or member of the birth family) relayed their thanks to the adoptive parents. One example was particularly poignant:

I first met her brothers in May at A.'s house. She was having them to lunch and asked me if I wanted to come. I said "sure!" I was already there, and I saw them arrive. And I saw B.B. and I said "oh, does he look like you, the eyes" They came with their wives
and their children. And they came up with a big basket of flowers and they came up and kissed me and said "thank you for doing such a good job" and gave me the flowers. It was lovely. (AM #4)

In this family, it was the birth brothers, who, after learning about their sister's existence, encouraged their mother toward the reunion. It seems that they, too, had a need to give recognition to the adoptive parents.

Meeting face to face, and exchanging thank-you's gave both parties the opportunity to recognize one another as real individuals, and in this way also to "complete the circle". The first interview made this most evident:

AM I think it is important because if, for nothing else, for one thing as an adoptive parent to say thank you for entrusting us with the care of the child that you gave life to and on the other hand to be able to say thank you on the other hand because we were given the chance to be parents which we wouldn't have been able to otherwise, so I think even if you meet the once to say thank you I think that that is important and I think it helps on both sides because then the adoptive parents can actually see that this other person is not an ogre and it's the same on the other hand that as adoptive parents we can meet the, you know, meet the birth mother and hopefully the father as well and see that they aren't monsters either. And it's easier to deal with something that you face than something in your imagination. You can imagine all kinds of weird and wonderful or horrible and awful things, you know, so I think it is important to meet the, for them to meet the once anyway.

I What if one party or the other doesn't want to meet.

AM Well, then you have to deal with that, but I think that as long as people are willing to, um, to meet, I think it makes it better in the long run.

AF I think it completes the circle.

AM Yah, I think it completes the circle. It's all part and parcel of the adoptee. (Interview #1)

By recognizing that the adoptee belongs to neither set of parents exclusively, but is part of both, the adoptive parents not only free the adoptee of
potential guilt, but also free themselves of the fear that the adoptee would have to choose one or the other. This freedom for the adoptee is significant. In essence, it allows the adoptee to be "guilt-free" in the reunion. One of the adoptive parents believed it was important that the adoptee not feel a reunion is a matter of choosing between families:

If you resist the reunion, or if you make him choose between you, you'll only damage the relationship, and he'll resent you for it. It's not fair to make him choose. He can have both. I have room for him and his mom and sister. And it's been nice to see how he's grown. I think it's drawn us closer... (AM #1)

Respect:

The adoptive parents' level of respect for others, was very apparent and was a property which ran through all of the interviews. Not only did they demonstrate respect for the adoptee in various ways, but they also stated their respect for the birth parents (particularly the birth mother, in effect, honoring her). Their respect for the adoptee is demonstrated in their ability to give the adoptee control in the reunion, and to respect the adoptee's individuality. Their respect for the birth mother is expressed in terms of compassion for the decision she made to place the child for adoption and in admiration for her survival skills. In all cases the birth mother was noted to have survived not only placing her child for adoption but also a series of other tragedies. It is interesting to note that the adoptive parents did not express the same level of compassion for the birth fathers.

A non-ownership attitude is, in the author's view, a pre-requisite to developing the level of respect for the adoptee and for the birth mother expressed by these adoptive parents. They are not caught up in ownership issues, rather they are focused on encouraging the adoptee toward becoming
(or being) an individual in his/her own right. Also, there is no need for
competition between the two sets of parents. The adoptive parents can
recognize the birth parents' strengths without fearing they will compare
unfavorably.

Although the childhood legends referred to earlier recognized differences
between the adoptee and the adoptive families, in that context the differences
were generally "sugar-coated" (much as the birth histories given by the social
worker had been). When discussing the adoptee as adult, the adoptive parents
also recognized differences, but in this context they tended to be recognizing the
individuality of the adoptee. In most cases this uniqueness was also an
illustration of how the adoptee was similar to his/her birth family. The adoptive
parents further noted that they were accepting of the adoptee's differences, and
made no attempt to change him/her. The following example illustrates this
respect for the adoptee's individuality.

He's very different from the rest of our family. He's very laissez-
faire, nothing phases him. We're more get up and go. It's
frustrating sometimes, but that's who he is and I've learned to let
him be. He'll get to things, but in his time, which is different from
the rest of us. Now that I've met his mom and sister I can see
where he gets it. (AM #5)

The adoptive parents also demonstrated their respect for the adoptee by
allowing the adoptee to be in control of the reunion. In all cases, the adoptive
parents noted that they felt it was the adoptee's prerogative to set the pace of
the reunion and to control how and when the two sets of parents would meet.
They appeared to recognize that the adoptee would benefit from being in control
of the circumstances of the meeting, and while they may not have organized the
event in the same way, they did not interfere in the arrangements. In the
following example it seemed evident that the adoptee wished the meeting to take
place in "neutral territory". Although this meant some inconvenience to the adoptive father, he went along with the plan.

AF She was staying at, my mom and dad were away on a trip and she was staying over at their house and cause I said well can have a, she wanted to have a BBQ and I said look we can have it this house and she said let's do it over at granny and grampa's houses. I thought it was kind of strange

AM Well, it's kind of neutral territory.

AF I guess so, yah, whatever you want.

AM Then you're not, their not coming onto our turf.

I I guess the other thing was that she was kind of in charge there.

AF Yah, I guess

AM Yah, that's right.

AF So here I had to pack up the BBQ and everything else and I thought yah, this is kind of ridiculous, I mean we have all this room here, you know, but I didn't argue with her, I said no this is you know, what ever, I just thought it was strange, I wasn't going to argue with her. She wanted to do her own thing. So I thought I should let her, I don't want to spoil her her day... (Interview #1)

In the family where a meeting has not yet taken place between the birth parents and the adoptive parent, it is out of respect for the adoptee that the adoptive parents have not pushed for a meeting:

I've made it known to him that I'd be glad to meet any of them, but it's not turning out that way. It doesn't matter to me one way or the other. It's what he feels comfortable with that matters to me. (AF #7)

The adoptive parents' respectful attitude toward the birth mother, and their ability to honour her was an important element related to their non-ownership attitude. Even when the birth mother turned out to be a
disappointment, as in the first interview, the adoptive parents were understanding, rather than condemning, in their attitude. In most cases the adoptee established a relationship with the birth mother which was at least satisfactory, and in most cases it was expected an ongoing relationship would be developed. As was noted earlier, in the section on reality testing, it was somewhat comforting for the adoptive parents to find that their lives had been more "successful" than that of the birth parents. Nevertheless, the adoptive parents took care to recognize the positive attributes of the birth parents and to express their respect for the birth mother's coping abilities. They invariably noted that the birth mother's life had been more difficult, and they were impressed with her survival skills. The following example illustrates the point.

His mother and I have developed a relationship based on mutual respect. I don't know if I could have survived the things she has. She has told A. how lucky he is to have been brought up in a good family. We're very different, we've lived very different lives, but we can see strengths in each other. (AM #5)

The same level of respect for the birth father was not evident. The adoptive parents did not view the birth father negatively. On the contrary, most expressed a liking for him. The difference, however, is that the "honoring" component was not present in their discussions of him. The author was unable to find any reason to account for this difference in attitude.

The following example clearly outlines the notion of non-ownership from the adoptive parent's view:

AM Claire Marcus, she said in there, she said that if adopted parents could look at um adoption as a guardianship not as in that these children are in your care and yes you love them and things but not that you possess them, and actually if all parents no matter whether you're adoptive parents
You can't possess anybody, even if your own children you don't possess them, I mean.

No, I would never want to possess my children and I think that's where people can't understand why we've been so open, so willing to go along with reunions and actually encouraged reunion, um because we never feel like we owned our children. They're not possession like a chair or a table. (#1)

The notion of non-ownership, it seems, provides the adoptive parents with the ability to give the adoptee the freedom to explore his or her background, to develop relationships with whomever s/he chooses, and to make decisions about how those relationships will develop. This freedom, given the adoptee, also sets the adoptive parents free. They are free to share in the relationship and to recognize the benefits of the reunion without being threatened. These freedoms are even more accessible because of the stage of development both the adoptee, and the adoptive parent has reached.

CATEGORY 4: DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE

Of the four categories, this is perhaps the most surprising as it addresses the discrepancy between the attitudes (or projected attitudes) of adoptive parents in the literature, and the attitudes or experiences of the adoptive parents interviewed in this study. This category reflects the fact that the adoptive parents' views, and response to the adoptee and to the idea of reunion have changed over time, as they have each developed. The adoptees were all adults, but they were easily divided into an older (over 30) and younger (under 30) grouping. The adoptive parent's age range reflected that of the adoptees. Not only did the adoptive parents note that their views would have been different, before the adoptee reached adulthood, for example, but differences between the "younger" and older families also became evident. Just as in the "legend"
category there was a difference between the more positive adoptions and the more difficult adoptions, in this category there were distinct differences between the older and younger groups. The older adoptive parent group (interviews #2, 4, 6 & 7) ranged in age from 60 to 80. They were all retired, and their children were all out of the home. The adoptees in this group had all been married and had families of their own. Two of the adoptees were divorced and one was remarried. The younger adoptive parent group (interviews #1, 3 & 5) were in their late 40's and 50's. They were employed and had one or more children living at home with them. None of the adoptees in this group were married as yet. While the properties which emerged applied to both groups the elements and dimensions of the properties varied between the two groups.

Letting Go:

As with any adult child, the developmental task for the parents involves "letting go". At some point in the adult child's life the parent needs to step back, and essentially transfer custody of the individual to him or herself. Further, the adult goes on to establish their own family unit to whom they owe their first allegiance. For the adoptive parents whose adult child has reunited with birthparents, "letting go" asks even more. For them, to "let go" means to step back and let them have this very emotional experience while the adoptive parent takes a very peripheral role. Even though the re-introduction of the birth parents into the adoptee's life is by definition an emotional and risky experience, these adoptive parents have acknowledged that it is an experience that the adoptee must control. Their role, in the reunion, was to respond to cues given by the adoptee. Despite this, the younger adoptive parents were much more actively involved in the reunion than were the older adoptive parents. Paradoxically, "letting go" also involved claiming. By identifying the importance of the role they
had played in the adoptee's life, the adoptive parents found it easier to let them go.

One of the elements of letting go is the ability to step back and allow the event to develop. The reunion is only one of many areas in the adoptee's life that requires the adoptive parents to let go. For the younger adoptees, it was apparent that the adoptee and adoptive parents are in the process of forming new dimensions in their relationship centering on the adoptee achieving complete independence. The parents of the older adoptees have, in essence, already let go, so their involvement in the reunion is much more peripheral.

In the third and fifth families, the adoptive parents were actually key players in the reunion. The adoptive mother in the third family had initiated the reunion and had, in effect, talked her son into it. In the fifth family, the adoptee wanted his adoptive mother to be there when his birth mother returned his call, and eventually convinced his adoptive mother to call again on his behalf (thus making the first contact). In the first family, the adoptee's reunion was closely tied to the adoptive mother's (she was also a birthmother) reunion with her birth son. In each of these cases, however, the adoptive parents showed evidence of the "letting go" process by "stepping back" once the reunion was underway. In the third family, for instance,

He went through with it on his own and it was really scary for him, and that was really neat. But he carried through... The fact that he saw it through on his own is great. He's talked more with A.S. and A.B. than he has with me..." (AM #3)

For this adoptive mother, although she had virtually imposed the reunion on her son, it was important to step back and let him carry on.

In the group of older adoptive parents, who have already let go, stepping back is not so much an issue. Their support for the adoptee is less obvious and
could best be described as responding to cues. The adoptees do not seem to need a lot of support, but kept the adoptive parents involved, through periodic telephone calls, on how things were progressing.

She doesn't say very much, she'll just say when she saw them last, or whatever. She'll just mention, now and then, when she's seen them or had a card or something. (AM #4)

The adoptive mother, who was very interested and excited about the reunion, has responded to these cues by displaying her interest when her daughter tells her about her family, but takes a back seat to others such as the adoptee's husband and sister who are more involved in the adoptee's life and in her reunion. The adoptive mother noted that while she only got periodic updates, but the adoptee's husband at one point felt quite overwhelmed:

I think A.H. found it to be a lot. One day he said "if I meet any more B's (adoptee's birth surname), I don't know what I'll do. (AM #4)

Part of the letting go process, brought on by the reunion for both groups of parents, involved claiming. The adoptive parents made a note of how the adoptee was similar to the adoptive family while simultaneously noting his or her likeness to the birthfamily. This is similar to the idea of "multiple belonging", except the focus is on noting how the adoptee has developed a similarity to the adoptive family over the years, and the adoptive parents have a need to recognize the impact they have had on the adoptee's life. The following examples illustrate this paradox:

I said to her, I wonder how much comes from me and how much comes from your mother and dad. And she said, well I grew up with you... (AM #4)

He might look a little bit like his mother, with his eyes. But personality wise I think he's taken on our personalities, he hasn't
taken theirs and so I think that changes a person's physical appearance. (AM #7)

This is a natural fit for him. It's funny and it may be a natural fit and yet because the family that he grew up in has been quite different he may find that it's a natural fit on one level but on another level it's not quite a natural fit. It may be strange for him. (AM #3)

The adoptive parents' need to claim, while letting go, indicates that on some level the reunion brings out a desire for recognition of the impact the adoptive parents have had on the adoptee. At the same time, such recognition given either by the adoptee or by the adoptive parents was an integral part of all the reunions and was one of the hidden benefits discussed later.

