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Adult Adoptees And The Psychological Processes Involved In The Decision To Search For Origins

Anne Ranee Farrar
Seton Hall University

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ADULT ADOPTEES AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES INVOLVED IN
THE DECISION TO SEARCH FOR ORIGINS

BY

ANNE RANEE FARRAR

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Seton Hall University
2002
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Completion of this doctorate program in Counseling Psychology has been an endeavor that has helped me to develop some of the most powerful relationships that I have ever had, and for that I am forever grateful. This graduate program truly has become a second family to me. I left my family and life as I knew it in Michigan and ventured to New Jersey where I was welcomed and accepted. This program has helped me become a better person professionally and personally. Thank You!

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amount of work you have given to the field. Dr. Hartman — it wouldn’t have been the same without your involvement in this process. Thanks!

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DEDICATION

To my family!

To my parents, Dr. Raymond and Geraldine Farrar, who raised me to be a person seeking truth and knowledge in an ethical and moral fashion, without you this work would not at all be possible. You have both helped me understand the importance of strong family commitment and I feel that because you chose David and myself as your children, that you truly sought a family connection. Despite the miles between us at this point in life you are always on my mind and in my heart! Thank you for being the people that you are and allowing me to be the person that I am. To my brother, David Anson Farrar, you are the only person in the world who truly understands how I have conceptualized our lives as adopted children in the Farrar family. When it comes to our relationship, I don’t feel our relationship could be any stronger even if we were connected by blood. Thanks for being a great brother. I look forward to our children growing up together!

To my biological parents – I am not sure who you are at this point in my life but I know that you are the reason I am alive and that I exist on this planet. Thank you for giving me the opportunity for an amazing life. I know that if I ever met you the first thing I would want to say is “Thank You” so Thank You!

One of the participants in this study discussed how she feels that marriage is the adoption of one adult to another and on that note, I also am dedicate this work to my future husband, Douglas Clay Anton. I look forward to spending our life together and growing together as a family unit. You have been a part of my life for 11 years now and I look forward to spending eternity with you. It is with your support, love, and respect of
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Adoption has existed since the beginning of time. References to the practice of adoption can be found as far back as mythology (Sorosky, Baran, & Pannor, 1978). There were even specific rules formulated on behavior of both the adoptive parents and the adoptees in the Code of Hammurabi, which is part of Babylonian law (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990). The formation of current adoption practices has undergone many changes since the beginning of time.

Schechter and Bertocci (1990) discuss the implications that an adoptee who is searching for their adoptive family has had on Western society. They state, "the search by the adopted person for birth information or for the birthparents themselves has in some respects shaken the structure to its foundation" (p. 62). They discuss how society has typically blocked them from access to this information because of the laws which have been set in order to seal the records which identify the biological question.

Today, one of the most heated issues with regard to adoption is whether or not the adoption should be open or closed; this refers to whether or not the birth parents have access to the children they relinquished, and whether or not the adoptee has a right to contact and/or know his/her birth parents. This issue has been researched and to date the only real conclusion which has been reached is more controversy. "Rigidity and secrecy have created the dilemmas now faced by American adoptees, and only new attitudes and
practices can end them” (Sorosky et al., 1978, p. 224). Chapman, Dorner, Silber, and Winterberg (1987) are advocates of open adoption and report that this form of adoption facilitates communication in the adoptive home. Through the use of education adoptive parents are better able to acknowledge and recognize that adoption is a life-long process and they are more comfortable discussing it throughout their children’s life. There are three sets of people who must be taken into consideration when changing adoption laws; they are: birth parents, adoptive parents, and adoptees. Another advocate of open adoption is Betty Jean Lifton (1979, 1994). She reports that all members of the adoption story are “victimized” by the closed adoption system.

The opening of birth records and the search of adoptees for their biological families has impacted much of the adoption profession in today’s society. The debate exists in professional circles about whether or not it is in the adoptee’s “best interest” to search for birth family. Little research exists discussing this very important point, yet legislative movements and political camps have “taken sides” on this particular issue.

Adoption Statistics

The National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (1996) reported that in 1992, 127,441 children were adopted within the United States. This includes children of all races and nationalities. Of these adoptions, the majority of them (42%) were stepparent or relative adoptions. Thirty-eight percent were adoptions that were handled by private agencies or independent lawyers. Sixteen percent were adoptions of children who were in foster care and five percent were international adoptions.
Research reports that 2% to 4% of all American families have adopted (Moorman & Hernandez, 1989; Mosher & Bachrach, 1996). The National Center for Health Statistics (1990, as cited in Adoptive Families of America, 2000) reports that there are 1.5 million adoptive families nationwide which accounts for 2.2% of all United States families.

State Adoption Laws

Despite the importance of adoption to many people, it is an area which is under-researched and has incomplete data (Stolley, 1993). States govern adoption laws and several states have spent the last couple of years in court battling to change the laws (e.g., Oregon) which had been appealed by a group of birthmothers who did not agree with the courts 1998 decision to allow adoptees access to birth records. These court cases demonstrate the controversy that surrounds adoption. The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute (2000) reports that currently there are six states in the United States, which allow all adult adoptees to obtain their original birth certificate. They are: (a) Kansas, (b) Alaska, (c) Tennessee, (d) Alabama, (e) Oregon, and (f) Delaware. Two states (Oklahoma and Washington) allow for the adoptee to access their birth certificate if they meet certain requirements. There are at least 24 states which have mutual consent registries. This allows members of the adoption party to meet at some point in the future if members have signed a consent form agreeing to be contacted, they would then be contacted by a "confidential intermediary." Several states have "good cause" laws, which allow for access to adoption information if they are able to demonstrate good cause in a
court. This is true for New Jersey, North Carolina, and the District of Columbia (Hollinger, 1997).

In terms of birthparents relinquishing their children, the current statistics demonstrate that the rate at which women relinquish their infants has declined dramatically particularly for white women. Between 1989 and 1995, 1.7% of White women relinquished their children, which was a tremendous decrease from 19% between 1965 and 1972 (National Center for Health Statistics, 1997). These statistics also report that the rate for Black women has been consistent at two percent and it has decreased to less than one percent. For Latina unmarried women this has also been consistently under two percent.

The focus of this research will focus on the adult adoptee and therefore it is necessary to briefly review what is known about adult adoptees in the scientific literature.

Adoptees

What must be realized is that different adoption issues fit into different adoptive situations (Grotevant, McRoy, Elde, & Fravel, 1994). Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Marantz Henig (1992) state:

People are unique in terms of their inborn temperaments, life experiences, and coping styles, and the particular combination that arises in a particular individual will help determine what being adopted means to them. To impose a single system onto human beings, who are so idiosyncratic, cannot possibly work for everyone. (p. 190)
*The Lifecycle of Adoptees*

Rosenberg (1992) has worked in the area of adoption since her first field placement in her master’s program while working for her master’s of social work degree (MSW). Due to her extensive work with adoptive families and hearing their stories she developed a chart of developmental tasks that adoptees must work through to be successful adults. She reports that there are nine phases that all adoptees need to work through:

1. *Conceived and born:* This basic phase involves their survival which is obviously crucial.

2. *Postpartum:* This is when they are physically removed from their biological parents. It is necessary for them to endure the trauma of the mother-child separation.

3. *Adoptee is an infant:* They begin to recover from their separation and begin to bond with their adoptive parents.

4. *Preschool years:* The adoptee begins to develop trust, initiative, and autonomy, while maintaining attachment. It is at this point where they usually integrate the concepts of being adopted.

5. *School-age:* Adoptee begins to develop competence, affirm permanence in their adoptive family, and also continue working on integration of being adopted.

6. *Puberty and Adolescence:* It is imperative for them to accept both their genetic and psychological selves, to accept their adoptive family lifestyle, and achieve independence.
7. **Young Adult:** It is usually now that they come to terms with their genealogy, seek out intimate relationships, decide whether or not to search for their biological parents, and also work on their "ties" with their adoptive family.

8. **Adulthood:** This phase is where they may give birth to their own biological children, they may help a new generation along with its psychological and genetic self, and they disclose the information regarding their adoption to their children.

9. **Later in life:** They begin to accept their life for what it is and for the person in which they have become.

All adoptees must deal with the fact that they were relinquished by their biological parents; they may feel as if they have undergone more than nonadopted children. Rosenberg (1992) feels it is essential for adoptees to realize, "adoptive parents provide the most positive context for this resolution when they are clearly committed to the permanency of the relationship and can accept the child's special tasks" (p. 53).

Kirk (1964) has suggested that adoptions that are handled the best are those in which the adoptive family raises them and gives them the opportunity to explore adoption-issues, whenever they arise. Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig (1992) state that being adopted can complicate the development of self-image and self-esteem, especially when the adoptee does not look like his parents and they are at the point of middle childhood, ages 6 to 12. During this stage, the adoptee also begins to understand the logical connotations of adoption and will then begin to realize the loss of the parents he or she never knew.

Rosenberg (1992) indicates that adoptees' decision to search for birthparents is considered part of an adult adoptees life and this is the specific focus of this research.
Adoptees and Searching for Origins

Search as a Process. Identity has been long considered a lifelong search for self (Erikson, 1950, 1963). Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig in 1992 wrote the book Being adopted: The lifelong search for self. The very purpose of this book is to review the lifelong process that an adoptee has in incorporating their adoption status into his/her life. In discussing this process, Schecter and Bertocci (1990) emphasize that it is specifically through the activism seen in searchers, that the adoption community has slowly begun to realize that all people involved in adoption are involved in a lifelong process. Brodzinsky and colleagues emphasize that across each developmental milestone adoption status will come into effect. The book follows Erikson’s model of psychosocial development and each stage of development is addressed in reference to adoptees. In middle childhood (Industry vs. Inferiority), they indicate that the adoptee is already searching for answers regarding one’s origin and the reasons for relinquishment. They further state that during adolescence (Ego Identity vs. Identity Confusion) the adoptee is facing what he/she has lost by not being raised by their biological family, especially as it relates to the sense of self and that the adoptee begins to consider the possibility of searching for biological family. Therefore, the process of searching can begin when an adoptee is in adolescence and some adoptees may even actually want to meet their biological family prior to this period. Brodzinsky and colleagues even note how for adoptees in late adulthood that they may still have thoughts about searching and finding their biological family. It might be questions such as “What if I had searched?”, “Are they still alive?” Bertocci and Schechter (1987) found in their study that of adult adoptees who were active searchers there was search ideation that noted beginning in childhood,
continuing into adolescence, and moving into adulthood. Therefore, search can be best understood as both episodic and as a process. An adoptee can have made the decision to search, as you will see in the interviews, but then they may go through phrases where they search and then stop as they get a little closer and may then not discuss or actually search for months or years.

Rosenberg (1992) reported that some of the issues an adoptee may go through while searching for their birth parents are:

1. **Separation, loss, and grief:** Their own individual issues and feelings toward their situation may arise.