The idea of "letting go" is tied to both the adoptee's and the adoptive 'parents' development through the life cycle. This stage is part of life for all parents, but is brought to the forefront more for adoptive parents when the adoptee is involved in a reunion. They are required to let go in a way that no other parent is asked to do. If they have already come to terms with this developmental task, the reunion is seen as just part of it, as evidenced in the following comment.

I have friends, and the mothers of the children won't let their children go. My daughter's boyfriend was 28 and living at home. And he would arrange to take her out for dinner but then his mother would make a special meal for him, and he would call and arrange to meet my daughter after dinner. And my daughter said the lady is very nice, but she says, she's not prepared to let her children go. I think a lot of people have a security problem with their own children. They don't want to lose their children. Whereas, they have to grow up and get busy with their own life. I think the outlook of the parents makes a lot of difference. You have to cut them loose and the sooner the better. A. is 41, he has his own life and his own problems. He has to work them out for himself. I've done my part and I'm proud of the adult he's become. His reconnection with his birth mother is just one of many things... (AF #2)
Hidden Benefits:

The reunion was seen by the adoptive parents as meeting certain developmental needs for the adoptee and for the adoptive parents. In both cases these needs were related to the individual's developmental stage. For the younger adoptees, the reunion was seen as contributing to their maturity. In the older adoptees the reunion contributed a sense of completion, or a more clearly defined identity. For both, the reunion was seen as enhancing the adoptees' personal growth. For the younger adoptive parents, the reunion provided outside recognition (validation) of the parenting job they had done at a time when such recognition is particularly meaningful. For the older adoptive parents, the element of outside recognition was present, but more important was the presence of another (younger) set of parents, who might be able to serve as a surrogate parent to the adoptee. These were all hidden benefits to the reunion since they were not the primary motivation for it, but were certainly an important component.

The element of growth for the adoptee is reflected differently depending on their age. For the younger adoptees, the reunions were initiated in the hope of fulfilling an identified need for the adoptee (although it may have been the adoptive parent rather than the adoptee who identified the need). In this group, the reunion was undertaken in the hope that it would address some of the issues raised in their not-so-distant adolescent identity struggle. In the reunion they were seeking answers to questions such as the reason they had been surrendered, or an opportunity to find people who bore them some resemblance. In finding this, which they did, they found personal growth and an advancement in their maturity. The reunion allowed them to move on, beyond identity issues, in their development. The following quotation is a clear example:
He carried through so and and he seems a little bit more mature for the experience than he was. He's really come in contact with a piece of himself that's very real... because it did affect him deeply because it told him some things about himself that he didn't know about. It maybe told him, I'm guessing, because he hasn't said, it maybe told him sort of hey, I'm normal, I'm it's perfectly natural, this is the way I was meant to be sort of thing, but I do know that it that it meant a great deal to him, to be accepted and to find out that that he really matched and to be wanted like that. Now, anything else I would really be speculating, but the fact that he saw it through on his own, he's talked more with A.S. and A.B. than he has with me... I think for A. it has filled a hole that he didn't know he had... (AM #3)

The older adoptees generally had come to terms with their identity issues (as evidenced by the stories told by their parents), and did not have the same expectations of the reunion as the younger group. In fact, of the four older adoptees, only two initiated the search. One of these, the youngest of the group, did hope to address some lingering adoption related issues. Two engaged in the reunion only after it was initiated by the birth parent. The adoptive parents of these adoptees did not feel they would have initiated a reunion. The remaining member of this group was, according to his father, primarily seeking medical information. As this is a common motivation used to mask other motivations, it is difficult to know what his true expectations of the reunion were. For all of these adoptees, however, the reunion did not have the same intense impact on their lives as was experienced by the younger group. Instead their growth appeared to be evidenced in a quiet sense of completion.

AM  To me he didn't change one bit
AF  Well, he seems to be a little more contented
AM  Oh, yeah  (#7)

For the most part, the adoptive parents did not identify any changes at all in these older adoptees in relation to the reunion. Rather, it is a theme which runs
through their discussion which suggests that the reunion has been a positive event, but that it has not altered them a great deal. Part of this has to do with the more peripheral role the adoptive parents have in these older adoptees' lives and in the reunion. The adoptive father in the second interview, for example, stated that he really had no idea how the reunion impacted his son. He noted that his son has been married for eighteen years and out of the home for much longer than that. He has been updated on the progress of the reunion through phone contact, and suspects it has been an emotional experience for his son, but noted that he is not in a position to comment on the impact of the reunion. In the fourth family, the theme is undoubtedly positive, but again the adoptive mother did not feel she was in a position to comment on how the reunion has impacted her daughter. The same is true of the sixth interview.

The reunion for the younger families provided outside recognition to the adoptive parents at a point where such recognition was important. As they were readying the adoptee for independence, some validation of their assessment that this individual was ready and well prepared for a transition, was helpful. This validation came through the reunion either directly from the adoptee, or from the birthparents. This validation or recognition has been discussed to some extent in the discussion of multiple belonging and giving or receiving of bouquets. In this situation, however, the validation assists the adoptive parents in letting go further:

She's quite impressed with him, and he's developed a way of being with her that's sort of protective. She gives him more responsibility than I do... I guess she sees him as more mature, you know, because I've had him and sometimes I don't give him credit for what he can do. (AM #5)

For the older adoptive parents, the suggestion that the birth parent, who had
always been in the distant background, is now a reality, was in some ways comforting. These adoptive parents were facing their mortality, and saw the birth parent (who was invariably younger) as a surrogate who might carry on for them. The following example illustrates this well:

When she told me, course this was after A.F. died, and she was nervous about telling me because I'd just lost A.F. I had just been to the doctor because I have a heart condition, and I had had an angina attack for which I have medication. And my first thought was "Thank God", you know, and I was terrified for my health, and I thought "Thank God, if anything happens to me she's not going to be alone". And that was my very first thought. (AM #4)

Other adoptive parents in this age category thought that the birth parent might at least be an alternate with whom the adoptee could discuss their troubles. The adoptive parents in this age group were generally quite willing to share the adoptee with the birth parents, with the knowledge that they (the adoptive parents) had had the time and opportunity to develop a secure relationship with the adoptee.

Security:

If, as Baran (1993) suggested, adoptive parents who adopt as a result of infertility are less secure in their parental role, these adoptive parents did not give evidence of it. Four out of seven of the adoptive parents adopted because of infertility. There was no distinguishable difference between these and the fertile couples in any of the categories, including the security of the adoptee/adoptive parent relationship. The security in the relationship expressed by the adoptive parents appears to be based on the fact that a relationship has developed through the years that has proven to be stable and rewarding for both the adoptee and adoptive parents. Aside from expressing that they did not feel threatened by the relationship, they also presented a clear message that the
adoptees were engaged in a parent/child relationship with the adoptive parents only. While a strong and positive relationship may have been established with the birth parents, it was not a parental relationship. The birth parents were not seen as having the history which had established the adoptive parent/adoptee relationship. The relationship with the adoptee was seen to be based on trust. The reunion was seen as enhancing the adoptee/adoptive parent relationship for the younger families, but for the older families who had more history and consequently more security, the reunion was seen to have had no impact at all on the adoptive parents' relationship with their son or daughter.

The element of trust has been discussed to some extent in the discussions of letting go and following cues. The adoptive parents have been required to trust in the adoptee's judgment, particularly regarding the reunion. They have also expressed their trust that the reunion will not mean that they will be discarded or replaced as parents. In fact, although most of the adoptive parents mentioned that they thought others felt threatened for just this reason, these adoptive parents found the notion laughable. One adoptive parent (#6) joked that her daughter-in-law might be hoping to have a better relationship with her husband's birth mother than with his adoptive mother. By giving the adoptees control, and responding to their cues, the adoptive parents expressed their trust in the adoptee. Had they felt less secure, the author expects they might have attempted to gain control in some way. These adoptive parents, however, stepped back, did not force the adoptees into any situations not of their choosing, and gave evidence of their security in the relationship.

The older group of adoptive parents all noted that the reunion had had no impact on their relationship with the adoptee. In essence, they presented the impression that the base of their relationship was firmly established, and the
reunion was an event that was of great importance to the adoptee but impacted the adoptive parents much less and their relationship not at all. For them the adoptee/adoptive parent relationship was fully developed. Additionally, the relationship between the adoptee and adoptive parent, as was mentioned earlier, isn't as involved as in the younger group. These adoptees all had families of their own, who were their primary focus. The fact that they had been able, with varied success, to establish their own lives, was in itself evidence that the adoptive parents had been secure enough to let go at some earlier point in time. For these parents, the relationship was virtually unshakable. The following examples illustrate how these adoptive parents described their security.

I wouldn't see that he would suddenly say I've found my birth mother, and I'm going to pursue my life with her. If he did, so be it. When you're grown up, and you're a parent, where does your loyalty lie? I think it starts to flow to your children. (#2)

She felt because I had lost A.F., I would feel I was losing her. Never, ever, ever. Even now when I've met both B.M. and B.F. and all the boys, I look at them and I can't think of them as her parents. They're just new friends, and it never bothered me a bit. A. says "I can't believe it mom". I said "I have nothing to loose, I know how you feel about me, and I've had you for thirty-six years, you know, she never had you at all". And I said, "I have nothing to lose". And I was really very pleased. And they're such nice people. And I've never felt threatened. Somebody says "don't you feel threatened, don't you feel strange" and I say "no I don't", I think a lot of it was to do with my health, and yet I've never felt that way about people, you know, I'm always willing to accept people, and I knew someday maybe she would contact them, but it never ever crossed my mind to be jealous or... no never. I was always very secure, and so was A.F. I knew they loved me, and loved A.F., and I never had any qualms about if they wanted a reunion. I just sort of let things happen and think about it after. (AM #4)

In the younger group, two out of the three families noted that their
relationship had been enhanced by the reunion. For them, the relationship has not been completely established, was still developing and might be somewhat less secure. Although they share a history with the adoptee, that history has not yet included the adoptee's establishment of a separate home, a significant developmental event. As such, these adoptive parents have not yet completely let go. All of the adoptive parents in this group, however, felt enough security in the relationship to encourage the reunion, although it was also important for them to actively participate. The following example gives some idea of how the reunion actually helped the adoptive parents to become more secure in the relationship.

It's the adoptive parents that the kid is connected with, and they are going to be his parents even whether he likes them or not, for the rest of his life, he's going to think of them as his parents, even if he never relates to them again and leaves them and is connected with his first family. He's going to know that he was parented by those adoptive people and so I don't think they lose anything by it, I think they just gain seeing their kid grow much as they would by seeing him getting married and start to relate to in-laws. They see them in a different context and help him be in that context. I don't know, maybe I'm a little easier about him. It would be interesting to know what he thinks about that. I would speculate that it's a little different for him too, yah I think our relationship's a little different. I think maybe it's a little bit more relaxed and a little bit more real, so, I think for him um he has seen a family that, wow, I could have been in that one and I'm not, so he's he's had a another look at, he's stood in a different spot to look at the family that he grew up in so he's seen us from a different angle, and anytime you see something from more than one angle you begin to see it more clearly, right, so in that sense we are both more real to each other, I'm more relaxed in the sense that I think he may find that that we are refreshingly undemanding in comparison with the family that he almost dropped into. Phew, there but for the grace of God go I, I don't know. I think he will, I think he will care about them and I think he's um really pleased with them, but I think he it may be nice for him to be able to have them but not have to
have them. I have that that uh speculation from what I know of him and what I've seen of what's happened. (AM #3)

For these adoptive parents, then, the fact that their relationship with the adoptee has developed over time, and that the adoptee has now established (or is establishing) some level of independence, played a part in determining their response to the reunion. By comparing the experiences of the "younger" adoptive parents with those of the "older" adoptive parents, the developmental component becomes more clear. Erikson (1968) called his final stage of development "integrity". All of the adoptive parents interviewed showed a great deal of integrity in their response to the reunion.

SUMMARY

The categories described above are, as was noted at the beginning of this chapter, interrelated and overlapping. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this is to summarize the findings.

The adoptive parents' philosophy ran throughout the four central categories which emerged from the data. The legends, i.e. repeated stories about the adoptee, told by the adoptive parents, were a reflection of the adoptee's role in the family, and the adoptive parents' views about adoption. They served to set the tone for discussion of adoption in the family and there were identifiable reoccurring themes within them which were unique to each family.

If there had not been some level of openness regarding adoption in these families, the legends would not have developed as they did with adoption being a central component. At the same time, the legends to some extent determined the level of openness within the family by including messages within them about the safety of the topic of adoption within the home. It became apparent,
however, that these adoptive parents not only talked about the importance of openness, but gave evidence of it in their actions. They showed empathy for the adoptee, both in their desire for a reunion and in sharing the emotional experience of the reunion. They had an inclusive attitude, reaching out and including others as members of their extended family. They recognized and were open enough to recognize the impact of adoption on a variety of others, particularly adopted and birth siblings. Finally, they were open to facing the reality of the birth family.

The adoptive parents' openness is part of, yet distinct from, their non-ownership view of parenthood. As parents they are aware that their task is to prepare their children (adopted or born into the family) for independence. For adoptees there is an inherent recognition that the child has ties to the birth family, and these ties are recognized and supported. The adoptive parents' attitude of non-ownership allows them the freedom to recognize others in the adoptee's life without feeling they should have "exclusive rights" to the adoptee. The non-ownership attitude of these adoptive parents is in direct contrast to the "children as chattel" notion incorporated into early adoption law. The adoptive parents demonstrated their permission for the reunion both verbally and through their actions. They recognized and accepted the adoptee's multiple belonging, i.e. belonging to several families - adoptive family, birth family and in some cases, their own nuclear family. This attitude incorporated respect, not only for the adoptee as adult, but for the birth family as well.

The previous categories are all a reflection of the adoptee and adoptive parents' developmental stage. The legends are as much an indication of the adoptive parents' current views as they are stories of past events. The adoptive parents' level of openness has developed or been reinforced over time. Their
attitude of non-ownership, too, has been a value that has proved worthwhile, particularly in their most recent experiences. The adoptive families interviewed fell naturally into two groups or generations. In the younger generation, the focus was on letting go. Both the adoptees and the adoptive parents were in the process of recognizing and developing the adoptee's independence. This had already happened for the "older generation". The developmental stage had a significant impact on the adoptive parents' attitude toward and experience of adoption reunion.
CHAPTER VI: IMPLICATIONS

"There are two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One is roots; the other wings."

Author Unknown
Courtesy of Adoptive Parents Association

The discussion in the preceding chapter, particularly as it pertains to openness and non-ownership, might almost seem to be little more than common sense. These adoptive parents approached adoptive parenthood with openness and confidence. They approached the adoption reunion in a matter-of-fact manner. What is noteworthy about this group is that they appear to be quite different from the assumptions made about adoptive parents in the literature. They do fit well, however, with current guidelines regarding adoptive parenting.

This chapter will evaluate the findings discussed in the previous chapter as they relate to the literature and to policy and practice. Incorporated into this discussion are the findings in relation to the questions posed in the introductory chapter. The chapter will conclude with implications for future research.

FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE LITERATURE

It is important, when discussing the findings of this research, to keep in mind two important qualifying factors. The number of subjects interviewed was small (n=7), and nothing is known about those who did not respond to the letter inviting them to participate. As such, no generalizations can be made.

The Adoptees' Experience of Adoption Reunion:

The adoptive parents' accounts of the reunion stories of the adoptees closely resemble those portrayed in other studies. The findings are congruent with studies conducted by Campbell, Silverman and Patti (1991), Depp, (1982), Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1978), and Triseliotis (1973) in that the adoptees...
were generally reported to feel that they had benefitted from the reunion, although at least three adoptees (#'s 1, 3 & 7) found the reunion fell short of their expectations to some extent. The results most closely resemble those obtained by Depp (1982). The adoptee in family #1, while finding an unsatisfactory relationship with her birthmother, found a very satisfying relationship with her birth father and birthsister. This illustrates the importance of other members of the adoption circle, as is frequently evident in the autobiographical accounts of adoption reunion, such as those written by Fisher (1973), Lifton (1975), and Maxtone-Graham (1983).

Aumend and Barrett (1984) and Triseliotis (1973) suggested that it is primarily adoptees who are dissatisfied with the adoption who seek a reunion. Lifton (1988) and Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1978), on the other hand, see reunion as a normative development for adoptees, in no way related to the "success" of the adoption. All of the adoptive parents in this study viewed the adoptions as successful, in that they continued to have what could be described as a normal parent/child relationship. None of the adoptions had broken down, although there had been difficulties identified in three of the adoptions, and these were reflected in the legends. In one instance, the adoptive mother initiated the reunion as a form of compensation, because she felt she had "failed" her son to some extent. In all other instances, however, the adoptive parents felt the reunion was a normal desire for the adoptee and was not related to the adoptee/adoptive parent relationship.

Gender Issues:

Despite the focus, in this study, on obtaining a sample that does not evidence the same gender bias as in previous studies (Campbell, et al., 1991; Depp, 1982; Feigelman, 1986; Gediman & Brown, 1991; Lifton, 1988;
Rosenweig-Smith, 1988; Sachdev, 1992; Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978; Stevenson, 1976; and Triseliotis, 1973), there did not appear to be any identifiable gender differences, either from the adoptee's perspective or from the adoptive parent's perspective. The one adoptive father who was interviewed by himself believed his experience of parenthood was different from his wife's and therefore his relationship with his children was different. Whether or not this is true, the relationship with his son, as he described it, and the impact of the reunion, did not appear to the researcher to be significantly different from those described by the adoptive mothers. In the interviews with the couples, both participated equally in the interview.

Impact on the Adoptive Parent/Adoptee Relationship:

Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1978) suggested that where the relationship with the adoptive parents was poor, the reunion aided in explaining how the difficulties had come to be. They further noted that if the relationship prior to reunion had been good, it would be enhanced by the reunion. (It should be noted this information was received through adoptee reports). Depp (1982) found that four out of six adoptive parents questioned found that their relationship with the adoptee was unchanged following the reunion. Of the two remaining, one found the relationship had deteriorated, and one found it had been enhanced. The findings of this study are congruent with both, Sorosky, Baran and Pannor's (1978), and Depp's (1982) findings depending on the age (or developmental stage) of the adoptive parents. For the younger group, the reunion did enhance the relationship, as suggested by Sorosky, Baran and Pannor. Although difficulties had been reported, the adoptive parents saw their relationship with the adoptee at the time of the interview as good. In the older group, the adoptive parents generally saw the relationship as unchanged,
congruent with Depp's (1982) study. Neither Depp (1982) nor Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1978) noted the age of their subjects (Depp identified the mean age of adoptees questioned, but not the age of the adoptive parents who took part in her study). Perhaps if the ages of their respondents had been identified, the importance of the developmental stage with regard to the impact on the relationship would have been identified.

Parental Security:

Baran (1993) suggested that adoptive parents who are infertile are more threatened by adoption reunion, as insecurity related to infertility would be enhanced. The adoptive parents in this study did not identify a resurfacing of loss or infertility issues, triggered by the reunion, nor were these evident to the researcher. The adoptive parents appeared to be unanimous in their belief that their role in reunion is one of support to the adoptee. The adoptive parents recognized the importance of the adoptee's "roots" from the beginning, and saw the reunion as a natural outcome for someone who had been previously disconnected. Because they saw the reunion as unrelated to the outcome of the adoption, they were unthreatened by the prospect or reality of the reunion.

Subsequent to completing the data analysis, the researcher noted the following comment in Melina's (1989) book:

"One researcher told me that he's observed that adoptive parents whose sons and daughters are in their thirties are more sincerely supportive of the adoptees' desire to search for their birth parents than those whose children are still adolescents or young adults. It may be that parents whose sons and daughters are grown feel more secure in their relationship than those whose children are on the verge of adulthood." (p.219)

Unfortunately, Melina does not identify the researcher or the study, making it difficult to determine whether this research has been published. The
view cited by Melina is, however, congruent with the evidence in this study. While all of the adoptive parents interviewed expressed security in their parental role, the older group showed a more genuine security in their willingness to be peripherally involved in the reunion. This element of parental security, developed at a later age, seems to have been unrecognized in the literature to date (with the exception of the comment cited by Melina). Further research in this area is clearly warranted.

Adoptive Parents' Expectations:

Sorosky, Baran and Pannor's (1978) study suggested that adoptive parents expect the reunion can be damaging to the adoptee. For the most part, the adoptive parents in this study were unable to identify any expectations of the reunion. They generally expressed what might be termed "protective concern" for the adoptee. For most, this was not a concern that the adoptee would discover unsavory facts in his/her background. The concern expressed by the adoptive parents was that the birth parent would be rejecting or refuse contact. In only one of the families was this concern realized (family #4, where the adoptee's sister, also adopted, was refused contact by her birth mother).

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The trends and ideas arising out of this study carry certain implications for both policy and practice.

With regard to policy, the primary implication has to do with the continuation or refinements to the adoption reunion registry. The group of parents interviewed provide an interesting contrast to those adoptive parents who opposed and continue to oppose the opportunity for adoption reunion. The stories presented in this study vary, but all could be described as desirable
outcomes in reunion, both for the adoptee and the adoptive parent. It is likely that the experiences and reactions to reunion described by this group of adoptive parents are what most adoptees would hope to hear from their parents. The adoptive parents were supportive and understanding and their relationship with the adoptee following the reunion, if not enhanced, was at least unchanged. Because many of these adoptive parents (particularly the older ones) see the reunion as natural, normal, and essentially, a non-issue, their voices have previously been unheard on this topic. There is, then, a group of adoptive parents who welcome the prospect of adoption reunion. It is also interesting to note that in three of the seven families the adoptee, prior to the reunion, was under the impression that the adoptive parent(s) would be threatened by a reunion. As was mentioned earlier, communication patterns in adoptive families are impacted by the secrecy imposed through earlier adoption practice. This makes it difficult for adoptees or adoptive parents to get a clear reading of the other's comfort level with adoption reunion. The fact that 3/7 adoptees in this study initially believed that the adoptive parents were more resistant to adoption reunion than they later proved to be, suggests that adoptive parents in general might be more supportive of reunion than is generally thought.

The author must express caution, however, in discussing the implications of this study for policy on adoption reunion. As has been stated previously, this study sheds no light on the experiences or feelings of adoptive parents opposed to reunion. Further, there is no way to determine the proportion of adoptive parents who support reunion versus those who are opposed to it. What this study can help to understand is the circumstances and conditions which might contribute toward a positive experience of reunion for the adoptive parents. These are an open attitude, a custodial view of parenthood, and an expressed
level of security in the relationship acquired over time.

Policy makers should be encouraged to make more effort to solicit positive adoption reunion stories from adoptive parents. Information gained from adoptive parents whose experience has been positive can aid adoptive parents who are concerned about how a reunion might impact their families. Additionally, policy makers should be encouraged to ensure that counselling is available to adoptive parents when their son/daughters are engaged in a reunion. In this way, perhaps they could be assisted in making the reunion a positive experience, both for themselves and for the adoptee.

Some adoptive parents, particularly in the younger group, noted that a peer support group for adoptive parents would be helpful so that they can exchange ideas and experiences and have a forum to express their feelings about this unique experience. Such a group might shed further light on how adoptive parents can benefit from adoption reunion.

This study, although not intended as such, provided some retrospective insight (through the legends as well as adoptive parents' comments) on the factors which contribute to adoption success. The older child and cross-racial placements seem to have been the most difficult. Additionally, the circumstances at time of placement, for example, readiness or desire on the part of the adoptive parents, set the tone for the development of the adoption. This study reinforced the importance of sensitivity to these issues when working with prospective adoptive parents. Melina's (1986 & 1989) works designed to assist adoptive parents, seem to have been supported by the adoptive parents interviewed for this study. Melina generally espouses the importance of accepting the differences in adoptive parenthood, openness, and understanding the adoptee's experience as key contributors to success in adoption. All of the
adoptive parents appear to have demonstrated these values and benefitted from them. In preparing adoptive parents or working with adoptive families, the promotion of these values would appear to be validated in this study.

With regard to practice, legends in adoptive families might be identified as a useful means of gaining insight into the meaning of adoption in the family and the family rules regarding the discussion of adoption-related issues. Many adoptive families experience difficulties that are complicated by the fact of adoption. As is suggested by Byng-Hall (1988), Freeman (1992) and Stone (1988), the family stories, or legends can provide valuable insight into the family's functioning. This study has recognized that, at least in the families interviewed, the legends held adoption as a central theme. This author believes that the role of adoption-related stories and legends in adoptive families warrants further research. An awareness of their potential for practice is, however, something to be considered.

The findings with regard to openness in adoptive families also carry implications for practice. The open attitude of the adoptive parents in this study enabled both the adoptee and the adoptive parents to benefit from the reunion. When working with adoptive families facing reunion, the findings would indicate that openness on the part of the adoptee as well as the adoptive parents allows them to include one another, understand each other, and recognize the total individuality of the adoptee. As such, it can be a period of growth for all members of the adoptive family.