2. **Bonding and attachment:** Bonding usually refers to physiological bonding that occurs during pregnancy, while attachment refers to the psychological bonding that occurs. The members of the family need to assess their own attachment capacity, since some are more willing to become attached than others.

3. **Identity formation:** That it is necessary to establish "boundaries" and cope with abandonment by their birth parents.

Betty Jean Lifton (1979, 1994) is a psychologist who works with all members of the adoption story. She reports that the decision is "arrived at over of period of time, as the self gradually evolves from one level of consciousness to another, striving for authenticity and self-autonomy" (1979, p. 78).

Schechter and Bertocci (1990) discuss eight themes which they believe are important psychological "intrapsychic" factors involved in the decision of whether or not to search and find their biological origins. The first factor they discuss is that of loss and mourning. Schechter and Bertocci note that the adoptee may feel a predisposition to a
"pervasive anxiety that, if loss (of the object, birthmother, and of the object's love) happened once, it can happen again" (p. 72). They state that this anxiety about this possible loss "reemerges with great force" (p. 72) if they decide to begin the process of searching.

The second theme they discuss is envy and jealousy. This is connected in their writing to the sensitivity an adoptee may have to being similar and/or different from their adoptive families. They continue by stating that "since the adoptee cannot be the same as those others she perceives in the non adoptive world, she may find herself (unconsciously and perhaps consciously) in a state of envy" (p. 75).

The third theme that Schechter and Bertocci (1990) discuss is complications in their sexual identity. They discuss that with regard to infertility problems, despite the reality of "fault" in terms of inability to get pregnant, it is typically assumed that it is the women who is incapable. Therefore, particularly for female adoptees, a fundamental difference between herself and her adoptive mother is her "presumed capacity to bear a child" (p. 77) and that it is because of this that envy can occur. They continue and state that the female adoptee may struggle with her sexual identity and may have an unconscious identification with being "barren (in fantasy – asexual) or damaged adoptive mother" (p. 77). They indicate that much less is known about male sexual identity in terms of adoption.

The fourth theme they address is identity. Schechter and Bertocci (1990) note that the adoptee has the need to sort through having two sets of parents and how this impacts his/her identity. In terms of the search behavior, they note that identity is
important because it often is the quest for self that the adoptee reports searching for in order to be "complete."

The fifth theme presented by Schechter and Bertocci (1990) is the reconciliation of cognitive dissonance and the internalization of locus of control. By this they mean that the adoptee has several dissonant elements in his/her life such as an amended birth certificate and are typically denied access to the original. They note that the search is probably related to the need to gain control over one’s life and to reconcile these cognitive dissonances.

The sixth theme presented is the perception of difference and body image. Schechter and Bertocci (1990) discuss the perceptions an adoptee may have in terms of feeling different from his/her adoptive parents knowing that there are people that exist that physically resemble them.

The seventh theme presented is attachment. Schechter and Bertocci discuss Mahler, Pine, and Bergman’s (1975) belief that in order to fully separate and individuate that it is necessary to be attached. They note that it is necessary for the adoptee to separate both from the adoptive parents but also from their internalized images of their biological family.

The eighth and final theme that Schechter and Bertocci discuss is the need to experience human connectedness. They discuss that, “the human being has the capacity in adulthood to remember the past, savor the present, and conceptualize the future” (p. 84). They note that the wonderment which surrounds the unknown genetic links can become part of the quest.
Bertocci and Schechter (1987) found in an informal survey that they conducted that 60% of the participants indicated that one of the primary reasons for their searching was their lack of similarity to their adoptive family. They noted that the participants felt that this lack of physical resemblance to them was frustrating, embarrassing, and lead to their insecurity about their adoption status.

Schechter (1960) found that there was a higher proportion of adoptees in therapy than found in the general population. This raises a controversy regarding whether or not adoption results in poor mental health for adoptees. Some experts feel that this over representation of adoptees may be correlated to the fact that adoption is largely a middle-class occurrence and this is also true for those who seek therapy (Melina, 1986). It must also be addressed that families who undertake adoption, must deal with members of mental health field with regard to the adoption process, and they may feel more comfortable seeking assistance when they undergo a family or individual crisis.

Brodzinsky, Schecter, and Marantz Henig (1992) feel that when you are working with an adopted adolescent, it is necessary to help them complete a "psychological search" (p. 113). This suggests that they need to attempt to work through and clarify their feelings towards being adopted. The therapist may have them actually initiate an imaginary search, only in a few cases would they have them complete a real search. Usually, they would ask the adoptee to write a letter to their biological parents and then the adoptee will answer the letter from their biological parents to themselves. This allows the adoptee to reflect on their feelings and fantasies. Once this is done, the individual and therapist can review what information they have uncovered.
Internal versus External Modes of Searching for Origins. Schechter and Bertocci (1990) refer to an adoptee who has begun the process of searching for their birth family as being an “activated” search. This activated search is regarding the adoptee who has decided to actually go out and attempt to find their biological roots. In this study, this process of search that will be examined will be specifically focused on the “external” search. This refers to the adoptee actually attempting to gather more non-identifying information regarding their origins or is seeking to actually find their biological parents in order to seek what they look like or to develop a relationship with them.

An external search should not be compared to an internal search, in which the adoptee can and does think about his/her biological family but does not actually actualize the search. They may think about and fantasize about their origins. This research will specifically examine the external search and therefore all references (i.e., their search category) to searching noted below will typically be in reference to an external search unless specifically noted otherwise. Therefore a person who is considered a non searcher does not necessarily mean that they don’t think about their adoption status and whether it would be nice to meet their biological family one day, but that at this point in their life and/or adoption process that they don’t have a plan to search for their biological origins.

Minimal research exists about the reason why an adult adoptee might decide to search or not search for his/her biological parents. Research that does exist focuses on the external aspect of searching in order to find out why an adoptee actually makes the decision to search. Bertocci and Schechter (1987) found in an informal survey that they conducted that 60% of the participants indicated that one of the primary reasons for their searching was their lack of similarity to their adoptive family. They noted that the
participants felt that this lack of physical resemblance to them was frustrating, embarrassing, and lead to their insecurity about their adoption status.

Definition of Terms

1. Adoptee: An individual who is adopted by a family who is not biologically related to them in any way.

2. Parents: Unless otherwise noted, this word will reference the adoptive mother and father.

3. Searcher (In Process): Adoptees who have externally pursued information on their biological parents, whether it is for non-identifying information or for the purpose of reunion.

4. Non Searcher: Adoptee who has not externally sought out knowledge about their biological heritage and at this point they do not have any intention of completing an external search.

5. Reunion (Found): Adoptee has physically met their biological parent, parents, or other biological family members.

6. Process: It is defined as a "systematic series of actions directed to some end (Random House, 1998).

Existing Theoretical Models

Currently there are three prevailing theoretical models in which clinicians and researchers have been attempting to explain why adult adoptees decided to not search or search for the biological family. The first explanation (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991) is a
psychopathological model and has dominated the field for several decades. The model assumes that there are a list of personal deficiencies that the adoptee has such as lack of control, insecure attachment, feelings of loss, difficulty in acquiring connectedness, and genealogical bewilderment.

The second explanation views search as a normal developmental process implying that adoptees must complete as part of their psychosocial development (Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998; Feast & Howe, 1997). Brodzinsky and colleagues (1998) state that “adoptive parents and their children each have their own unique adoption-related tasks, and that the way in which these individuals cope with, and resolve, their respective tasks determines, in part, the adjustment of the family system” (p. 21). The life-cycle philosophy is focused on the reality that the structure of the family along with the family functioning impact the psychological health of the family members.

The third explanation places the search for origins in the context of social-cultural norms and expectations (Haines & Timms, 1985; March, 1995; Wegar, 1997). In this model it is felt that in American culture what is typically accepted is relationships that are defined in terms of blood and biological ties. In this model, the “closer the adoptive family can come to the biological model, the more permanent, stable, and healthy it will be” (Muller & Perry, 2001, p. 16).

Muller and Perry (2001) suggest that each adoptee constructs their own meaning around his/her decision to search for birthparents. They write, “adopted persons construct, based on their specific biographical situation, different meanings around search” (p. 31) and they recommend that future research should make an effort to both capture and elucidate both the factors involved the and meanings for the adult adoptees.
All three of these models have been discussed as theoretical models at this time and research has not been conducted to see if any or all of the models are applicable workable models with adult adoptees as to why one might search or not search for their birthparents.

**Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study is to elucidate and understand the factors that are involved in an adoptee's decision to externally search for birthparents. This will help to gain a better understanding of the complexity of the psychological processes that are involved in the decision of whether or not to they externally search for birthparents. The three models presented as potential explanation of searching have been explored in theoretical and clinical settings. In this research, by allowing the participants the ability to share their narrative about why they have decided to externally search or not search for their biological parents at this point in their life will, as Muller and Perry (2001) recommended, be able to better elucidate the factors and meanings related to the decision to externally search for birthparents.

**Significance of the Study**

There are many issues, which need to be explored concerning adoption. Adoption affects everyone in the family: the adoptee, the adoptive parents, the biological parents, and the extended family. It is only recently that any focus has been placed on birth fathers and not only their human rights, but also their right to know about their child. What about the biological mother's mother? When a biological mother is pregnant at 15
and is considering her options: parenting, adoption, and abortion, who is the person who may be the one who makes the final decision: legally, the adoptee’s biological grandparent(s).

There are many questions in the field of adoption. While this researcher feels a strong desire to find these answers, it is essential to help the adult adoptees better understand the complexities of their life in terms of being an adult with regular responsibilities but also having a second family and the factors involved in deciding whether or not to find out who they are.

This study will hopefully reveal themes of the process that adoptees go through while they decide whether or not they are going to externally search for their biological parents: why some continue in their search for information, why some stop, and why some never actually search for their origins.

This information will be helpful to researchers, clinicians, adoptees, biological parents, and also adoptive parents on how to better see and understand the commonalities and unique differences experienced by adoptees.

Statement of the Problem

This research is aimed at examining how the adoptee, at one point in his/her adult developmental lifespan, conceptualizes his/her decision about whether or not to begin an external search for his/her birth family and how this has remained similar or been different across his/her life to date. This research will focus on the experience of the adoptee that was adopted as an infant within the first year of their life. Brodzinsky (1997) states that adoptees often feel they have a fundamental right to know about themselves
and that this can lead to frustration, development of an external locus of control, as well as feelings of helplessness. In October 1987, Kaplan and Silverstein presented seven psychological issues that are applicable to all people, but have extreme relevance to those involved in the adoption triangle in a workshop at the American Adoption Conference. These seven issues are as follows: (a) loss, (b) rejection, (c) guilt and shame, (d) grief, (e) identity, (f) intimacy, and (g) control. As noted earlier, Schechter and Bertocci (1990) report eight psychological issues which they believe are core issues underlying the need an adoptee has to search for biological history. They are as follows: (a) loss and mourning, (b) envy and jealousy, (c) sexual identity, (d) identity, (e) internal locus of control, (f) body image, (g) attachment, and (h) human connectedness. This research will focus on the themes that emerge as a natural part of the interview and research process in order to gain a better understanding of how they may affect the adoptee in their life decisions.

Edens and Cavell (1999) report that there are only a handful of studies which examine adoptees and the task of searching for birthparents. They ask the question, “What does undertaking a search mean for the adopted individually, intrapsychically and interpersonally?” (p. 57). They further report that the studies that have been completed to date tend to examine searching behavior as dichotomous: searchers and non-searchers. Edens and Cavell indicate that they believe this is not a dichotomous variable and that searching is a more complex process. Furthermore, searching behavior is not a dichotomous behavior. As Schecter and Bertocci (1990) report there is a continuum of behavior from “disinterest” to “contemplation” to “activated searching.” In addition, prior studies have had serious methodological limitations.
Delimitations of the Study

Qualitative research is a complex process and because of this there will be some limitations to the research. In order to best assess an area of research it is necessary to limit the sample. All adult adoptees must be over the age of 18 years of age so that they are legally capable of searching for birthparents. This does not allow for children and adolescents who may have thoughts and feelings about their birthparents to have a voice and tell their narrative. Another limitation is that in order to decrease the amount of variance, which may enter into the arena due to other factors such as searching for one’s culture, it is necessary to exclude all transracial and international adoptees. They do have a story and it needs to be heard, but it is likely that their story has more layers than adoptees who are of the same race as their adoptive family. Also, the adoptees are asked to look back upon their lives retrospectively and if they had been interviewed at another point in their life, their responses to the same questions may have been different. This could be due to a person having a different conceptualization of their life at different times.

Objectivity will be attempted, but because the primary researcher is adopted her worldview will most likely become a part of the interview process. This will hopefully be minimized by the researcher’s willingness to use personal therapy to work out any personal issues, which may be brought up by this study as well as the use of a peer debriefer, a research team, and a dissertation committee. One of the main objectives in qualitative research is to strike a balance between objectivity and subjectivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin state, “The interplay between research and researcher means that the researcher is an instrument of analysis in qualitative studies” (p. 53).
Therefore in order to best ensure objectivity and maintain self as instrument, a final chapter (will see Chapter 6), will contain the researcher as an instrument. This researcher will complete the surveys as well as share her story that has unfolded in life and throughout the research process.

Another limitation will be that the sample will self-select and that there may be strong differences between the process of searching for birthparents with this group and those people who do not volunteer for such a study. These limitations are all important areas, which need to be addressed, and as will be discussed in Chapter 5, they all require future research.

Methodological Rationale

This research has been organized in relation to several methods of qualitative research, with the use of an ethnographic design with the goal of developing grounded theory. The research methodology will be the constant-comparative method, which calls for the simultaneous collection of data as well as analysis of the data. Grounded theory indicates that the researcher does not begin the research with a preconceived theory but will allow the data to emerge. Then theory can be drawn from the data and will hopefully offer “insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) noted that qualitative methods are often used to obtain the “intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional methods” (p. 11).
Lofland (1996) stated:

I use the term “Analytic ethnography” to refer to research processes and products in which, to a greater or lesser degree, an investigator (a) attempts to provide generic prepositional answers to questions about social life and organization; (b) strives to pursue such an attempt in a spirit of unfettered or naturalistic inquiry; (c) utilizes data based on deep familiarity with a social setting or situation that is gained by personal participation or an approximation of it; (d) develops the generic prepositional analysis over the course of doing research; (e) strives to present data and analyses that are true; (f) seeks to provide data and/or analyses that are new; and (g) presents an analysis that is developed in the senses of being conceptually elaborated, descriptively detailed, and concept-data interpreted. (pp. 120-121)

Only recently has a small amount of research been done examining the psychological components of adoption. Qualitative research allows the design and the concepts to emerge from the data, which is collected through analysis. Generally when a researcher begins a study with hypotheses of how they believe the topic which is being evaluated is going to respond, this is because they are able to base their thoughts on previous existing literature. Without a literature base it is impossible to make hypotheses. Qualitative research allows the researcher to evaluate an area to collect further data and then allow this to evolve into theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The main purpose of qualitative research is to develop theory and therefore it is hoped that this research will help to contribute to the field by adding and refining to the existing theoretical models on the processes involved in the decision to search for
birthparents. This area of adoption research is lacking in theory and this form of research is deemed not only necessary but also the only ethical way to respond to the lack of information. This allows the participants to express their views of what is important and not important to them since they have experienced what is being examined. A researcher without this data from the participants can only hypothesize and assume what they believe to be the important areas of study. Not to say that their research questions might not be important and relevant but it may miss a major element of what is important to the concept being examined. Lincoln and Guba (1985) report that the goal of the interview is to sit with the respondents, hear their stories, the voices, their language, and their perceptions and that this will then allow them to better understand their experiences. Maines (1997) reports, that in grounded theory, the data are narrative constructions and that they represent reconstructions of the original experience and not the original experience. This is because they are being asked to rely on what they recall of their experience which may be impacted by memory, outcomes of experience, and other socio-cultural elements of experience. An example relevant to this study is that the participants will be asked to recall their experience with their adoptive family across their lifespan. They may discuss topics which are more “memorable” as opposed to the every day experience.

Charmaz (2000) states a very important element in working to develop grounded theory is for the researcher to conduct an ethnographic interview but not become totally immersed into the culture. This research will require the researcher to understand the participants experiences but with the need to be as objective as possible. This research will look at pieces of the participant’s life as an adoptee. Without complete immersion it
is impossible to examine the complete social structure of the adoption community. The goal of this research is to begin to comprehend the process, at a particular moment in time of what it means to be adopted and what the search for origins means to that adoptee. It will not examine what that adoptee may decide at a later point. It seems that the decision to search for birthparents is a process, whether it be psychological or external. It is not possible to know how the search process will change for that particular person, but their research will gather a variety of views from adoptees across the lifespan. Information will be gathered from adoptees at different points of life about how they personally are impacted by being an adult adoptee and how they have incorporated their need (or lack of need) to externally search for their birthparents. The objective of this research is to reveal any factors that may influence whether or not they decide to search for their birthparents. It will not look for cause-and-effect relationships. Cause and effect information can only be based on theoretical information, which is founded on data. Without this data, it is too soon to consider what are the ramifications of the adoptees decisions. This can only begin the process of inquiry in this very important and neglected area of research.
CHAPTER II

Literature Review and Theoretical Rationale

This chapter contains the theoretical rationale for this study and an overview of the literature which exists on adult adoptees. As will be discussed in detail, there is very little adoption literature which addresses the psychological functioning of adult adoptees. There is even less literature which utilizes objective research methods in order to examine the effects of adoption on the adoptee. Much of the existing literature is based on clinical judgment, personal experience of the author or the book or article, and case studies.

This chapter will briefly review the theoretical rationale for this research utilizing the Object-Relations and Attachment Theory paradigms. Then the remainder of the chapter will focus on the existing psychological literature which exists on areas which have demonstrated psychological implications for adoptees: attachment and bonding, grief and loss, psychosocial development, family functioning, psychological functioning, and search and reunion issues. The chapter will conclude with a brief summary.

Theoretical Rationale

Object-Relations theory and attachment theory have both been around for years and fall under the heading of psychoanalytic theory. What these theories have in common is the importance of early relationships in a child’s life. Both of these theories
have a dearth of information related to adoption, which is in reality a form of maternal loss and deprivation which is central to both of its theories. These theories though they do not directly address adoption issues, help conceptualize some of the relevant issues for adult adoptees.

**Object-Relations Theory**

Object Relations is a general way to refer to interpersonal relations (St. Clair, 2000). St. Clair states that the object refers to the significant person or thing which is the object or target of another person’s feelings or drives. Freud was the first theorist to discuss the word object in relation to the mother-child relationship. Generally, the theory surmises that *relations* means the way the person handles interpersonal relations is typically connected to the “inner residues of past relationships that shape an individual’s current interactions with people” (p. 1).

Hamilton (1990) explains, utilizing object-relations theory, that an adoptee’s vulnerability to separations is a result of the abrupt, premature separation which occurred from the biological mother. It is noted that if this occurs before the infant is able to distinguish between self and others, that this can result in an incredible vulnerability to the sense of self.

Fairburn (1954) defined object relations development in three stages. The first stage, the *infantile dependence stage*, is characterized by the identification of the early object and by the oral attitude of incorporation or taking. He gives the example of thumb sucking as a replacement for the missing breast. The second stage is called the *transitional stage*. This means that the child’s relationships with objects expand outside
of the primary object. He states that unresolved conflicts at this stage result in the development of defense mechanisms to deal with the conflict. The third stage is called *mature relational stage* and that a mature relationship is based on both give and take. This theory indicates that if the adoptee was removed from the biological mother during the infantile dependence stage, that this will result in an affected stage two and stage three of development since the dependence toward the mother would be affected by the infant’s removal.

*Attachment Theory*

Mary Ainsworth is primarily known for her seminal work on attachment classification. She developed her theory from research using the “Strange Situation”; a research procedure during which infants are evaluated in terms of their attachment patterns with their primary caregiver. Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) define *Attachment security* as a state in which the infant is secure or untroubled about the availability of the attachment figure. Ainsworth developed the Strange Situation classification in order to capture the balance of attachment and ability to explore under conditions of increasing through moderate stress. The three initial attachment classifications are: (a) Secure, (b) Avoidant, and (c) Ambivalent or resistant.

In a secure attachment the child tends to use the mother as a secure base for attachment. The child misses the parent when they leave but actively greets the parent when they return and then can continue exploration. In an avoidant child, while the mother is present they readily explore and do not show much affect toward parent. When
the parent leaves they continue with little distress. When the parent returns they seek
distance from parent and avoids contact and plays with the toys.

In a child who has an ambivalent or resistant attachment classification the child is
distressed when entering a new room even with parent present. They tend to fail to
engage in exploration. When parent leaves the room they are unsettled and distressed.
Upon their return the child may alternate between showing they are angry and having a
 tempered tantrum or they may appear passive and are too upset to make contact. They tend
to not find comfort with the parent.

In 1986, Main and Solomon wrote about a fourth type of attachment classification
known as is Disorganized/disoriented. Here the child tends to have a lack of an
observable goal or intention even with the parent present. They may demonstrate
interrupted movement, freezing, fear, and confusion. The child lacks a coherent
attachment strategy

John Bowlby, who is considered the founding father of attachment theory,
addresses the topic of attachment issues in-depth in many of his books (1973, 1980). In
neither of these two books does he mention adoption and in a footnote addresses that for
most children the person who is the attachment figure is the “natural mother” (1980, p.
9).