The notion of custodianship can be somewhat difficult to encourage but is essential not only to adoptive parents but to all parents. The findings of this study illustrate how the non-ownership philosophy of the adoptive parents frees both the adoptee and the adoptive parents in the developmental process.
Adoptive parents may be more resistant to the notion of custodianship if they are insecure in the adoptive relationship. In practice, then, adoptive parents need to be guided to recognize that in trying to have exclusive rights to the adoptee, they are only likely to alienate her/him. In recognizing the adoptee's multiple belonging, however, the adoptive parents are free to recognize and accept the adoptee as part of the family, but one who is a person in his/her own right.

The notion of the developmental stage which became evident in this study has significant implications for practice. Working with younger adoptive families in reunion the focus would be on including and involving the adoptive parents. Older adoptive parents, on the other hand, might be assisted to recognize the benefit to the adoptee of having others with whom s/he shares a connection. Adoptees might be made aware of how the timing of a reunion might elicit different responses from their parents.

Social workers working with adoptive parents who have an awareness of this study might be able to aid prospective adoptive parents to recognize how they can prepare for reunion through the years. Social workers might also help adoptees to work with their parents toward reunion, and help both parties recognize the benefits of reunion for everyone.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

One of the goals identified at the outset, and inherent in exploratory research, is to identify questions for future study. As has been evident in the preceding discussions, several research questions have been identified. They will be listed here in point form with minimal elaboration, since they have all been identified and discussed elsewhere in the paper. They have been listed in order of importance as perceived by the author.
1. Are legends/stories in adoptive families identifiably different, and what can they tell us about the family?

The existence of the legends in these families and their strong adoption theme was unexpected by the author. The researcher found the legends fascinating, both in their content and in the apparent messages they contained. Further exploration into this area would benefit practitioners working with adoptive families, as well as social workers preparing families for adoption. A study examining adoptive family legends and comparing them with legends in non adoptive families might shed some light on how adoption issues are dealt with in these legends. Another interesting study might compare the stories told by adoptees with those told by their parents, comparing the messages contained within the stories.

2. What is the ripple effect of reunion, and in particular how are siblings (birth siblings, adopted siblings and siblings by adoption) impacted?

It was evident in this study that the group most impacted by adoption reunion, not considered as part of the adoption triad, are siblings. The issues for birth siblings and adoptive siblings are most likely different. Adoptive siblings can be further broken into those who are themselves adopted, and those who are born into the family. Again, it is assumed that the issues for these two groups would be different. As part of the ripple effect it would also be interesting to explore just how far reaching the ripple has grown. What is the impact of reunion on the extended family, for instance. Are there cultural issues? How is our society in general impacted by the reunion? The list goes on.

3. What proportion of adoptive parents are threatened by adoption reunion, and what is the difference between them and adoptive parents who are supportive of reunion?

This question might be difficult to explore due to the confidentiality and
anonymity restrictions inherent in adoption. Adoptive parents who subscribe
strongly to secrecy would be difficult to access for research purposes. One way
of accessing both adoptive parents opposed to and those in support of reunion
would be to use a mailout survey through Ministry records. Another means
would be to advertise, stating the importance of the views of those opposed to
reunion. Until a method is found which gives a more accurate reflection of how
the total adoptive parent population feels regarding adoption reunion (before
and after they experience it), it is difficult to determine for adoptees what impact
a reunion might have on their relationship with their parents.

4. **Do adoptive parents' attitudes change over time, and if so, what
impacts this change?**

This study suggests that the developmental stage of the adoptee and
adoptive parents is a significant consideration in the adoptive parents' attitude
toward and experience of reunion. This area warrants further examination.
Factors such as changes in societal attitude, for instance, may also play a part.
Additionally, if adoptive parents' views regarding adoption reunion change, how
is this communicated to the adoptee (if at all)?

5. **Are the messages given by adoptive parents regarding adoption
congruent with those received by the adoptee, and do these
messages effect the outcome of the reunion?**

It seems apparent, particularly from comments made by Baran (1993) that
there is a strong assumption that adoptees receive strong nonverbal messages
from adoptive parents regarding the safety of adoption issues. It is further
assumed that if the adoptee pursues a reunion in isolation, or without the
adoptive parents' knowledge, the reunion will not be as positive. This author
believes that these assumptions have not been adequately tested in the
literature. Through interviewing both adoptees and adoptive parents in the same family and comparing their responses, some insight into this area might be gained.

6. **In what ways might the reunion experiences of adoptees who are adopted later, or of transracial adoptees, be different?**

   The research generally has not separated these groups or identified their possible significance. This is another area where the literature on adoption reunion needs to be developed. Just as samples of older or transracial adoptees have been compared with other adoptees in studies exploring risk factors in adoption, similar comparisons of adoption reunion would be informative.

7. **Is there a difference in outcome between reunions instigated by the adoptee versus those instigated by the birth parent?**

   British Columbia is currently the only Province with provision, through the Active Reunion Registry, for the birth parent to initiate a reunion. The lack of such provisions elsewhere is a carryover of the stigma attached to birth parents (particularly birth mothers) for their perceived promiscuity, etc., and their agreement to surrender their parental rights. The opportunity exists in British Columbia to compare reunions initiated by birth parents with those initiated by adoptees, with a view to encouraging the other provinces to follow British Columbia's lead. In this study, there did not appear to be a difference between the two groups, although it must be noted that the study was not designed to explore such differences.

   While this study has contributed some insight into the adoptive parents' experience of adoption reunion, it has raised more questions than it has answered. As such, it has served its purpose. It is only hoped that more
inquiring minds will continue to explore the fascinating world of adoption, adoption reunion, and the inherent complexities experienced by families formed through adoption.
REFERENCES


Papers from the First Adoption Conference, 1967 - Unpublished


The way we talk—and the words we choose—say a lot about what we think and value. When we use positive adoption language, we say that adoption is a way to build a family just as birth is. Both are important, but one is not more important than the other.

Choose the following, positive adoption language instead of the negative talk that helps perpetuate the myth that adoption is second best. By using positive adoption language, you’ll reflect the true nature of adoption, free of innuendo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive language</th>
<th>Negative language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birthparent</td>
<td>Real parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological parent</td>
<td>Natural parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth child</td>
<td>Own child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child</td>
<td>Adopted child; Own child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born to unmarried parents</td>
<td>Illegitimate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminate parental rights</td>
<td>Give up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make an adoption plan</td>
<td>Give away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To parent</td>
<td>To keep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiting child</td>
<td>Adoptable child; Available child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological father</td>
<td>Begetter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making contact with Parent</td>
<td>Reunion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International adoption</td>
<td>Adoptive parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption triad</td>
<td>Foreign adoption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permission to sign a release</td>
<td>Adoption triangle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search</td>
<td>Disclosure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child placed for adoption</td>
<td>Track down parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court termination</td>
<td>An unwanted child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child with special needs</td>
<td>Child taken away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child from abroad</td>
<td>Handicapped child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was adopted</td>
<td>Foreign child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is adopted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Words not only convey facts, they also evoke feelings. When a TV movie talks about a “custody battle” between “real parents” and “other parents,” society gets the wrong impression that only birthparents are real parents and that adoptive parents aren’t real parents. Members of society may also wrongly conclude that all adoptions are “battles.”

Positive adoption language can stop the spread of misconceptions such as these. By using positive adoption language, we educate others about adoption. We choose emotionally “correct” words over emotionally-laden words. We speak and write in positive adoption language with the hopes of impacting others so that this language will someday become the norm.
### Historical Sketch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1901 | Infants Act enacted  
- Superintendent of Neglected Children appointed  
- incorporation of three Children's Aid Societies: Vancouver (Protestant), Vancouver (Catholic), and Victoria |
| 1920 | Adoption Act enacted. |
| 1931 | Child Welfare Division born; Superintendent of Welfare and Neglected Children appointed |
| 1935 | Adoption Act amended to provide for investigation, supervision and probation. |
| 1947 | Department recommended legislation to control private adoption placements. |
| 1957 | Adoption Act revised; adoptees right to inherit from natural parent removed; "as if born" clause added. |
| 1964 | A serious shortage of adoption homes caused the Department to increase staff and implement a province-wide recruitment strategy. |
| 1967 | The first provincial adoption conference held in cooperation with the Adoption Resource Exchange of North America (ARENA). |
| 1971 | The Annual Report noted a sharp increase in the number of adopting applicants and a steadily diminishing number of children available for adoption. |
| 1975 | The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that registered Indians could be adopted under provincial statutes without losing rights under the Indian Act.  
National Adoption Desk established.  
The British Columbia Royal Commission on Family and Children's Law published its report.  
Completion of the amalgamation of the Vancouver and Victoria Children's Aid Societies with the Ministry. |
The Annual Report noted an increase in requests for post-adoption information.

1978 A task force on adoption was struck in September, 1978 at the request of the Minister.

1979 Adoption Act amended: the Superintendent no longer required to inquire and report into step-parent and relative adoptions unless directed by the court.

1980 Central adoption registry transferred to Victoria.

Adoption Act amended to allow voluntary transfer of guardianship over the child to the Superintendent; "baby-selling" prohibited.

1985 Central adoption registry computerized.

1988 Adoption Reunion Registry established. (Passive)

1989 Adoption Act amended to permit assisted adoptions and disclosure of identifying information in certain circumstances.

Special Needs Adoption Conference held.

Adoption Management Committee formed.

Adoption Field Guide introduced.

1990 Bill 73 - Adoption Amendment Act passed Third Reading.

1991 Appointment of Adoption Program Manager.

Passage of active adoption reunion registry legislation.

Dear 

I am a student in the Master of Social Work Programme at the University of British Columbia. My thesis, which is a partial requirement for the completion of my degree, is aimed at learning about the experiences of adoptive parents whose child(ren) has reunited with his/her birth parents.

I have been employed by the Ministry of Social Services since 1982. Currently I work in New Westminster as an adoptions social worker. I have been interested in adoptions issues since the beginning of my career as a social worker, and I have studied a variety of adoption related topics over the last seven years.

With the recent implementation of the Adoption Reunion Registry, adoptive families have had to address a number of new issues. I have asked the Adoption Reunion Registry to inform adult adoptees, who have reunited with their birth parents, about my research through this letter. I have asked them to mail the letters, rather than provide me with names or addresses, in order to maintain confidentiality. If you feel your adoptive parents might be interested in participating in my study, please pass this information on to them so that they might contact me.

In my study, I plan to explore three main areas through a face-to-face interview with them:

1. What was their relationship like with you through your growing years?
2. What was their initial reaction to your search and/or reuniting with your birth parents?

3. How has their relationship with you been impacted by the reunion?

I am interested in your adoptive parents' perspective because many assumptions are made about adoptive parents' reactions to reunion, but very few researchers have actually talked with adoptive parents about it. I feel the information I receive from adoptive parents will be helpful to other adoptive parents as well as adult adoptees.

I expect the interview to take approximately one hour. If your parents are interested in taking part in the study, or would like more information, they can contact me at the numbers indicated below. They may also wish to contact my faculty advisor, Dr. David Freeman, at 822-2255 or 736-3664. If they have difficulty reaching me, they can leave a message at my work number. I have no means of contacting them, or you, other than through this letter, so if they choose not to contact me, they will not be approached again regarding this study.

I am hoping to have my study completed by April 1993. In order to do so, it is important that anyone wishing to participate in the study contact me as soon as possible. I hope to hear from you or your parents in the near future.

Sincerely,

Annemarie Travers
660-8496 (message/work)
939-2410 (home)
APPENDIX D

Interview Guide

Demographic and baseline information:

Age
Occupation
Number of children: a) adopted b) born to them
Age at which child referred to was placed
Agency or Private Placement?
How long since reunion occurred?

A) Questions Related to the Adoptive Parent/Adoptee Relationship

Introductory Question: There are controversial views expressed about how the adoptee/adoptive parent relationship impacts one's desire to search. In order to help me to understand your experience, please tell me how your relationship with __________ developed through his/her childhood.

Probes

a) Tell me about when __________ first arrived in your home.
b) What was s/he like as a child? (Probe - what was her personality like, interests, hobbies, etc.)
c) How is s/he the same or different from other family members?
d) When did you first discuss adoption with __________ (How did you tell __________ s/he was adopted?)
e) What did you know about __________'s background?
f) What did you tell __________ about his/her background?
g) How did this change over the years?
h) What is your favourite memory of __________'s childhood?
i) What difficulties have you experienced with __________? (adoption issues? adolescence?)

B) Questions relation to the adoptive parents' initial reaction to the research/reunion?

Introductory Question: There is, at this point, very little information available about how the search and/or reunion impacts adoptive parents and other family members. Your story of how the reunion took place may vary from your son/daughter's. I am interested in hearing what your experience was like, and what your thoughts and feelings were.
Probes

a) How did you first hear about _________'s search/reunion?
b) What thoughts/feelings did you experience at that time?
c) Did your views/reaction change in the first week - how after you heard about it?
d) What did you think would happen when _____________ met his/her birth parents? What did happen?