Rutter and O’Connor (1999) report that there has been very little consideration of
attachment issues and its theoretical implications for adoptees. They report that the
theory predicts that there would be implications for the security and pattern of attachment
in relationships for adoptees. They report that the little research which has been done has
focused on whether or not adopted children can still develop normal selective
attachments to their parents but that there has not been any consideration into how adopted children’s attachment models have been affected by the knowledge that their parents are not their biological parents and what does this lack of relationship with them have on the adoptee? Finally, another question addressed is whether or not these attachment issues are reflected in the adoptees decision to search.

Attachment and Bonding

Watson (1997) describes the differences between attachment and bonding. He described bonding (based on his interpretations of Bowlby) to be a “significant relationship that happens without the knowledge or conscious effort of those involved and not as a result of a learned skill” (p. 163). He further states that this unconscious relationship can occur on four levels. They are: (a) genetic bonding, (b) birth bonding, (c) traumatic bonding, and (d) transference bonding. Genetic bonding is a bond which occurs between two people due to common genes which they share in terms of a connection through common ancestry and certain inherited characteristics. Birth bonding is the bond which exists between a mother and her child. The child was physiologically dependent upon the mother for space, blood, oxygen, and food. Traumatic bonding is defined as the bond which exists between strangers who experience a common trauma which connects them. He makes reference to people who end up as hostages together. The fourth and final type of bonding is transference bonding. This bond refers to the immediate connection that people may have based on their unconscious responses to each other.
Watson (1997) states that there are many reasons that an adoptee might search for their birthmother but that the search is driven by the birth bond. It is "the sense of a meaningful connection that adopted persons and their birth parents feel for each other" (p. 168). He further states that adoptive parents are often fearful of this bond that what needs to be realized is that this bond is different from the attachment which exists between adopted children and parents.

Melina (1986) reports that the love that birth parents feel towards a child and the love adoptive parents feel towards their children is generally the same, but what is different is the attachment between a child and their adoptive parent. The attachment develops under very different circumstances than the attachment between a child and their birth parent. Attachment is further described as a reciprocal process that develops between the parent and the child throughout the child’s first year of life and continues throughout their relationship. Brodzinsky and colleagues (1992) state that attachment can occur with any mother or father, or really any adult who spends a great deal of time with the newborn. They describe the relationship as a "little dance, a synchrony in their responses to one another. This dance can be done with any caregiver who responds sensitively to the young infant’s cues" (p. 33). Further, they state that the child does not begin to show preference for their mother (or primary caretaker) until the ages 4 to 6 months. This they report is the key to attachment when the baby seeks the attachment figure as their source of comfort when they are upset. Attachment is seen as the quintessential bond.
Attachment generally develops between the parent and child when the child learns that they can count on their parents to meet both their physical and emotional needs. Melina (1986) reports that this process is the same for adopted and non-adopted children.

A study conducted by Singer, Brodzinsky, Ramsay, Steir, and Waters (1985) examined adoptees attachment patterns. The total sample contained 27 nonadopted infants, 27 intra-racial adopted infants, and 19 interracial adopted infants. They were all assessed utilizing Ainsworth's Strange Situation paradigm. They found that adoptees who were placed for adoption before or during the attachment formation period had no difference in rates of attachment patterns compared to a control group of non-adopted children.

Brodzinsky et al. (1998) state that children who are removed from an adoptive home prior to the legalization of the adoption generally show a decline in their attachment-related behaviors. Austad and Simmons (1978) inform the readers that children who are adopted even early in life may present behavioral symptoms of a non-neurotic nature which may be denote that adoption itself can create difficulties with attachments to others and interpersonal relationships regardless of the age at which the adoption took place. They subsequently report that long before the child understands they are adopted and what that means, that there are problems with parent-child attachment.

Children who are not raised by their biological parents due to adoption are different from children who are not raised by their biological parents due to death. Therefore adoptees have experienced a loss not due to death and this impact on a child needs to be explored.
Abandonment and Non-Death Loss

Verrier (1993) states that regardless of how you look at it, the adopted child was left alone by the biological mother and handed over to strangers. They shared approximately 40 weeks with them in utero and they are connected historically, genetically, but also possibly emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. Nickman (1985) states that being adopted is a primary loss in that the adoptee is not kept by their original parents.

There is a good reason to call this the primary loss in adoption: the fact that the child did not come into the world as a wanted person, into the arms of a man and woman who together could eagerly and lovingly assume his care. (p. 376).

Jones (1997) reports that there are concrete losses such as loss of: (a) knowing their first parents, (b) knowledge of their early life events, and (c) biological relatives. On a more abstract level the adoptee must deal with the loss of knowledge of personal and familial medical history as well as a sense of trust which exists for an infant on biological relatedness.

Brodzinsky, Smith, and Brodzinsky (1998) report that adoptees lose their birth parents, but they also experience a loss of “social status” associated with a stigma of being adopted. Brodzinsky (1990) reports that loss of birthparents, extended family, culture, genealogical heritage, and loss of societal and community acknowledgement and the support children receive when they lose a parent to death or divorce, complicates the grieving process for the adoptee. Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig (1992) state that grief (the behavioral manifestation of loss) occurs when the adoptee comes to realize they are adopted. As well, they revisit the grief throughout crucial developmental points in
their life such as the death of the adoptive parents, their own marriage, and also the birth of their first child.

Sorosky, Baran, and Pannor (1978) mention that the adoptee has already experienced an actual object loss of their birthparents and that thus as McWhinnie (1969) and Rogers (1970) state this adoptee becomes vulnerable at the adolescent developmental stage to any additional losses, abandonments, or rejections. Bertocci and Schechter (1991) report that adoptee's initial loss is the paradigm for all succeeding interpersonal losses and separations. Loss of a birthparent is by sociolegal protocols and not death. This loss has the possibility of being reversed at some point during the adoptee's life. They further report that this striving to find the "lost object" can actually become literal, if they decide to search for birth parents. They may be attempting to repair the split from their birthparents as they search for a sense of wholeness.

Nickman (1985) recommends that the best way to intervene with a child who grieves their various losses is to have a dialogue or discourse about adoption beginning at an appropriate age and continuing throughout the adoptee's development. Furman (1974) stresses the importance that a trusting adult can have to help allow a child to grieve. Children whose parents die have severe losses, but effects of loss on children who are adopted can have more confusing and subtle effects. Talking with the adoptee may be difficult for the adoptive parent because many of them have their own thoughts and feelings surrounding adopting children (i.e., whether it is due to infertility issues, good will) which may not have been resolved (Frankel, 1991). Nickman (1985) further reports that when an adoptee can work through the losses in a conscious manner this allows for normal development; whereas, if the issues are painful, internalized, and not discussed,
then the "unconscious identification with progenitors conceived of as bad or unworthy" (p. 379).

Adopted adults frequently report that when they learned about someone else giving birth to them, either no further communication was permitted, others demonstrated discomfort with the topic, while still others did not have answers to share (Chapman, Dorner, Silber, & Winterberg, 1987). The grief they report is a normal experience and feeling and this can be lessened if they receive validation of the loss of the birth family. The researchers mention that their grief becomes intertwined with the need to know that they were and still are loved by the birthmother. It comes down to an issue of "was I given away because I was rejected or because I was loved?" In closed adoption the adopted person rarely sees evidence of the love on the part of the birthparents. Brodzinsky (1990) reported that adoptees have very different reactions to being adopted, but that it is not uncommon for them to exhibit anxiety, anger, depression, shame, and confusion.

Brodzinsky, Singer, and Braff (1984) suggest from their research findings that children in preschool and earlier are not likely to understand what adoption means in reference to themselves. At age 6, they generally are able to understand between being a biological parent and adoption. When the child is between the ages of 8 and 11, the concept of adoption is broadened and they begin to understand the notability and complications of the family situation. It is not until they are in early to middle adolescence before they really seem to conceive that there is a "legal transfer of parental rights and responsibilities from biological parents to adoptive parents" (p. 876).
Silin (1996) states that adoptees can only understand their adoption stories consistent with their emotional/cognitive development abilities. Brodzinsky (1990) states that until children have reached the developmental stage in which they understand enough to cognitively ponder their unknown past and their unknown birth parents that adoptees will not have any basis for understanding adoption-related losses or have behavioral and emotional reactions of the process involved in grieving. At different points during the child’s developmental lifespan they will emotionally and cognitively need to re-evaluate the loss. In adolescence, the adoptee often realizes that there has been more lost than just the birthparents, but a loss of connection to their genealogical lines. As the adoptee grows into their emerging identity, these issues may have a powerful impact on who they are and who they become.

Pavao (1998) mentions that every person searches for themselves in various ways throughout their life. The search for self is compounded for the many adoptee because of “closed records and legal fictions – false birth certificates” (p. 111). As the adoptee cognitively and emotionally begins to ask questions and seek information, they may often hit a “brick wall” by having access to either no information or false information and not the truth. Brodzinsky and Brodzinsky (1997) state that during the school age years, children tend to get inquisitive about their adoption and that this is normal. Furthermore, often when the child shows confusion, sadness, and even anger while they are trying to find out why they were given away to different parents. It can be helpful if a therapist, parent, or adult normalizes the child’s reaction regarding their questions around their birthparents, this can ease their anxiety and assist with the relationship of the adoptive parent and child.
Brodzinskiy (1997) states that when an adoptee believes that their birthparents are people who are impaired, uncaring, or inadequate, they are more likely to see their relinquishment as abandonment or rejection and are more likely to internalize these feelings into disapproving self-attributions and become ashamed about being adopted. Children who feel they were bought or stolen from the birthparents are often angry with their adoptive family (Brodzinskiy, Schechter, & Henig, 1992).

Psychosocial Development

Erikson (1963/1950) has been one of the leading figures in conceptualizing child development and following this development across the lifespan. He developed what he considered the eight stages of life. They are as follows: (a) Trust versus Mistrust, (b) Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt, (c) Initiative versus Guilt, (d) Industry versus Inferiority, (e) Identity versus Identity Confusion, (f) Intimacy versus Isolation, (g) Generativity versus Stagnation, and (h) Ego Integrity versus Despair. Following is a detailed description of the eight stages as defined by Erikson.

Stage 1 examines Trust versus Mistrust. This stage is noted to occur during early infancy. Respondents who are high in trust tend to have a basic sense of trust of themselves and others, whereas high scores on Mistrust tend to view the world as inconsistent, stressful, and threatening. Stage 2 examines Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt. Erikson reports that this stage is generally prevalent during late infancy. High scorers have a good sense of themselves and tend to value themselves and see themselves as having control over their lives. Those who are high on Shame and Doubt tend to feel
that they don’t have a sense of self worth, control, or self-sufficiency. They may feel that they are inadequate or worthless.

The third stage is Initiative versus Guilt. Erikson views this stage as occurring in early childhood. Those who are high on Initiative tend to believe that they know how the world works and how to affects its workings. Those high on Guilt tend to feel they have a constant fear of making mistakes, being weak or inadequate and make be over conscientious and may self-restrict. The fourth stage is Industry versus Inferiority, which Erikson noted generally occurs in late childhood. Those individuals who are high on Industry tend to have an active tendency towards learning are competent, and relish achievement in their works, skills, and abilities. Those who are high scorers on Inferiority tend to feel that they are mediocre, incapable, and have a lack of ambition.

The fifth stage is that of Identity versus Identity Confusion, which is noted to occur in adolescence. High scorers on Identity have successfully examined their various role and have integrated them into one consistent identity. They tend to be open to periods of re-evaluation and are able to effectively integrate their own self-concepts into the ways other see them. Those who are high on Identity Confusion tend to have difficulty integrating a central identity and may have difficulties between primary roles and opposing value systems. They tend to not be sure of their basic convictions or of their place in life. Stage 6 is Intimacy versus Isolation, which Erikson noted generally occurs in young adulthood. Those who are high in intimacy tend to be able to commit to concrete relationships and affiliations in order to develop their ethical strength in order to abide by those commitments. Those who are high in Isolation tend to remain alone and
may be seen as self-absorbed because of a fear of ego loss. Commitments may be seen as too restrictive.

Stage 7 is Generativity versus Stagnation, which Erikson noted generally takes place in Middle Adulthood. High scorers in Generativity tend to have a concern and a desire to create a better world. They are able to become involved with conditions beyond their own development and immediate family. Those who are high in Stagnation tend to be seen as having an absence of generative involvement; seen as having a lack of powerful caring. They may seek short-term gratification. The last stage is Ego Integrity versus Despair, which Erikson noted tends to occur in older adulthood. Those who are high on Ego Integrity tend to have a sense that their lives had meaning and significance. Those who are high on Despair tend to review their own life histories and feel that they have misdirected their energies and lost opportunities.

Glenn (1985-1986) states that continuity of the past and present is important for identity formation and when a child is born from a closed adoption, there is usually not access to information on the birthparents. Helwig and Ruthven (1990) report that the only link the adoptee often has to their birthmother is through their body, their genealogical heritage. A non-adopted child usually has the ability to see their own past and future through their parents and other relatives. An adoptee is not able to do this, and instead must “work out from her own body what her mother would have been like, and create a mother who resembles herself, whom she in turn can resemble” (p. 66).

Max Frisk (1964) reported that having a lack of information about one’s genetic background prevents the adoptee from developing a genetic ego. He further states that this is then replaced by a hereditary ghost and that they are not aware of what is being
passed on from generation to generation. Further, interest in sexuality for the adoptee adds in the quest and increased awareness of “how the human race and its characteristics are transmitted from generation to generation” (p. 113). Grotevant (1997) describes that both adopted and non-adopted children share tasks of identity formation, but that adopted children have the added task of integrating their history as an adopted child who has two sets of parents, into their arising sense of identity.

Grotevant (1997) discusses how most of the challenges that adoptees face in their formation of their identity is based on givens in their life and not the choices they make. But that they have choices in how they come to terms with their adoption and how they “become woven into their personal narrative” (p. 9). Brodzinsky et al. (1992) claim that every adoptee engages internally in a search process. This process begins during their school years and continues throughout their life.

Kelly, Towner-Thyrum, Rigby, and Martin (1998) conclude that adoptees have been as successful in achieving developmental tasks at the appropriate time and that subtle differences do exist in the adoptive family that may be related to the existence of realistic self-appraisal throughout their identity formation. Their findings are consistent with findings by Hoopes (1982) that adoptive families are more likely to be less individuated than non-adoptive families, they are less likely to be comfortable in the role of parents, the bias of adoptive families to be more child-dominated.

Sorosky et al. (1978) state that the more open the communication is between the adoptee and their adoptive parents, the less likely they are to resort to excessive fantasizing or acting out “to fill an identity lacunae” (p. 119). The process of identity formation is a lifelong process and it may repeat itself across the development of the
adoptive. Partridge (1991) declares that some adoptees may experience life crises that go beyond their adoption, but that it is important to realize that all adoptees "face particular challenges that must be mastered on the road to emotional maturity and identity consolidation" (p. 197).

Family Environment

How does the adoptee perceive their adoptive family (i.e., the social climate)? Martin, Kelly, and Townner-Thyrum (1999) were interested in this question and examined 51 adoptees who were college students. They were interviewed according to a structure which was derived from Kirk's (1981) interview format. The 10 categories were (a) the presence of major family disruption, (b) the presence of inter-racial or intercultural adoption, (c) the adoptee's age when told they were adopted, (d) the adoptee's desire to search for birthparents, (e) the mother's comfort in talking about her child's adoption, (f) the father's comfort in talking about his child's adoption, (g) how satisfied the adoptee is with their adoption status, (h) the adoptee's acknowledgement of life differences due to being an adopted child, and (i) the adoptee's attitude toward the birthmother.

They also completed the Family Environment Scale (FES), 3rd edition (Moos & Moos, 1994). This instrument is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Martin, Kelly, and Townner-Thyrum (1999) developed scores for each of the 10 FES scales and for each of the 10 Kirk variables. They found that adoptee satisfaction was positively correlated with family expressiveness, intellectual cultural orientation, active recreational orientation, cohesion, moral religious emphasis, and negatively connected with conflict. These
researchers further reported that adoptee satisfaction was most related to the high levels of expressiveness, active involvement together, various recreational activities, and low levels of conflict.

This study found that general family environment was not predicted by the adoptee’s decision to search for birthparents, age at the time of their adoption, adoptee acknowledgement of differences, and the presence of a major family disruption (Martin, Kelly, & Towner-Thyrum, 1999). The researchers conclude that the satisfaction of the adoptee with their own adoptive status played a stronger role in the family than tasks focusing on open communication regarding adoption.

Psychological Adjustment

Wierzbicki (1993) conducted a meta-analysis of 66 published studies that compared the psychological adjustment of adoptees and non-adoptees. The criteria for his study was that the studies were published in English, that they were not limited to children taken away due to parents having psychological difficulties, and reported enough data to calculate an effect size.

He found an overall effect size of .72 indicating that adoptees had significantly higher levels of maladjustment than did nonadoptees (Wierzbicki, 1993). Another finding was that adoptees tended to have higher levels of externalizing disorders and academic difficulties than nonadoptees. He found a mean effect size of 1.38 indicating that adoptees are over represented in the clinical population. The final result is that the mean effect sizes tended to be larger for adolescent adoptees than children and adult adoptees.
A cause of these difficulties was not found, though Wierzbicki reported that both the environment and genetic factors may contribute to the adoptees increased risk for psychological maladjustment.

A study conducted by Cubito and Brandon (2000) examined the psychosocial adjustment of adult adoptees in the assessment of anger, distress, and depression. They had a sample of 525 female adoptees and 191 male adoptees. The participants completed 4 scales and their scores were compared to a nonclinical normative data sample by gender and search group (whether or not they had searched for birthparents).

Post-hoc analyses revealed that male non searchers exhibited marginally less anger than did male searchers. Among the women, the non searchers had significantly less anger than did the searcher or the reunited groups. Male searchers had significantly higher scores on the BSI than the male non-searchers. Women searchers had marginally higher scores than non searchers but were not significant.

These results, though they do not compare adult adoptees to a comparison sample, may be seen as suggesting that adoptees are at an increased risk for overall distress, depression, and anger. What is extremely important is that there may be significant results among the different groups, the scores do fall short of being in the clinical range when compared to outpatient norms.

Search and Reunion

When searching the bookshelves at a local bookstore in the area of adoption there many books which have recently been published which are personal narratives of an adult adoptee sharing their search and reunion story. In 1998, Susan Saffian wrote a book
entitled *Ithaka*, which is her story about being found by her birthmother. Also in 1998, Lynn Franklin with the assistance of Elizabeth Ferber wrote a book entitled *May the circle be unbroken: An intimate journey into the heart of adoption*. This book is a birthmother’s experience of being reunited with her son whom she gave up to adoption. Another book which is edited by Susan Wadia-Ells (1995) is called *The adoption reader*. This book is a compilation of the stories of 9 birthmothers, 13 adoptive mothers, and 9 female adoptees. All of the books are important in that they inform the audience that these people have something important to say and that they are willing to share their narratives. These narratives are a way for these authors to share and inform the readers about the complexities of these issues. As a researcher this is a positive place to begin. What has not occurred is an analysis of these stories for the point of developing theory.

Pacheco and Eme (1993) conducted an outcome study which examined the outcome of search and reunion between the adoptee and the biological parents. They conducted a telephone interview with 72 adoptees who were members of an adoption search group. Twenty-five percent reported that they began searching for their birth parents due to their own pregnancy or birth of a child, 14% searched for a medical or health reason, 11% searched after their adoptive parents death, 7% searched after their engagement or marriage, 5% reported it was due to stress, 15% reported it was not because of anything significant, and 35% reported it was “other.”

These participants were asked 21 questions regarding their reunion (Pacheco & Eme, 1993). Forty-five percent of the participants reported having contact with their biological family bimonthly/monthly/holidays. Only 15% reported having no contact with their biological family following their reunion.
Several of the questions they were asked addressed their psychological adjustment following their reunion. Eighty-five percent reported that they felt the reunion improved their self-concept about themselves, while 7% reported they disagreed with this statement, and 8% were uncertain. When asked about their emotional outlook on life, 74% endorsed that this had improved, 15% disagreed with the statement, and while 11% reported that they were uncertain.

Pacheco and Eme (1993) reported that the vast majority of the adoptees surveyed had a good relationship with their adoptive family and their impetus for searching was not because of dissatisfaction with them. The question that remains is what is the process like for them in terms of deciding whether or not to search. Research has tended to focus on the search and reunion. The question that remains is what happens before this activity takes place.

Moran (1994) examined the stages which occur following a reunion with biological parents for some adult adoptees. Moran who is also an adoptee and a professional counselor utilizes her own searching experience as a case study and reports that she integrates her clinical experience. She develops a theory that post-reunion there are four stages of which an adoptee goes through: (a) paralysis, (b) eruption, (c) loss and grief, and (d) empowerment. She describes paralysis as the initial feeling after walking away from the first encounter after meeting the person who gave you life. Moran noted that this came from the fact that it is a “culmination of great expectations” (p. 258). The paralysis comes in because of an overload of emotions. Eruption is the second stage and she indicates that this is a result of reality and years of “building and nourishing the fantasies” (p. 258). She indicates that letting go of these fantasies is not easy.
The third stage is described as loss and grief (Moran, 1994). She stated that this is when the adoptee realizes that the primary bonding ended at the birth and that this cannot be recaptured. She reports that this stage of mourning can be the longest stage until the adoptee realizes that the only thing to do is accept the reality. This fourth stage of empowerment is when the adoptee is finally able to move past what has occurred and to grow into self-knowledge and self-acceptance. She indicates the importance for counselors to be aware of the emotions which an adoptee is most likely to grow through post-reunion. This knowledge can help the counselor become aware of the steps which need to be followed to reach a healthy conclusion.