C. Questions relating to the relationship between the adoptee and adoptive parents following the reunion

Introductory Question: Now that _________ has had contact with his/her birth parents, I wonder about any changes that might have occurred in your relationship.

Probes

a) How often does your son/daughter have contact with his/her birth parents now?
b) How do you feel about their relationship?
c) Do you feel the reunion has positively or negatively affected _________?
d) Have you had any contact with _________'s birth parents? If not, would you wish to? What kind of contact?
e) Has the reunion made a difference in your relationship with _________? How so?
f) If you were to talk to other adoptive parents whose child was planning to reunite with his/her birth parents, what advice would you give?
g) In hindsight, would you have done anything differently in raising _________? Has the reunion made a difference in this regard?
Certificate of Approval

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR</th>
<th>DEPARTMENT</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freeman, D.</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>B93-0030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT

UBC Campus

CO-INVESTIGATORS:

Travers, A., Social Work

SPONSORING AGENCIES

TITLE:

The impact of adoption reunion on adoptive parents: an exploratory study

APPROVAL DATE

FEB 12 1993

TERM (YEARS)

3

CERTIFICATION:

The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the Committee and the experimental procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Dr. R. Corteen or Dr. R. D. Spratley

Dr. I. Franks, Associate Chairs

Director, Research Services

This Certificate of Approval is valid for three years provided there is no change in the experimental procedures.
Adoption Reunion and the Experience of the Adoptive Parents:
An Exploratory Study

Types/Conditions/Circumstances
- preparation
- fate
- circumstance
- emotion
- uneventful childhood
- differences
- telling - fact of life
- mutual acceptance
- adoption acceptance
- following the script
- coincidence
- protectiveness
- excitement
- disappointment
- understanding
- mingling
- extended family
- impact on adopted sibling
- impact on birth siblings
- fact finding
- measuring up
- bucking the system
- filling the gap
- completed circle
- giving/receiving bouquets
- recognizing individuality
- adoptee control
- honoring birthparent
- stepping back
- responding to cues
- claiming
- growth
- validation
- birthparent as surrogate
- trust
- relationship development

Properties
- grand entrance
- adoption related memories
- reoccurring themes
- empathy
- inclusion
- ripple effect
- reality testing
- permission
- multiple belonging
- respect
- letting go
- hidden benefits
- security

Categories
- legends
- openness
- non-ownership
- Parental Philosophy

Core Categories
- developmental stage
- hidden benefits
- non-ownership
APPENDIX G

Sample Transcript

AT What I'd like you to do is to begin by telling me about when A. arrived.

AM It was great. It was exciting. Just before, she was born in September of '71 and just, of course the abortions had been legalized just a few months before that so there was a real drop in the number of children that were available for adoptions. And we went to the, on the Thursday night before we got her we went to a meeting and originally we said we'd like a boy first, only because we thought it would be kind of nice to have a boy as the oldest and it was, it would be nice, it was one of this druther things and then we went to the meeting and they told us how short they were of children, how few babies and if anybody could possibly have their own children it would, you know, just sort of let them know, that it would be kind of nice if they took their name off the list and,

AF Don't be picky.

AM Yes, don't be picky, and as we left

AF 'Cause, how long had we waited at that time?

AM About 6 months, and we had the foster baby, about 6 months before that.

AF Yeah, 6 months, now it seems ridiculous.

AM And now of course this is ridiculous, I mean people look at us and say "so what", but then it was a long time and so they, as we were leaving we said to the social worker, "well, it really didn't matter whether we had a boy or a girl first, you know as long as it's a reasonably healthy baby, that was all", and she said, "I don't think it's going to be really long before you get a baby. And then, Sunday night when, that was on Thursday, and on the Sunday night before we, A.F. was on holidays, before he went to bed, I said "wouldn't it be neat if we got a phone call in the morning to say they had a baby for us". And sure enough, Monday morning I was just waking up and the phone rang, and I answered the phone and it was a social worker to say they had our baby for us. Oh, we were so excited (laughs). And we picked her up on the Tuesday.
AF  It's good you have a memory like that.

AM  I remember the days of the week. I do, I really, these things I guess because, I don't know, I just do. And, oh, I was just, we were so excited and A.F.'s dad was working in construction at Burnaby Hospital at that time, that's where A. was born and he was the first one in the family to see her besides us, so that was kind of exciting. A.F. trotted across the construction sight to get to the new grampa. It was neat. And when we picked her up the nurses in the hospital said that she was just the best baby and they really enjoyed having her there. She was the baby they used for bath demonstration. They wouldn't even let me dress her.

AT  How old was she when she

AM  Ten days, yeah we got her new born. They wouldn't even let me dress her, they said, "no that's all right, we'll dress her", because she was so much fun. Then we came home. We stopped in and did a bit of shopping on the way home, had to show the people in the store the new baby (laughs). That was when Eatons was still in New Westminster, downtown.

AF  I don't remember that.

AM  I do, I remember that specifically.

AF  I honestly don't, you know.

AM  Looking for announcement cards. Came home.

AT  What were her growing years like?

AM  Oh, fine

AF  Fine, she was a good,

AM  Good yah

AF  She never really caused us any problems at all, even like right from a baby,

AM  She was a dream of a baby,

AF  Yep, you didn't even know she was in the house, she was a good kid.
AM Yah, she really was.

AF Yah, no problems

AM I remember the first morning she slept through (laughs) until 9:30 in the morning. I woke up and I was sure she'd had SIDS or something. I thought "she's dead".

AT How old was she then?

AM She was only oh, five/six weeks old, and I knew babies don't normally sleep through that well. Of course I was lying there, my heart's in my mouth, because she was so.

AF She can still sleep like that.

AM Oh, yah, but she was, she was a very easy baby.

AF And she was really no problem growing up.

AM No

AT Can you think of a favourite story of her childhood for me.

AM When she was, yeah, when we got her

AT In her childhood.

AM When we got her? We had a nice little bedtime story that told her about when we got her.

AF Yah, she always liked to hear that.

AM Yup

AT When did you first tell her that she was adopted?

AM Well, always, it was never a secret. That story I probably started to tell her when she was about a year old, or maybe even before that, I don't know, it was always there.

AT Kind of like a bedtime story?

AM Yah, and there hasn't been a problem as far as her being adopted at all. I
don't think that the kids have ever, either one of them, have ever felt like, I've talked to A.B. about it and he said no, he's never, but she would tell anybody.

AF    She never hide it.

AM    I remember when E (teacher) phoned me that time, just after the kids changed schools, and she knew that A. was waiting for A.B. at school and his teacher said to A., she said, "you two don't look very much alike", because some kids, of course, they look so much alike. A. said, "oh no, that's because we're adopted", and just came home, never thought... The phone rang a little while later and it was this teacher, very concerned that she'd upset A., and I said, "well why?". So she told me what had happened and I said' "oh no, it's just that's the way things are at our house". So it's never been a problem.

AT    What about when she was a teenager? Did she go through any extra struggles then?

AM    No

AF    No

AM    No, just the usual obnoxious teenage (laughs), actually, no, we've never had a problem, with hanging around, or getting in with the wrong crowds or anything.

AF    No, no. We've been fortunate to have both of them like that. She's always had good friends, and you know, she's never been a problem.

AT    When I talked about earlier, about a story from her childhood, I meant quite often we tell stories about our kids at their wedding about silly cute little things they did, and that kind of thing. Do you have any of those kind of stories?

AM    Oh, I see, when she was..., oh dear. I know she snuck upstairs. I don't know, what are some of the things we like to tell about her? I don't know... she was just always so good. I think probably the one with E (teacher), that was probably, that was very interesting because of the teacher's reaction, and she was very concerned that A. was upset, but I don't know. Can you think of any others, stories we like to tell on A., things she is done?

AF    No, but I bet you two hours from now I can probably...

AM    Yah, probably think of something.

AT    That's right.
AF  She had a normal childhood, you know. She had ups and downs like everybody else, you know.

AM  Yah, I can't think of anything in particular.

AT  Do you remember the first conversation that you had about her wishing to find her birth parents?

AM  Yah, that was when she was pregnant (emotion laden). Her daughter she relinquished, is now 26 months. And it was when she was pregnant when the subject first came up.

AF  I disagree. We talked about it. We discussed it before. We discussed that over the years, you know about that, and we've always told her that if she wanted to, that we wouldn't stand in her way at all, you know. I think that you're right that that's why it really became

AM  I think that's when it became an issue

AF  Issue, but she's mentioned it over the years, you know, about that, and we always said that we'd never stand in her way, you know, the same with A.B.

AT  But it really came to the fore for her when she was pregnant?

AM  That's right.

AT  And what was your response then?

AM  What, that she wanted to search for her parents, her birth parents?

AT  Yes

AM  That was fine with us, we didn't, we never had a problem with it.

AF  We could always see her point

AM  Yah

AF  I've always tried to put myself in her shoes and I think I would be the same, you know, I don't think I'd want her to go through life wondering, if she had the chance that she could find them, at least give it an effort and if she didn't at least say she tried. I've always encouraged her to do that.
AT That would have been a very stressful time for her. Did she, did she pursue it at that time, or did she wait until after she had the baby?

AM No, it was after she'd had the baby and relinquished her baby. She really didn't, the baby was about three or four months old when A. put her name on the passive registry and then that December or January the active registry came into being and she was on the active registry. She was really excited about that, that she could get on the active registry and something could be done about it, so,

AT So, then what happened?

AM She was on the active registry and six months, just six months and she was reunited.

AT Was she living at home, or

AM Yah

AT So, were you around when the call came from the registry?

AM Was either one of us home? I'm not sure.

AF No.

AM I think we were both at work

AF We certainly soon found out.... she was really excited. I remember that.

AM Well, we were really excited for her too, because I know, like A.F. said, putting yourself in her shoes I know it used to bother me when she was growing up and going to the doctor and they'd say well is there any history of this, and I'd say well, I don't know. And that always bothered me, that I couldn't say, yes, but I don't know, but I can find out, because I thought what if there is something important here? So, it never really, and I know myself that if I was adopted I would be dying of curiosity. I never considered it as a threat to us. I always considered it a natural curiosity, because I know what it means to have cousins and you know, and you look at a family portrait like our family and there is a certain family trait, you can see everybody looks like everybody else to some degree and when children are adopted they don't have anybody that looks like them.

AT What did you have for her in terms of a background history when she was placed or later?
The ages of her parents and how many brothers and sisters there were and just basic physical description and just one short page.

That's about all it was wasn't it?

I think I have it downstairs actually. Maybe A.'s got it upstairs in her room, just a moment and I'll see. I can't remember.

We got far more for her than we got with A.B. With A.B. we got absolutely nothing. Just two sentences, that's about it. So we were really in the dark.

Was there a reason for that?

I don't know. And of course, at the time we were just happy to get the child, we never really, you don't really think about these things at the time, you know, actually I often thought that now that maybe we should have pressed for more information you know at the time. I would imagine now they probably give more.

Yes, you can get it.

We had very little.

You can get it very easily just by writing.

With A.B. nothing really. With A. we're talking about a page. Their ages and what their occupations were and what their likes and this type of thing.

And a brief statement about why she was surrendered for adoption?

Yes, that was just because they were too young, that they hoped to get married, and they actually did too, they did actually get married after.

How old is A.B.?

He's 18.

How has this reunion impacted him?

I don't know. A.B.'s very quiet. A.B. never says too much. In fact to get anything out of him you almost have to sit on top of him and drag it out. He doesn't say an awful lot, very quiet type person. Never says too much.
AT That's quite a pile you have here.

AM Yah, well this is because we're really involved. We've got a three way thing on this.

AT A.B., was, he's 18 which makes him born in

AM '74, December, '74

AT OK, I just wondered because in 1975 the policy came out where we had to provide significant background information so that was the year after.

AM Yes, that's A.'s

AT That's pretty brief.

AF And that's really good.

AM This is a lot more than we got on A.B.

AT Yah, that's what

AM On A.B. the birth mother knew very little about the birth father.

AT Where was A.B. placed from?

AM Port Alberni.

AT I think that's another significant factor there.

AM I have really poor vibes with that social worker I'm afraid.

AT It's not only that but in small towns they were working with adoptions very much off the side of their desk, you know, it didn't happen very often, they weren't really aware of adoption issues or needs for this kind of thing and I think that the service that people got from elsewhere in the province was a little different than what they got down here.

AF Well, we've, I guess he will be next.

AT Has he talked about

AF As much as he will.
AM As much as he'll talk about anything.

AF I was just saying how hard it is to get anything out of him.