It appears that Moran (1994) has demonstrated the ability for an adoptee and also adoption professionals, to be unable to disentangle the web for helping adoptees. Moran noted that she would not want to separate the two and that in her experience the subjective and objective are complementary. This article is based on clinical experience and does not involve the use of objective research skills, at least not demonstrated in this article.

Triseliotis (1973) interviewed 70 adult adoptees who had contacted a government agency for their birth records. The main themes which arose for them to search were: (a) desire to compare their own image with that of a biological relative; (b) a desire to know what biological parents looked like with regard to their eye color, hair color, and height; (c) a desire to be able to form an accurate mental picture of them; (d) a wish to know who they are alike and who they resemble; and (e) a desire to understand contradictory physical characteristics. This researcher concluded that one of the main reason for searching was to discover people with whom they are similar.
Aumend and Barrett (1984) were interested in determining if adoptees who search for birthparents were different in terms of their own self-concept than were adoptees who decided not to search. They conducted a study with 113 adoptees (searchers = 66, non searchers = 47). The results of Aumend and Barrett’s study suggested that non searchers had more positive self-concepts than the searchers. Also, the nonsearching adult adoptees reported more positive attitudes toward their adoptive mothers and fathers. Ninety-eight percent of the non searchers were reported to be placed with the adoptive parents before the age of six months, and almost eighty percent of searchers were placed in their adoptive homes before the age of six months. Overall the study reported that adoptees regardless of searching status did not demonstrate low self-concept.

Summary

The aforementioned literature is offered as a basis for this exploratory investigation and therefore no a priori hypotheses were assumed. This study is attempting to examine the psychological impact of being an adoptee and how this may have on the decision to search or not search for their birth parents. It will examine the potential differences that might exist between the adoptee who has externally searched and those adoptees who have not searched for their birthparents in terms of their psychological makeup with respect to grief and non-death loss, attachment, psychosocial development, and family functioning of the their adoptive family. Given the critical importance of understanding the dynamics of adoption on all members of the adoption triangle, this study will help explore the impact of the searching process on the adult adoptee.
CHAPTER III

Methodology

This qualitative inquiry involved an examination of the psychological factors which are involved and may contribute to an adult adoptee's decision of whether or not to search for their birthparents. Based on the lack of existing empirical literature that examines the processes an adoptee goes through in his/her search for origins, it is important to gain a better understanding of the adoption population. This section discusses the study's setting, selection of the participants, data collection procedures, establishing and building trustworthiness, and data analysis procedures. Before this discussion, it is imperative that information be shared about the researcher and her two research assistants and her peer debriefer for the purpose of introducing the worldview of the researcher and the current study.

Pilot Study

Farrar, Palmer, and Beckworth (2001) conducted an exploratory investigation of the psychological differences that exist between the adoptee that has searched and the adoptee that has not searched for his/her birthparents from a quantitative lens. This study began to explore the impact of the searching process on the adult adoptee. The purpose was to examine the impact that adoption has on adoptees along the developmental lifespan, in terms of the impact of that primary object loss, the effects on attachment
throughout the adoptee’s life, and the impact on the adoptee's formation of his/her identity. Furthermore, the study investigated the social climate of the adoptive family. Participants were 25 adoptees who were over the age of 18 years old and were adopted before their first birthday. Each participant completed questions about their adoption, and several instruments: Measures of Psychosocial Development (Hawley, 1988), Non-Death Version of the Grief Experience Inventory (Sanders, Mauger, & Strong, 1985), Life InterPersonal History Enquiry (Schutz, 1989), and the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1994).

Frequencies were computed for all variables in order to gain a better understanding of adult adoptees. Based upon these findings and the lack of psychological literature in this area, this research will review the need for qualitative research to be conducted to further examine the intricacies of the psychological impact for adoptees of deciding whether or not to search for their birthparents. Participants were adult adoptees who were adopted before their first birthday.

Participants were recruited via a broadcast e-mail sent to a private northeastern university population and flyers around the same university campus. Participants consisted of adult adoptees who were scattered across the United States (due to e-mails being forwarded to family/friends). All materials were mailed to the potential participant who contacted the researcher and indicated their desire to learn more about the study and met the study criteria. If they agreed to participate they returned the information in a self-addressed envelope to the primary researcher. Forty packets were mailed and 25 were completed and returned (Response Rate = 62.5%). The 25 participants who participated were organized into three categories (16 had searched, 6 had not decided
whether or not they planned on searching, and 3 had decided against searching at this time). Clinical differences did not emerge in the means and standard deviations either between groups or when compared to the normative data. Since the groups are small, power was less than optimal. These variables, which were measured by the instruments, were deemed appropriate by the existing literature, but the instruments may not accurately address the complexities of the factors being studied. These results support the need of qualitative data to examine in greater detail, and more specifically, the factors related to the decision whether or not to search. Based on the findings of this research, it was determined that the researcher would proceed with a qualitative dissertation utilizing an ethnographic design with the goal of developing grounded theory, which indicates that their will be no preconceived theory but will allow the data to emerge.

Researcher Worldview

At the time of the conclusion of the research, the primary researcher is a 29-year-old Caucasian female who is concluding her 5th year as a doctoral student in counseling psychology. She was adopted within the first year of her life. Her reported biological ethnicity is Polish and French. Her adoptive mother is Polish and her adoptive father is Lebanese. She has a 26-year old brother who is also adopted. This researcher began her search for her biological parents when she was 19 years old at which time she received non-identifying information and found out that her adoption records were closed. Upon receipt of that information this researcher decided that she would never search for more information and became angry at the fact that no identifying information was available. She completed a form, which gave the adoption agency the ability to contact her if a
matching form was ever received from the birthmother. To date, no further search efforts have ensued. It was decided that for purposes of this research that no personal decisions to search or not to search would be determined during this time. This researcher's identified theoretical orientation is described as both developmental and psychodynamic in nature. Also, the primary researcher has been in personal therapy for four years. It was determined that she would continue in therapy throughout the dissertation process in order to discuss personal reactions and issues, which may be brought up during the research process in order.

This researcher has employed two research assistants to aid with this project. The first researcher assistant is Douglas Beckworth is a 28-year old Irish-African American male who is also adopted. He was adopted at the age of 6 after living with three foster families. Mr. Beckworth has a master's in counseling and volunteered his services to the primary researcher. He has just completed his first year as a doctoral student in counseling psychology. His primary responsibility was in reviewing the accuracy of the transcriptions of the interviews (which were transcribed verbatim by the primary researcher) by listening to the audio-tape and concurrently reading the transcripts.

A second research assistant worked with Anne Farrar on identifying existing themes (research auditor). Her name is Maria Valle. Ms. Valle is a 41-year old female who is married and has two children. She earned a master's degree in counseling and to date has completed her second year in a counseling psychology doctoral program (though she withdrew from the program due to familial issues). Ms. Valle is a Hispanic woman who is not adopted and has not a member of the adoption triad.
A third assistant was utilized as a peer debriefer to be discussed in more detail below. Ms. Nouriman Ghahary is a 38-year-old Iranian female who is currently a fourth year counseling psychology doctoral student. Ms. Ghahary has no connection to the adoption profession either personally or professionally and was deemed an appropriate objective person to aid the researcher throughout the process.

Setting

All interviews took place in a place named by the participant with the main requirement that it was conducive to audio-taping. All travel expenses on the researcher's behalf were covered by the researcher. The settings in which the interviews took place was inside the participants' home, the university library in a private room, and one interview took place outdoors.

Sample Selection Procedures

This study is influenced by the ethnographic and naturalistic method of inquiry of qualitative research. The initial task was to identify the group of people, which will be examined. Since in today's society there are many forms of adoption, specific selection criteria were utilized in order to best understand the issues of this population of adoptees. In this study all participants were adult adoptees who fit the following criteria: (a) they are 18 years old or older, (b) adopted within the first 12 months of life, (c) are adopted into families of the same race and are not adopted from another country, and (d) did not reside with any biological relatives after their adoption. Ethnicity, age, gender, and socio-economic status were not used as criteria in choosing adoptees.
Selection of participants was seen as purposeful as opposed to an ad hoc process. Each participant was chosen only after the previous interview had been conducted and analyzed. This was to ensure a variety of participants to cover the three search categories as well as to allow a distribution of adult adoptees across the life span. This would ensure that not all participants belonged to the same search category and were approximately the same age. This was necessary because grounded theory is flexible and it accounts for variation; the research calls for modifications when emerging or established conditions change or as more is gathered (Charmaz, 2000). It is based on the constructivist assumptions that there are multiple social realities, and that there is a mutual creation of knowledge by both the viewer and the viewed. In qualitative research, generalization is not based on randomization as in quantitative studies (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984). Inferential processes are based on sequential and logical inferences, which are based on the corroborative data. Charmaz states that during grounded theory research it is imperative that the researcher collects data and simultaneously analyzes the data.

*Purposeful/Maximum Variation Sampling*

Lincoln and Guba (1985) report that all data sampling is done with a purpose in mind, and that is to gain as much information as possible from the participants including all of its various ramifications and constructions. They report four main requirements in purposeful sampling. The first is that no a priori specifications of the sample are set: no specific distribution is set up such as what ages of participants and how many participants in each category. The second is that each participant is selected only after the previous
participant has been analyzed. The purpose of the next participant is to fill in the gaps of information gathered so far and to extend the knowledge, which has already been learned. The third factor is that there is a continual adjustment of the focus. This means that as the researcher gains more knowledge and begins to develop working hypotheses then the sample can be more refined and focus on what seems to be the most relevant in terms of adding more information to what has already been gained. The fourth is that data collection stops after the information, which is being gathered, becomes redundant.

No power analyses were prepared in advance to alert the researcher to how many participants were needed as in quantitative data because it was impossible to tell when the point of maximum variation would be reached. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated, “if the purpose is to maximize information, then sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from newly sampled units; thus redundancy is the primary criterion” (p. 202). With this in mind, the sample was selected in ways to impart the greatest amount of information available. Therefore, what is important is not “how many individuals exhibit this concept but rather in how often this concept emerges and what it looks like (i.e., properties) under varying conditions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 95).

Serial selection was utilized and therefore a participant will only be chosen after the previous participant has both been interviewed and their interview data analyzed. The next participant was then chosen in order to further extend the knowledge gathered and to fill in gaps in the information, which was shared. This procedure of sampling is called theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The number of cases, which are analyzed, is unimportant. What is important is how each participant can help the researcher develop theoretical insights into the psychological processes, which occur in
adult adoptees in the search for the origins. The researcher then interviewed adoptees across the continuum of whether or not they have externally searched for their birthparents.