AM Although it's interesting because if you ask him he'll say, "oh I don't care", I don't know. But I mentioned to him I was over visiting my birth son last week and had dinner with them and I said to him, you know I mentioned that he was asking how A.B. was doing and I said well I mentioned that it would be a good idea to take A.B. to Port Alberni so he can have a look at the place where he was born because I showed him a picture once of the hospital where he was born, remember when I was over a couple of years ago, and the look on his face, and I thought I'm glad I did it because he was really interested. And as usual, he says very little, but he looked sort of happy you know, so I thought

AT awestruck?

AM Yah, in a way, so I thought well that's fine, so I mentioned to C (adoptive mother's birthson), he said what I could do is take A.B. over and he could pick us up at the ferry on the other side and then drive us up to Port Alberni and I mentioned that to A.B. and he thought that was a really good idea.

AF But with A.B. we would probably have to do it rather than him.

AM He would never do it and would suffer for it for years. He would never get around to it.

AF Of course, A. is more do things you know.

AM She's the one that really got me moving too.

AF A.'s the more go getter type.

AT So, did your reunion occur after her's?

AM Before, 6 weeks before. C (adoptive mother's birthson) and I met on the first of May and A. and B.M. met in the middle of June.

AF It was at the point where I wasn't sure who was meeting who.

AM (laughter) Poor A.F. the look on his face when I came down. I said to you, actually the night before A. got the call, I said I hope she doesn't get a call for a few months yet, because, I said, the emotion that's going around here right now is, it's just horrendous, and then of course she got the, the two of us, it's sort
of overwhelming and I said to him at the time I'm glad A., A.B. won't come to it for a bit yet. I couldn't stand it all at once.

AT So, to focus back on A., and we'll get to the other few stories later, but so that first week when she got the call, what was your gut reaction at that time, you said you were excited, any other response?

AM Oh, I was really pleased for her. I can honestly say that I was really pleased for her. I never felt that it was any threat to us or anything which I know that a lot of adoptive parents do.

AF I think I felt a little bit of concern in the back there, not for myself but for A. more than anything, that I wanted to make sure that it came out OK you know, you just have that little bit of doubt, you know.

AT Did you get, when they made the call did they say anything about how her birth parents are or that kind of thing in order to address that kind of anxiety?

AF Well, A. did talk to

AM Well, actually

AF or somebody talked to

AM She got her mother's birth certifi, mother's name

AF Yah

AM Yah, and they said that her mother had to go and sign the papers, the you know release forms

AT The consent

AM So anyway, , but she was really pleased, so they, so A. went through the phone book and phoned her before she signed the papers, so which was fine, I can understand that because I know how excited I was and, she, that's when she found out that her birth parents had been married and divorced and she had a full brother and sister

AF That's a story itself, that is.

AM Her birth father is remarried and he's got another son, so, and then there's cousins, dozens and dozens of cousins and aunts and uncles because her father's from a very large family, there's nine kids, nine kids in the family I
think

AF  She's come out with these different names, I can't keep up with them all

AM  Yah, and then, and the family all keep in touch with one another and then there's all these spouses and all these ex-spouses and the ex-spouses still seem to be part of the family and all these cousins and step bro... oh, it's huge.

AF  The mother and father, although they are divorced, they seem to see each other, you know,

AM  Yah

AF  I don't know, it just seems, it seems a funny situation, I can't figure it out but then,

AM  A very large extended family.

AF  Yah

AT  With very few boundaries.

AM  There seems to be, that's right

AF  Of course, found out she has a sister of course.

AM  Oh well, that has been the best for A.

AF  She's about three years younger? Four years younger?

AM  Four years younger, I think, yah she's a year younger than A.B., and it's just been great for A. having a sister, I think every girl wants a sister you know, and it's, and B.S. is just a clone of A.

AF  Yep

AM  It's gone extremely well with her birth father. A.'s just another one of the kids around the house and when she goes over there, she stays over there quite often

AF  She stays over there quite often and you know, gets along, the mother's a different story.

AT  Tell me about her mother.
AM I think she's got a whole set of problems herself. I don't know what her problem is but apparently she seems to be the clinging type doesn't she,

AF I think she's insecure.

AM Extremely insecure, she's very overweight, she, I know she's had A. very upset a few times, she tells, she'll phone up sort of like on a Saturday morning, you know we're talking a 21 year old girl here, Saturday morning to say oh well it's so and so's birthday this afternoon and I'll see you there. A. knew nothing about it. And so A. says no, then B.M. gets upset and

AF Says she's ignoring her and all

AM That she's ignoring her so, of course, A., when you start that kind of thing you push away even farther and you don't want and I think it's too bad because B.M. could have a nice relationship with A. but she's, I'm sorry for A., I'm sad for A. in that situation because it could be a nice relationship, but it's because of B.M. it just can't be. She just doesn't seem to be able to let go. Even B.S., A.'s sister, lives with her father now and she doesn't see her mother any more than she really has to because I think because B.M. seems to try and hang on too tight and of course the tighter you hold the harder,

AF She was trying to tell A. how to dress and everything, well, you don't, I mean A.'s not a 10 year old you know I mean at 21

AM She objects to me doing that so, she's certainly going to object to B.M. doing that, and it's just too bad. I feel badly for B.M. I think B.M. could use a lot of, probably she needs a lot of help, counselling of some sort, but, and you know I'm sad for A. that

AF But still, the relationship with her father and that family is

AF more than made up for that you know

AT and with the sister.

AM&AF Yah

AM Oh yah, that's the, that has been a real bonus for A., that's been great, and it was just not long after she was reunited, when is that about a month later, that's Whipped Cream on Water Wars, this is a family BBQ thing that the family have every year, and everybody comes, all the, all the, everybody that's possibly involved with the family. Well, A. was there, A. and A.B. and I but A.F. was
working and I was looking at her in the middle of the group and I thought "she just fits" she was the missing piece and the link is there now and it just, she's just there, so I'm really pleased for her

AM in that respect, I think it's great. It makes us feel good that that she's felt good you know.

AT Can you go back to that to that first week of the reunion and sort of walk me through. When the first phone call came and A.'s reactions, and your reactions and then step by step until she actually met her, what exactly happened.

AF Well, I can recall, of course I've got a memory like a sieve anyway, but I mean I just remember how happy A. was, I mean she was like ten feet off the ground,

AM Oh she was,

AF And I just remember feeling happy for her, I never thought about anything else, I just remember, I was hoping it would all work out, that's really you know, I don't, that was my, thinking back on it now I just remember A. was being so happy.

AM Yah

AF And then you know just sort of hoping that it works out, you know, and having that little bit of I guess in the back of my mind,

AM A little concern that you hope that things were OK, a little concern that you hope that things were OK, of the unknown of course, we were a little concerned about the unknown, and I think that's the way I felt, I just, I was, she got that phone call and she was so excited and just I was just really really pleased for her.

AT So who did she actually meet first and how did that come about?

AM Her mother, her birth mother first.

AT And where and how?

AF She met at some, well for lunch or something like that. They just, she met at some shopping centre I believe wasn't it?

AF Oh, Central Park, that's right.
Central Park. Oh that was funny because she drove over to Central Park to meet B.M. and gets there and there was some meet on or something and to try and find a place to park, and I can just imagine what's going through her mind, because I had said to her do you want me to go with you. No, I want to do this myself. I thought fine, but I said but phone me as soon as you can because we want to make sure you're all right you know, because you don't know. So, anyway, she said she got there and she had to walk about a mile to get into the Park because she couldn't get in, there was no parking, and this seemed to go actually it went very well just at the very beginning.

I think the first few meetings she had went fine.

Yah, it was fine, but then it, when B.M. started to get possessive and things it went down hill, which was too bad, you know, I think that's a shame.

So how long had it been between the first phone call and when she actually met B.M.?

Two days?

Yah

I think, it was just a couple of days I think.

And then she met B.M. and when did she meet B.S.?

Oh, just a few days later.

Yah, it was, It went pretty quick.

Within about a week.

Her father as well?

Yah,

Yah, I can remember it after the first meeting when she came home and she said that she had, like she was telling us about the sisters and brothers, well she pretty well had the whole family history right off the bat there.

Yah, yah, B.M. had everything for her.

And her parents were divorced and now her birth father was married to
somebody else, but they're all still good friends and I thought oh, I started to think here yah, you know I'm sort of out of it because I have, I don't know I guess we live such a normal life and you get into something like this that seems kind of strange. To each his own I guess, I'm not trying to tell anybody else how to live their life, it's up to them, but it just seems to me. (laughs)

AM yah, yah, all these spouses and ex-spouses, cause there's no, I've got a couple of first cousins, one first cousin that's divorced, and that's the only one, I mean the next generation's a different story but up until our generation there really hasn't been anybody so I, I mean I read about it you know, but if you don't actually see it.

AF The whole thing, it went quickly, it was all you know, like I say the first meeting she had the whole family history and that was just a day or two later and she met everybody else.

AT And then when did you get to meet anybody?

AM It was pretty quick too. That was about two or three weeks.

AF Two or three weeks later.

AM Yah

AT And who instigated that meeting?

AF A.

AM A. did, yah, she wanted that to happen quickly.

AF She was staying at, my mom and dad were away on a trip and she was staying over at their house and cause I said well can have a, she wanted to have a BBQ and I said look we can have it this house and she said let's do it over at granny and grampa's house. I thought it was kind of strange

AM Well, it's kind of neutral territory.

AF I guess so, yah whatever you want

AM Then they're not they're not coming onto our turf.

AT I guess the other thing was that she was kind of in charge there.

AF Yah I guess.
AM    Yah that's right.

AF    So here I had to pack up the BBQ and everything else and I thought yah, this is kind of ridiculous, I mean we have all this room here, you know, but I didn't argue with her, I said no this is you know, what ever, I just thought it was strange, I wasn't going to argue with her. She wanted to do her own thing. So I thought I should let her, I don't want to spoil her her day...

AT    So you had a family BBQ with yourselves and your son I assume?

AM    Yah

AT    And her Mom

AM    Was B.M.

AF    Oh yah, she was there.

AM    She was there. I'm trying to remember. Yah, and K (birthfather's wife)

AF    And all the kids

AM    And B.B. and B.S. and B.B., yah, and then some of A.'s friends came too.

AF    Yah

AM    I mean it was just a

AF    That's right, some of A.'s friends were there too.

AT    So it went really well.

AF    The thing that struck me about those two is her birth parents, I don't know how they ever, whether they changed a lot over the years I don't know but they're about as different as you know, they wouldn't be the type you'd think would ever, cause he's so outgoing. I mean, I don't think anything phases on him at all.

AM    Well, he's like you. Just really easy going.

AF    You know I don't think anything would phase on that guy at all.

AT    That's kind of nice for her that both her fathers are similar.
AM Yah

AT Is it.

AM Yah

AT Has she expressed that or

AM I don't know if she's ever actually, I don't know if she's ever really thought about it, but yah, A.F. and B.F. are in that respect

AF She thought that he would be, we might be in that way, but I would say we're not in other ways, like he would be far more outgoing than I would.

AM Oh yah, yah.

AF I would never consider myself an outgoing type person. I'm more of a private, I like my own space type of thing, whereas he I think just likes people around him all the time and, you know, which I'm not that fussy of, I mean I you know, I'd just as soon be by myself.

AT So you wouldn't fit into that very large extended family.

AF No, no I don't think so. No, not really.

AT So what kind of things has A. said to you since the reunion about how it has impacted her life?

AF Oh, she just says that she's now, that you know, that she feels you know more complete you know and everything you know, and she just you know she likes the other like, I think the biggest thing is her sister, someone she talks about most of all. You know, how how nice it is that you know how she feels that she's got a you know a sister. Because they do things you know, they go out and do things and you know, and now A.'s got a boy friend so that's sort of, although I shouldn't say that because he only lives close by there so he's, she met this guy from this family, you know, you have to see this group to, it's just unreal, you know. She met this guy through the family here so, you know, it's quite a group all right. You know, she just feels she's been much happier. The only thing that's a drawback is her birth mother. They were doing fine for the first while.

AT And has she expressed any feelings about about that with her birth mother, that she wishes that
AF  Yah. She wished that you know, but A. said that she's just not going to take it from her. She's given her every chance. In fact, a couple of weeks ago she phoned her up and you know to try to make up, I guess they've had a fight somewhere along the line, or a couple of them and she said that she just won't change her ways and A. says I'm not doing that that's, you know, until she comes around, that's basically it, you know . I just say, there's not much I can do I mean A.'s 21 years old, I mean that's, you know, we've in fact A.M. did encourage A. to phone her and try and make, which A. did but it didn't work out, so you know.

AT  So have they pretty much cut out contact except

AF  Well, it's just casual. I think you'd call it just a casual contact they have and I don't think B.M.

AM  A. & B.M. ya, ya (A.M. brings in pictures) That's A. This is A. here. There's B.S. and B.B., now those are the three and this is the half brother.

AT  OK, so B.B. lives with his dad too?

AM  B.B. lives with his mom.

AT  With his mom?

AF  Yah.

AT  And B.B. lives

AM  B.B. lives with his dad and mom, with B.F. and K (birthfather's wife).

AT  Right.

AM  And B.B. lives with B.M. and B.S. is with B.F. and K (birthfather's wife). These girls look so much alike.

AT  Who did this picture? Like who initiated

AM  A. did, she wanted the four of them. She wanted the four of them taken together. That was the Christmas present they gave B.F. and K (birthfather's wife) and to B.M. . They had this picture taken which I thought was a very nice thing.

AT  When did the reunion occur.
AM  Last June.

AT  So there's still a lot going on for them. What, what, how has it impacted your relationship with A..

AF  I don't think it

AM  I don't know. We've just been really pleased for her that she's

AF  I don't think it's

AM  Yah

AF  I don't think it is changed much I, you know, I can't think of anything

AM  No, I can honestly say that I've never felt threatened.

AF  I never felt that either, right from the start, I felt that way from the start.

AM  I've been annoyed a few times with B.M. because it's made A. unhappy sometimes.

AF  I don't think it's changed anything at all. A.'s always been a good kid, you know, she's always, like she was out, like this is a good example, she went out on Saturday afternoon. She said I won't be home for dinner dad, I'm going out with J (adoptive's boyfriend), that's her boyfriend. Where are you going? I'm not sure yet, you know. OK, so about 9:00 at night she phones says we're going to a show and then they're going to a bit of a party, she'll be home about 2:00. I do have her rules here still. Although she's 21 she's living here, she still has, I still want a time when she comes home.

AM  Yah, I mean we're not, we don't set her,

AF  No but there are still

AM  Say midnight you have to be home, you're only aloud once a week, you know, but we just at least like to have idea where she is because if anything ever happened and then at least we you know we have some idea of where she's been.

AF  She knows the rules and she's good about it you know. But I have to laugh at this boy friend here. She was trying to, because I work shift work and A.M. works different hours and she was trying to, she wanted to bring this guy
over and she was trying to fit in

AM What was that Thursday two weeks ago

AF Yah right

AM The Thursday night, she said she was bringing him over to dinner, well I guess she'd mentioned it to me and I'd kind of forgotten and I was working that night, and you were working

AF Yah, she phoned me up, I got a phone in my car at work, so she phones me up

AM What time are you coming home for dinner?

AF And I told A.B. I wasn't coming home for dinner tonight and I already figured my work be out and I really couldn't fit it in, because normally I come home for dinner, but because A.M. was working or something, A. said she wasn't going to be home so I thought I won't bother, so I said I don't think I can make it tonight, you know, so she said, because I got J (adoptee's boyfriend) here I wish I'd known before but, you know, so we did it a couple, we did it a week or so,

AM Last Sunday

AF Last Sunday

AT A week ago?

AM Yes, she brought him over, they came over here about noon, she was giving him a cooking lesson. And I think may, I don't think it's really changed things around here.

AF Oh, I don't think it's changed anything at all really you know.

AM No, as far as our feelings or anything are concerned you know. I can honestly say that I have never once felt threatened, which I know that some adoptive parents do. Maybe because I can see the other side of the coin. I don't know, it's hard to say, I have been annoyed a couple of times because of, you know, because of things that have happened with B.M. and that, but

AT Does it bring out your protective urges?

AM It does, yah, yah. It's not so much now, , I guess it's part of the maturing process, but I think when at first you know you do feel quite protective because
you don't want your kids to be hurt. Yah but I

AF Apart from that I mean A.'s adjusted that now, I know she was upset about it there for a while but I think she's got over that now and she just realizes that A. has to get on with things and the other side, like her father's side and that, is, the rest of the family she enjoys so I think she's just letting things go as they go I think.

AT If you were going to give some helpful hints to adoptive parents whose son or daughter is looking at a reunion, what would you say?

AM I would say that we all need our roots and we just need to know where we come from, who we look like.

AF I would say give them all the help you can.

AM And give them all the support and help you can. They're not doing this as a threat to you because they're looking for other parents. They just need to know where they came from, as I think everybody does. We all need to know our roots and I, that's the only thing I can say is don't, just look at it as an extension of the child because obviously that child, whether we like to admit it or not, is not the regular situation, and yet the rest of most people growing up know exactly where they came from, there's somebody else they look like. But those kids they don't

AT What about p.... One thing that's come across to me in some of my interviews is it's not who they look like but who they are like in terms of personality.

AM That's right

AT Did A. find that experience?

AM Oh yes, she and B.S.

AF Yah, her and B.S. She's very much like her father too. Very much, very outgoing, right? A.'s very outgoing and her father's that way too.

AM That's right.

AT Did she find in her growing up years that she was, like was she very different from you in personality as she grew up or is she, or are you recognizing how she's similar now that she's has the reunion.
AF I wouldn't say, I mean A.'s always been outgoing, that's, of course her mother is outgoing anyway, so, I mean I wouldn't class myself as an outgoing person but then that you know, and I don't think A. meeting her birth parents has changed her outlook or at all.

AM I don't think it has, she seems maybe a little more secure or settled or something but that could be the part of maturing process too, you know this 20, 21, 22. It could be a combination of both.

AF If you would ask me has A. changed at all

AM No

AF I don't think she's changed. I wouldn't say she has.

AT Did the fact that you had your reunion just before her's, did that have any kind of an impact on hers in terms of you had an idea of what kind of emotional experience it would be?

AM It probably would have been easier for us I think in that.

AF She was very interested in your reunion.

AM She was, she was fascinated.

AT I'm not surprised.

AF She was very, A. was right in there.

AM Yah. I don't know. It probably did help, and I'm really fortunate in that my reunion has just been, if you sat down and wrote down the ideal reunion, I think that that's the way ours has gone. There hasn't, I don't think that C (adoptive mother's birthson) and I had any rough spots, so

AT You've met C (adoptive mother's birthson)'s adoptive parents?

AM Yes I have. I met them about 6 week after we were reunited. And that went very well. The first thing C (adoptive mother's birthson)'s father said to me was, he said now I can see who he looks like. And I think that's that's that's the thing that that's in the forefront of anything else is who you look like. That's first, the first reaction and I don't know, it's gone very well. I know that C (adoptive mother's birthson)'s Mom, I know she's had a few kind of rough spots and so I phoned her and she and I had quite a talk one night on the phone about that and I said I understood that but I said, please, I said, don't feel that I'm there as a
threat because that's the last thing, if I had ever thought I would be a threat I never would have started because that's not fair, because she's been the one there for all of them, all the things when he's growing up and I, maybe that's why, because I've talked to A.F. about this and I think that that's why we never felt threatened as parents with reunions because

AT Because of your experience

AM Maybe because, yah, because I can see the other side of the coin. Yah, but I think I (silence) don't know I think it probably did ease it for A. for some degree, and probably the fact, that fact, eased it for us in a way because we know you know we can see both sides of it.

AT So, do you have ongoing contact with C (adoptive mother's birthson) now?

AM Yah, oh yah, yah, yah and he seems to fit in fine around here you know. Everybody, A.B. was the one that I was more concerned about than anybody.

AT With your reunion with C (adoptive mother's birthson)?

AM With my reunion with C (adoptive mother's birthson). And actually I didn't tell A.B. about C (adoptive mother's birthson). He didn't know. I told... when A. was pregnant she and I were having an argument one day and and I said, she said I don't know why your so upset anyway. I said sit down, I have something to tell you, so I told her (interruption). Oh I'm sorry now where was I.

AT You were talking about when you told A. about

AM Oh yah, told A. about C (adoptive mother's birthson), yah, and the look on her face, she goes (mimics a shocked expression). So then she wanted to know more you know, but that's when I went through my grieving process, 25 years later so it's no wonder I was so upset, to bury it all those years and then it came to the forefront. But A.F. said he knew long before I did that I would search.

AT Why A.F.?

AF I dunno

AM Just knew me I guess.

AF I guess so, you know. I figure A.M.'s always nosy anyway, so, you know.

AT Did you think she was sort of carrying it in herself and would need to
resolve that one day?

AF    Yah, yah, yah.

AT    Was it something that you ever talked about between the two of you over the years?

AF    Oh ya, we've discussed it. We never made it a big

AM    No, I mean I don't know that I had ever said that I would, actually I don't think I ever actually verbalized until after, maybe it was even after A. had relinquished.

AF    No, that's ridiculous, you talked about it off and on.

AM    Had I? Probably I just, you bury so many things

AF    Yah

AM    But I know I would mention him. Yah, maybe I did just, you know, I guess there are a lot of things I had blanked out, well I know there was lots I blanked out, but I'm really glad that I did. I feel so much more complete I feel more settled and even if I think our reunion hadn't been an ongoing thing if I had just met him the once and talked to him at least I did know he was all right and that was the main thing, but I got this bonus that we have an ongoing relationship so

AT    One thing that I'm wondering about when we were at the conference you spoke very strongly, I was in a workshop where you were and you were speaking very strongly about the importance of the adoptive parents and the birth parents meeting and you didn't mention that when we talked just now and I just

AM    I think it is important because if, for nothing else, for one thing as an adoptive parent to say thank you for entrusting us with the care of the child that you gave life to and on the other hand to be able to say thank you for well, sort of thank you on the other hand because we were given the chance to be parents which we wouldn't have been able to otherwise, so I think even if you meet the once to say thank you I think that that is important and I think it helps on both sides because then the adoptive parents can actually see that this other person is not an ogre and it's the same on the other hand that as adoptive parents we can meet the, you know, meet the birth mother and hopefully the father as well and see that they aren't monsters either.

AT    Deal in reality.
Yah, and it's easier to deal with something that you face than something in your imagination. You can imagine all kinds of weird and wonderful or horrible and awful things, you know, so I think it is important to meet the, for them to meet the once anyway.

What if one party or the other doesn't want to meet.

Well, then you have to deal with that, but I think that as long as people are willing to, to meet, I think it makes it better in the long run.

I think it completes the circle.

Yah, I think it completes the circle. It's all part and parcel of the adoptee. You just want to know as much as possible about your children anyway, so.

So, you actually met C (adoptive mother's birthson)'s adoptive parents?

Yes.

Who initiated that meeting?

I don't know. (great sigh)

Probably C (adoptive mother's birthson) if

Yah, probably. I think it was on all three sides because I had said to C (adoptive mother's birthson), I had said, I would like to meet your adopted parents and he said he thought it would be a good idea and his mom and dad said they'd like to meet me so it was just a mutual admiration society I guess (laughs) you could say, that we should meet. And that was nice. I met them downtown. We went to Church and went for brunch afterwards. It was nice.

I got a kick out of that, going to Church

It's not something you normally do, is that what you're suggesting?

No, I kind of

We used to do at one time

Yah, we used to and I kind of drifted away

Like everything else I guess
AM  Yah, but C (adoptive mother's birthson) is very religious, he's very religious and his mom is too. He's extremely active in the, in church as is his mother. I don't know about T. I don't think T is quite so active in the Church, but

AT  So it was important to him?

AM  Yes, very important. And I've been to church with him a couple of other times.

AF  Oh, have you?

AM  Yes. Well, I did when I went over to Victoria and spent the weekend with him, we went to Church.

AF  I just had lunch with him.

AM  You didn't go to the church.

AT  Is there anything of importance do you think I've missed or any significant points you want to make?

AF  I don't think so, just that you know, I just like I said before that just help the kids. They want to find their parents, go for it, don't try to hinder them at all, that's the worst thing you can do you know, because it's been a good experience for us.

AM  Yah,

AT  I'm just wondering if you have anything to say about, this is just sort of a thought that's just come to me, and we talked a lot about it at the conference about how adoptees get a sense from their adoptive parents that it's a taboo subject, that it's not something they can talk about and so they go on without including the adoptive parents and that kind of thing. Was that something that you were conscious of in raising your children. Were you really, did you make an effort to make it an open topic. I mean you told them the adoption story as their bedtime story, but you know there are a lot of kids who, a lot of adoptees who we heard in the conference had that kind of relationship with their adoptive parents but still felt that the reunion idea was very taboo.

AM  Yes, they did didn't they. I found that quite interesting and I thought well jeepers, you know, it's too bad because the more open you are about things I think, it helps everybody. Everybody feels more relaxed about it and, I mean, people say well it's not natural, but then the adoption process isn't a natural
process. I mean it's a an accommodating process but I don't, and you've got to, when things, don't run exactly according to norm, you do have to make that issue, and I think the more open people are and talk about it I think, that if the parents, the adoptive parents would realize that that is part of the child and so they do need to know, I don't think that if they keep it a closed subject in the long run the adoptive parents are going to be the losers.

AT Do you have any ideas about how you, how you made that comfortable for your kids.

AM I don't know, we just did.

AF We just talked about it.

AM With us we've always just been very open about it. It's never been a, it's never been a negative issue.