Participant Recruitment

Adult adoptees were recruited via a multitude of means in order to enhance the variation of participation. Flyers and e-mail (see Appendix A) were used as means of announcing the research. E-mail was posted to a local university community bulletin board as well as sent to several list-serves and bulletin boards on the internet. Flyers were also posted at an adoption conference which took place in November 2001. Finally, previous research participants who completed a contact sheet agreeing to be contacted in the future, were notified by the primary researcher via e-mail.

The primary form of recruitment for this study (7 of the 10 participants) were participants from the previous study. Two participants were recruited after viewing the flyer, and the 10th participant found out about the study from the adoption conference in November.

Once the potential research participants were identified they received a descriptive literature outlining the purpose of the study and the type of participants sought. This information was either be mailed or e-mailed to them depending on their preference. Upon reviewing the material they then contacted the researcher and informed her of whether or not they are interested in being a potential participant. A monetary incentive was given to each participant at the end of the interview in the amount of $30.00.
Making Contact with the Participants

After a potential adoptee was identified and they reviewed the descriptive material, contact was be made by telephone or e-mail in order to ascertain their interest. This researcher contacted each participant and answered any questions that they might have about the research and the interview process. At this point the researcher then asked several screening questions (see Appendix B) in order to determine if the person met the requirements of the study. If they agreed to participate in the process then an interview day and time was arranged. At the time of the interview the consent form (see Appendix D) was reviewed and each participant was informed that they were free to discontinue, without penalty, at any point during the interview process. All of the participants who agreed to take part in the study completed the interview in its entirety.

After the interview and the transcription of the interview and data analysis, each participant received a copy of their transcript in order to correct, amend, or even extend the information, which they shared with the researcher during the interview. Each participant was free to write comments on the transcript and return it to researcher if they so desired. Also, approximately 2 weeks after receipt of the transcript, each participant received a phone call from the researcher in order to ascertain their views of their transcript and to answer any questions that they had about the research process and their involvement. At this time, the researcher has not received any of the transcripts back nor did any of the participants indicate any changes to the transcript. The participants were encouraged to review their transcripts in order to notify the researcher of any misinformation or additional information, which they felt should know to fully comprehend their narrative. Lincoln and Guba (1998) indicate the member checks are
one of the most important elements in establishing credibility. This was in order to check in with the members (participants) about their views of the interview and the transcript. The ethnographic interviews were audio-tape recorded with the participant’s permission (see Appendix D).

Research was conducted according to the ethical principles for research involving human participants (American Psychological Association, 1987). They were told that they were free to withdraw participation at any time during the interview without explanation. None of the participants asked to stop the interview. They were also informed that the information would be deidentified and transcribed by the interviewer. Further they were informed that the transcripts may also be read by the researcher’s committee members and that excerpts and themes may be both presented at conferences and appear in print. This study was submitted and received full approval by the Institutional Review Board at Seton Hall University.

Description of the Participants

The information presented below was deidentified in order to protect the privacy of the participants.

Participant 1 – Christian

At the time of the interview, Christian was a 27-year old Caucasian single male in his first year of graduate study in the mental health field. He resides with his adopted parents. Christian defined himself as a non-searcher. He has a sister who is also adopted and she is married and just had her first child. In terms of adoption, Christian indicated
that he has spoken with his adoptive mother, at times, about his adoption status but that he has not discussed it with his father.

Participant 2 – Matthew

Matthew is a 38-year old Caucasian male who has a professional degree. He has one adopted brother. Matthew found out that he was adopted in his thirties and within six months of this information he searched and found his biological parents. Matthew indicated that adoption is a topic that is not discussed in their house, particularly with their mother. He noted that his parents are aware of that he is in contact with his birth mother but that is all that has been discussed. Matthew described himself as having a good relationship with his biological mother. He had met his biological father prior to his dying. Matthew currently lives with his significant other. He describes himself as very different from his brother.

Participant 3 – Karen

Karen is a 31-year old Caucasian female who is married and pregnant with her second child. She searched and found her biological parents who had married and have two other biological children with whom she has had a relationship. One of her full brothers had died at the time of the interview. Karen has a graduate degree in the mental health field and at this time is a full-time mom who is contemplating returning to graduate school. Growing up she lived with her adoptive parents, an adopted brother, and a young sister who is a biological child. She noted that her brother is married to his third wife. He has a daughter from his first marriage and his current wife has a child
from a previous relationship and together they have two sons. Her sister is married and has been having difficulty with infertility problems. She described adoption as a open topic in their house and felt no ill will toward her parent’s biological child. Karen reported that all of the children were treated fairly. She reported that she has a close relationship with her sister yet a strained relationship with her brother due to their multiple differences.

**Participant 4 – Judy**

Judy is a 54-year old Caucasian woman who is married and has two adult sons. She defined herself as a non-searcher. Both of her adopted parents are deceased. She works full time. She grew up as an only child and lived with her adoptive parents. She described her parents as being very open with her adoption story.

**Participant 5 – April**

April is a 34-year old Caucasian female who is single and currently involved in a relationship. She is not married and does not have any children. She described herself as a non-searcher. She works full-time. Her adoptive parents divorced when she was approximately 8 years of age and she resided with her mother and adopted brother. April describes feeling very open to discussing adoption within the family environment but that due to several experiences, outside of the family, she did not discuss her adoption status with anyone. April notes that she has a distant relationship with her brother as well as her father. She notes that her father remarried twice and that he was not available to her throughout her childhood.
Participant 6 - Jill

Jill is a 24-year old Caucasian female who is single. She is not married and does not have any children. She is a graduate student. She defined herself as a non-searcher. She currently resides at home and commutes to school. She grew up with her adoptive parents and younger brother. Jill indicates that adoption was an open topic in their house and it was only talked about in her family when someone would bring up the topic.

Participant 7 - Lucy

Linda is a 53-year old Caucasian female who is married and has two adopted children. She is a professional in the mental health field. She described herself as a person in the search process. Linda grew up with her adoptive parents and her younger adopted brother. Linda indicates that she spoke to her parents about adoption and that it was celebrated openly. The day she was adopted was her mother’s birthday. She notes that she does not have a close relationship with her brother.

Participant 8 - Cathy

Cathy is a 27-year old Caucasian female who is single and is currently involved in a relationship. She has a graduate degree in the mental health field and is employed full-time. She described herself as a person in the search process. Cathy grew up with her adopted parents and her older adopted brother. She noted that approximately 1 ½ years earlier that her father died of cancer. Cathy indicated that her brother’s biological mother searched and found him and that he actually moved out of state and moved in with her in her home and at the same time cut off relations with her adopted parents. Cathy notes
that adoption was typically a closed topic in her home and people were not comfortable in asking questions. She also indicates that at the time of this interview she was involved in her own personal psychotherapy in order to help her deal with some of her issues.

**Participant 9 - Sarah**

Sarah is a 32-year old Caucasian female who is single. She works in the field of education and is looking for a career change. Sarah indicated that she has searched and found her biological mother, with whom she now has a relationship. She indicated that she is not interested in finding her biological father at this time. Sarah grew up with her adopted parents and her older adopted sister. She also has a brother who is the biological child of her adopted parents. She noted that her brother is married and has four children and that her sister is not married and has two children. Her adoptive family resides on the West coast and therefore they don’t see each other that often with the exception of a few times per year. Sarah indicated that adoption was open for discussion in their house.

**Participant 10 - Paula**

Paula is a 59-year old Caucasian female who is married and has two adult children. She is an artist and works in the field of adoption advocacy. She describes herself in the search process and shares her story of her search for her biological family. Paula grew up with her adoptive parents as their only child. Her mother suffered a mental disorder and died when she was approximately 12 years of age. Her parents separated for approximately 2 years, between the ages of 8 and 10. After her mother’s death, Paula resided with her father. She noted that her father was an alcoholic. He
remarried twice after her mother’s death and they both died prior to him. Paula noted that she only began searching for her biological family upon her father’s death and stated that he probably would have supported her in her quest but that it was easier to wait.

Data Collection Techniques

Within this naturalistic inquiry, the primary mode of data collection was the ethnographic interview.

*Ethnographic Interview*

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) stated that qualitative researchers “deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand” (pp. 3-4). Lincoln and Guba (1985) reported that there are multiple ways to gain information but that the “human instrument” is a primary mode of collecting the information.

A semistructured interview was utilized. This technique is employed when the researcher is aware of what they do not know and can formulate particular questions in order to find out the information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of semistructured questions allows the researcher to ask questions in a systematic and consistent fashion, but they are allowed to digress and to probe beyond the answers to the prepared questions (Berg, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) reported that it is best to begin an interview with general questions in order to develop rapport with the interviewee and therefore gain their trust. Then as the interview progresses moved into the more focused and probing questions.
The semi-structured questions were informed by a thorough review of the literature and also the experience of the author as an adoptee, which assisted in shaping of the questions. As already described the research design was emergent in nature in that this researcher may make slight modifications in the interview protocol as the study progresses based on themes that may be emerging from interviews and are not included in the existing structure. Appendix E contains the original set of semi-structured questions. The interview guide was only changed once during the process of the 10 interviews.

During the first interview the concept of existence was brought up in terms of abortion versus adoption as a choice of the biological mother. Christian, in the first interview, spoke about how he was “probably like 2 seconds away from like being like totally off (laugh) or something.” Christian continues on about he is not angry with his biological mother about giving him up for adoption and is thankful for her choice to relinquish him for adoption. Therefore, a question was added which asks whether or not their political worldview has been impacted by their adoption status. This additional question brought up views of several of the participants regarding their thankfulness to their biological mother for giving them life. It appears that this theme, though not directly correlated to the decision of whether or not to externally search for birthparents, offers some explanation of how the adoptees are conceptualizing their biological mother and how this may impact their decision of whether or not they would like to meet her and what they would like to say to her if they do. As will be discussed in detail later, several of the participants addressed their feelings that they feel that they should be pro-life because their biological mother could have opted to have an abortion but the majority of
them felt that they agreed with the woman’s right to choose. Appendix F contains the revised set of semi-structured questions.

In general, the interviewees were asked to discuss the psychological and factual processes they have gone through in thinking about searching for biological parents, their thoughts on adoption in general, their adoptive family, and their experiences as adopted individuals.