AF It's never been a thing that A.M. and I have said to each other now we must talk to the kids and tell them, you know it's just come up in general conversation, especially in the last few years when the whole thing has become more open. I mean years ago I guess it was it was a lot different eh, but we've always told the kids, because as A. got older she'd say, like you know, sometime if it's possible we've always said go for it. There's no problem here.

AM Yah. I think that when people are adopting they should be told when they are originally, when they start to talk about adoption and when they're having their home studies done they should be told you know informed that that this issue will come up and don't try to hold them back from doing it. I suppose there are extenuating circumstances when there really is some sad stories in the background. I mean I know there's times when children have been taken away because of abuse and that sort of thing, but I'm not talking about that, I'm talking about in the normal course of events and they should, even if it's a bad background per se, they should, children should always be told that the reason the adoptive parents are against them looking, they should say why, they should be able to have facts to say the reason we don't want you to look say, for instance, your mother was is a hooker on Granville Street and a drug addict. You know, even if it's a sad it's a negative thing they should at least be told because then they know that this is why there is nothing to be gained by searching.

AT And some would argue that there still is something to be gained by searching just finding that to be a fact.

AM Or you can you can say not necessarily don't search but you can say this is why we don't want you to. Please be prepared for the fact that this is not,
there's nothing positive that you're going to find out as regards to their personality anyway.

AT    Yah, and even then I mean usually about 20 years have passed things may have changed.

AM    Things may have changed that's true.

AT    Things may have changed and I guess my my view would be for those adoptive parents to say you know you have a really difficult background here. If you're going to search I'd really like to be there for you for what you find.

AM    Be prepared for that you may not find things

AT    It might be pretty

AM    It might be pretty bad news

AT    something that you're just not used to.

AM    But there was that one girl at the conference. Were you there when she when they had the Hope Services.

AT    I didn't go to that one.

AM    Yah, that was quite interesting and she had been reunited with her birth mother and she had obviously been brought up in a very well to do upper class home and she met her birth mother and she said she's a frowzy blond common type and she's a chain smoker and she went on about all these things and she says I have nothing in common with her. Absolutely nothing. She said I won't cut off relationship altogether but she said I really don't have a thing in common with her. I'm sure she's a nice person but there's nothing. And, which was too, I thought well isn't that a shame.

AF    That's going to happen.

AM    Yes, that's going to happen.

AF    But it's going to happen, you can't change that, it's going to happen.

AM    That's right, yah, I mean things do happen, people do change.

AF    I think as adoptive like we are I think for us to say to the kids we don't want you to do this,
AM I would never say don’t do it.

AF People must be awful insecure or something, I mean I just can’t imagine them saying something like that. Myself I, but again you’re dealing with different people here.

AM That’s right, yah

AT One suggestion that was made by Annette Baran who was at the conference was that couples who adopt because they’re infertile are less secure than than

AM That’s right, that’s right I was at that one, yah

AT Than couples who adopt for other reasons.

AM That’s right and there is, there’s that little underlying thing as much as you can tell yourself well it doesn’t really matter, it does matter. It really does matter, and there is that little thing, well you know, there’s that little thing that’s missing, it just, you can’t have children,

AT And at the reunion resurfaces those feelings.

AM That’s right, that’s right, yah. But if people can look at, who was it, oh what’s her name, Marcus, that passed away

AT Claire Marcus

AM Claire Marcus, she said in there, she said that if adopted parents could look at adoption as a guardianship not as in that these children are in your care and yes you love them and things but not that you possess them, and actually if all parents no matter whether you’re adoptive parents

AF You can’t possess anybody, even if your own children you don’t possess them, I mean.

AM No, I would never want to possess my children and I think that’s where people can’t understand why we’ve been so open, so willing to go along with reunions and actually encouraged reunion, because we never feel like we owned our children. They’re not possession like a chair or a table.

AT One of the, part of the reading that I’ve done has suggested that people, couples who are infertile who adopt react more strongly in that area, in that they
don't feel, they feel, there's a feeling that God or whatever has prevented them from having children so they don't feel entitled so they overreact and try to have a stronger sense of belonging that is

AF    Well I don't think I've ever felt like that myself.

AM    No, I don't think we have. I don't ever remember feeling like that. I can honestly say that the only feeling I've ever had was maybe envy sometimes and not a strong feeling then, just sort of a fleeting thing you know, wouldn't it be nice if my kids looked like me, you know, or like it was A.B. in particular, because A. was such an easy baby, I didn't have that feeling that sort of overprotective feeling with her because she's always been easier, but with A.B. I know there were a lot of things. I know when he was little and there was a lot of problems with him thriving and things and I wish I could breast feed him because then maybe he would do better. And it was little things like that, but I don't think there's ever been an overwhelming you know feeling to that degree. Maybe we're different in that respect. I don't know.
APPENDIX H

Vignettes

Vignette #1

Adoptive parents interviewed together

22 year old female adoptee, eldest of 2 children, both adopted. Adoptee placed at birth. Adoptive parents infertile, open about adoption throughout both children's growing years. Adoptive mother is also a birth mother (surrendered a son who is now 25). Adoptee initiated application for reunion after herself placing a baby for adoption. Adoptive mother also applied for reunion. Both reunited through the registry, within six weeks of one another. The adoption was seen as positive by the adoptive parents. They feel both children had normal childhoods with no particular trauma. The reunion for the adoptee has worked out well, particularly with regard to the discovery of a sibling, whom the adoptee has developed a close friendship with. The relationship with the birthmother has been strained due to the birthmother's unrealistic expectations and clinging behavior. The adoptee enjoys her relationship with her birthfather and his family. The adoptive parents have met the birth parents and siblings at the request of the adoptee. The birthparents eventually married, but later divorced. They had two subsequent children together, and the birthfather then had another child in his second marriage. The adoptive parents expect to encourage their son in a reunion when he reaches the age of majority.

Vignette #2

Male adoptee, age 41, is the eldest of four siblings. His sister, five years younger, was also adopted and is of Native Indian heritage. She reunited with her birthmother ten years ago, but found the relationship unsatisfactory so cut off contact with her. She has, however, embraced her Native heritage, and finds a sense of belonging with her band. The adoptive parents subsequently gave birth to two more children, a boy and a girl. The adoptive mother passed away after the two oldest children had left home, but she had suffered a lengthy illness. The adoptee initially applied for a reunion in an effort to learn more about his medical background, having suffered some serious medical concerns. He learned he was the product of a gang rape, which left him without any medical information from his birthfather's side. His birthmother, however, clearly cared for him. She celebrated his birthday each year with her husband and children. The adoptee is unsure how involved he wishes to become with his four half siblings, but is developing an ongoing relationship with his birthmother. At the adoptee's request, the adoptive father met the birthmother. The birthmother expressed her pleasure at how well the adoptee has turned out. The adoptive
father has been involved peripherally in the reunion. He sees this as appropriate given the adoptee's age.

Vignette #3

Adoptive parents always wanted a large family but thought they should only give birth to two, then provide a home for others who don't have a home. The adoptee, age 25, is third child, having an older brother and sister born into the family, and a younger adopted sister of Native heritage. The adoptee was 14 months old when placed, and the adoptive mother suspects he was abused in his foster home placement prior to being adopted. The adoptive mother convinced him to register, and the adoptive mother paid the registration fee. The adoptee had difficulties throughout childhood which were aggravated by the tension and eventual dissolution of the adoptive parents' marriage when the adoptee was a pre-teen. The adoptive father, according to the adoptive mother, never fully accepted the adopted children. The adoptee has enjoyed a sense of fit or belonging with his birth family but is not wishing to become overly involved with them. The birth parents were married and had six children. The birth father was suffering from a terminal illness when the birthmother became pregnant, and they decided to place this seventh child for adoption. The adoptive mother pushed for the reunion as a form of compensation for her perceived failures in the adoptee's childhood. She does not feel the reunion has changed her relationship with her son, but it has helped him to come to terms with himself. He is somewhat overwhelmed by his large birth family and is withdrawing from contact with them. The other adopted child would like to have a reunion but is currently unreachable due to drug/alcohol involvement. The adoptive mother would gladly facilitate a reunion if this daughter is ever in an emotionally stable or residentially stable condition.

Vignette #4

The 36 year old adoptee is the eldest of two girls, both adopted at birth. The adoptee in question had not registered with the registry, but her birth mother had. When the registry contacted the adoptee it was a surprise. She was nervous about telling the adoptive mother because the adoptee's father had passed away a few months previously, and she thought this would be a blow to the adoptive mother. The adoptive mother's response to the reunion was pleasure and relief - she was having health problems, and felt that if she passed away, her daughter would still have someone else. The adoptee discovered her birth parents had married and now had three grown sons. She was enthusiastically welcomed into their birth family, and the birth family has welcomed the addition of the adoptive family into their extended family. The other adoptive sister registered with the registry, but the birth mother refused contact. Instead, the birth grandmother has reunited with the adoptee, and the birth mother has communicated by letter. The adoptive mother is sad that the
second daughter's reunion hasn't gone as well as the first but has attempted to help her daughter understand the historical context and stigma which have impacted the birthmother's decision to refuse contact. She is hopeful that through continued contact with the birth grandmother, the birthmother will eventually agree to contact.

Vignette #5

The twenty-six year old adoptee is the fourth child. The adoptive parents chose to adopt a boy after they had 3 girls. The adoptee first mentioned a desire to locate his birth mother when he was 19, and the adoptive parents worked with him to try to locate her by placing an ad in the personals column on his birthday. Although they had registered with the adoption reunion registry, the connection took place by chance. The adoptee watched the news and saw his birthmother carrying a sign indicating she was looking for him. He told his adoptive parents the next day, and his adoptive sister helped him to track his birth mother's phone number through the television station. The adoptee did not want to make contact until his adoptive mother was present, and asked her to make the initial phone call. The first meeting took place with all members of the adoptive family present. The adoptee and adoptive family maintain a good relationship with the birthmother and birth sister, both of whom frequently visit and phone.

Vignette #6

Male adoptee, 45 years old, middle child with an adopted sister two years older and another adopted sister 16 years younger. The adoptive parents had also fostered children over the years. The adoptees were all told of their adoption from an early age, but approximately 15 years ago the adoptive mother provided the two oldest with scrapbooks recording their pre-adoptive and adoptive stories. The adoptee who reunited was described as having had a difficult childhood, and is currently more distant from his family than his mother would like, but she says they have a good relationship. The reunion occurred four months ago and was initiated by the birthmother. The adoptee received some notoriety with the reunion as after it occurred it was re-staged for television. The adoptee was initially unsure as to whether or not he wished contact with his birth family. The adoptee found he has one birth half-sister, who is schizophrenic and who is a responsibility for the birthmother and her husband. The adoptee is divorced and remarried. The adoptee arranged for the adoptive mother, the adoptive sisters, their husbands and children to meet the birth mother, her husband and daughter at the adoptee's home.

Vignette #7

Male adoptee, 31 years old, eldest of two children. His sister is also
adopted. The adoptee began expressing interest in a reunion at around age 14. The adoptive parents supported this interest, his father attending meetings with CARA (Concerned Adoptees Reform Association) with him when he was in his late teens. The adoptee made sporadic attempts at locating his birth parents through parent finders, advertisements and registration with the passive registry. It was not until he received counselling after his divorce that he activated his registration at the reunion registry. In his birth family he is the fifth child. His parents were married, but did not feel they had the means to raise another child. They subsequently placed a sixth child for adoption as well. The birth parents are now divorced. The adoptee does not have as much involvement with his birth family as he had expected prior to the reunion. The adoptive parents (particularly the adoptive father) have expressed an interest in meeting the birth parents, but this has not yet occurred. The adoptee has tried to convince his adopted sister that she should pursue a reunion, but she is not interested.

Note: This adoptee was particularly interested in the research topic. He called me several times to make arrangements on behalf of his parents. He then called me following my interview to discuss his perspective. He feels strongly that information should be accessible to adoptees and advocates for open adoption. He feels his parents have been supportive throughout. He believes the failure of his marriage is related to his insecurities based on the knowledge that his birth parents had rejected him and his fear (and resulting perfectionistic tendencies) that his adoptive parents would also reject him.
APPENDIX I

Characteristics of Sample

- All adoptive parents felt positively about reunion
- 6/7 had met birth parent(s). The 7th wants to but is waiting for the adoptee to arrange it.
- 3/7 might initially have given the adoptee the message they were resistant (#’s 2, 5, 6)
- 5/7 had other adopted children; 3/7 had children born to them; 2 families had both adopted and natural children
- Of the families where there were other adoptees in the home 2 other adoptees had reunited, but neither of these reunions went as well as the reunions which were the focus of this study.
- 3/7 met birth fathers; 1 birth father was deceased; 1 birth father was unknown
- 7/7 met birth siblings
- 5/7 of adoptees were male
- 5/7 of adoptive parents were infertile at the time of the adoption (1 adoptive couple, although infertile when they adopted, subsequently gave birth to two other children)