_Probing_. During the interview it was necessary to follow up with all of the participants on answers to questions from the respondent. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) report that directed cues allow the researcher more information than was originally gained by the question. This flexibility during the interview allows for the respondents narrative to emerge and allows the researcher to follow up on leads or return to earlier points in the interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Supplemental Data**

Supplemental data collection was utilized by several methods such as: (a) audio-tape recording of the ethnographic interview, (b) typewriting transcripts, (c) field notes, and (d) a research journal.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) report that audio-tape recording provides an opportunity to review as often as necessary to gain a full understanding, the ability to review for nonverbal cues (e.g., changes in voice quality and pauses). It also allows for completeness in that there is so much information, which the researcher is required to absorb that this allows the researcher to not have to rely purely on memory. It serves to increase the reliability of the interview. As previously noted, the participants signed a
consent form, which informs them that the interviews will be audio-taped (see Appendix D). Participants were also be reminded before the interview begins to ensure their comfort level. If the participants were not comfortable completing the interview at the time, the participant would have been thanked for their time and received a $30.00 stipend for their time. This did not occur. All 10 participants completed the entire interview process. The second form of data will be that audio-tapes were transcribed by the researcher and then reviewed by Douglas Beckworth for accuracy. Douglas simultaneously listened to the tape and read the transcript. If he found a discrepancy he would then change the transcript to read exactly as the interview.

The third form of data collection is the field notes, which were taken by the researcher during the interview. Berg (1998) stated that field notes should be completed immediately following the interview as well as after any potential accidental meetings with participants (e.g., see them in grocery stores, doctor’s office). This is in an attempt to record everything about an observation or experience in the field. Berg reported that these field notes should include any key phrases or key words, which will assist the researcher to reproduce conversations as well as include any information regarding physical appearance of interviewees such as their clothes, physical demeanor, and other information, which may not be information, shared during the interview.

This researcher saw two of the participants following the interview. Christian (1st interview) was seen across multiple occasions due to attending the same university. Paula (10th interview) was seen at another adoption conference in April 2002.

The fourth method of data collection is a research journal. Lincoln and Guba (1985) call this a “reflexive journal.” It contains a discussion of each interview, as well
as noting emerging themes, and interpretations of interviews. A research assistant, Maria Valle, who also served as the independent auditor, reviewed the reflexive journal.

Referral System

The goal of this research was to gain insight into the psychological processes, that exist for adoptees in the decision of whether or not they decide to search for their birthparents. It was not used as an attempt to resolve any potential conflicts, which may exist for the participants. Since all adoptees were asked to recall their own adoption narrative that might have led to topics that might result in the participants' experiencing feelings that may lead to discomfort, all participants were aware that the researcher could supply them with the name of a local community mental health facility as well as the names of practicing psychologists to participants who requested this information. To date, this information has not been requested. Further, this is stated in the consent form (see Appendix D) as well as discussed following the ethnographic interview during the debriefing process.

Trustworthiness: Establishing, Building, and Maintaining

Lincoln and Guba (1985) report that one of the most important aspects of qualitative research is ensuring trustworthiness. They note four main criteria that combine to make trustworthiness. These researchers believe that certain tasks such as maintaining field notes, triangulating data, doing debriefings, gathering referential information, and maintaining an audit trail increase the likelihood of trustworthiness existing in the study. The four main tools they discuss are: (a) credibility, (b)
transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. These are used in qualitative researcher in similar ways that correspond to quantitative studies such as internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Credibility

This has been reported to be the most important component of establishing the trustworthiness of research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). In order to insure the validity of the research the searcher must establish the truth of the findings of the particular study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba suggest the following four methods to ensure credibility: (a) activities that increase the probability that credible findings will be formed such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation; (b) peer debriefing, (c) negative case analysis, and (d) member checking. This has been compared to internal validity.

Prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. Prolonged engagement is the idea that the researcher needs to spend an adequate amount of time with the participants to ensure time to build trust, learn the culture, and test for misinformation either from informants or from their own biases (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). This allows for the participants to feel more comfortable with the researcher in order to feel safe sharing their stories. Prolonged engagement will hopefully be accomplished in this study by having multiple contacts with each participant both on the phone and in person. This was done by the initial telephone/e-mail contact, the descriptive letter, scheduling of the interview, the ethnographic interview, and the follow-up to review the transcript. Another form of prolonged engagement will be through the
use of the audio-tape. The researcher conducted the interview, transcribed the tape, and then reviewed the transcript to ensure accuracy and gain a better understanding of the material uncovered.

Persistent observation is to identify the characteristics that are most relevant to the questions being asked (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). This provides an in-depth examination of the query and allowing them to examine more carefully the details of the research. To achieve this it is important for the researcher to maintain continuous engagement with the material and to examine it in detail.

Triangulation has been discussed above as a form of using multiple techniques to ensure that multiple methods be utilized such the use of an ethnographic interview to gather more information.

Peer debriefing. A peer debriefer is a disinterested person who is utilized in a “manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit in the inquirers mind” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). This contributes to the credibility of the research by exposing the researcher to searching questions from the peer, which is aimed at probing biases, and clarifying interpretations. This was utilized in this study by face-to-face and phone call meetings with Ms. Nouriman Gahary. The point was for Ms. Gahary to keep the researcher on the track by keeping her honest about her observations and perceptions. As mentioned previously, this researcher has been and continues to be in individual therapy. These sessions have focused on allowing the researcher time to react to the interview subjectively in order to discuss her emotional reactions and for them not to impede the objectivity of the research.
Negative case analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that the object of the research is to continuously refine the hypotheses, which emerge to eliminate exceptions and continue until they fit into the hypothesis. They state that negative cases are those participants whose responses are different from the others. Positive cases are those cases whose responses agreed with previous cases. This researcher will continue data collection until the data collected becomes redundant and common themes have emerged.

Member checking. Spradley (1979) noted that this is the most important aspect of credibility and it involves the respondents. They are asked to review and check the transcripts by examining the categories, conclusions, and interpretations of the examiner. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) report that when the respondents agree with the interpretations of the researcher then and only then can the research be considered credible. This important element of credibility will be utilized by the researcher by mailing out a copy of the transcript as well as the themes, which they feel emerged from the interview and integrate feedback from the participant. At this time, none of the participants have returned their transcripts; phone contact has been made with each of them either via answering machine or by speaking with them, it is thus the belief of this researcher that the participants are in agreement with their transcripts and interpretations of such.

Dependability

This concept can be compared to reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This asks question, is this information reliable and if so, could these results be consistent and found in another study. This is taking the raw data, which is gathered, and organizing it and
explaining the themes and results in a manner that are understandable to others. This researcher will do her best to ensure that the themes are accurate. This was examined with two separate and independent audits of the transcripts, which took place, by the researcher and Ms. Valle. Then Ms. Valle and the researcher met and reviewed each of the ten interviews in order to collapse the themes. With the exception of one time, Ms. Valle and this researcher were in full agreement with each of the themes. The only disagreement was actually not over the theme but the interpretation of whether or not it was a positive or negative element in their life.

**Confirmability**

This concept can be compared to objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It basically seeks to determine that the study is both reliable and valid and that it is not based on subjective reactions. This was ensured hopefully with the use of the peer debriefer, the use of a second coder, and the researchers therapist to minimize the amount of subjective material, which enters into the research.

*Inquiry Audit.* Lincoln and Guba have suggested that the research use an inquiry audit as a means to both examine the dependability and credibility of a qualitative study. This is to ensure that the researcher’s subjective experiences stay outside of the research. An auditor is a researcher who dispassionately examines the process by reviewing both the process of the inquiry and the results (i.e., transcripts of ethnographic interviews). They suggest that the auditor examine the audit trail which is the written record kept by the researcher including the field notes and transcripts.
This study will be audited by Ms. Maria Valle who examined all written material by the researcher including raw data, data reduction products, notes, and will review the themes which have been noted by the researcher. This will help look for bias on the part of the researcher as well as serve to look at the inter-rater reliability among data reduction.

*Reflexive Journal*

The final recommendation by Lincoln and Guba (1985) regarding credibility is for the researcher to keep a reflexive journal. They described the journal as:

A kind of diary in which the investigator on a daily basis, or as needed, records a variety of information about self…and method. With respect to the self, the reflexive journal might be thought of as providing the same kind of data about the human instrument that is often providing about the paper-and-pencil or brass instruments used in conventional studies. With respect to method, the journal provides information about methodological decisions made and the reasons for making them – information also of great import to the auditor. (p. 327)

They state that this is another technique to ensure all four areas of trustworthiness: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. In this study the researcher maintained a journal in which she will record her insights, possible themes, reflections, and impressions of the participants. This was maintained from the beginning of the data collection to the end of the study. It was reviewed by the auditor and its contents were discussed with both the peer debriefer and the researcher's therapist.
Data Analysis

As has been discussed in detail, this research was emergent in design and utilized grounded theory and the ethnographic interview. This method of data analysis is called the *constant comparative method* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method indicates that researcher will be simultaneously collecting and analyzing the data. They report that its purpose is to generate grounded theory. Grounded theory means that theory is “derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). The method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory all stand in close relationship to each other. The goal of this research is to generate grounded theory concerning the psychological processes, which exist in determining whether or not an adoptee decides to search for their birthparents.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) list six essential characteristics of a grounded theorist. They are as follows: (a) the ability to step back and critically analyze situation, (b) ability to recognize the tendency toward bias, (c) the ability to think abstractly, (d) the ability to be flexible and open to helpful criticism, (e) sensitivity to the words and actions of the respondents, and (f) a sense of absorption and devotion to the work process. It is hoped that all six of these characteristics will be adhered to carefully by this researcher and her assistants.

Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) report that there are two main processes: (a) unitizing and (b) categorizing. They describe unitizing as the “breaking the text into units of information that will serve as the basis for defining the categories” (p. 123). They describe categorizing as the way to “bring together into provisional categories those units that related to the same content, devising rules that describe category properties, and
rendering each category set internally consistent and the entire set mutually exclusive” (p. 123).

In this study these two processes were achieved by unitizing the interview transcript. The transcripts were reviewed and the units were then placed into conditional categories that emerged from the units. These categories were flexible and open to redefinition as more units are placed into categories.

It was then important for the researcher to begin to integrate the categories that are similar and possibly have to redefine them. This process was open to flexibility based on the input from the researcher and the auditor. The next task was to delimit the theory, which arose from the research, and the final task was to write about the theory by which the results demonstrate.

Specifically, this researcher prior to beginning the coding process read each of the transcripts in complete in order to reacquaint with the data. After this she would read the transcript and make notes in the column of the document noting themes or topics being discussed for a minimum of each paragraph. Often, if there was more than one topic or theme in a paragraph more was noted as appropriate. Anne typically wrote down only one word summarizing her understanding of what was being discussed.

Maria was delivered her own copies of the transcript (either hand delivered or via e-mail). She then, on her own, read the document in its entirety and then on the second review she would follow the same protocol as Anne and would document all of the themes and topics that were discussed within a paragraph. Maria would often write down one word explaining her thoughts on what was being discussed but then might write
down a few sentences to help her to recall what she was feeling and thinking when she coded the data.

Then Anne and Maria met in a private setting and reviewed all of the notes that both had written on their documents. If different things were written down it was discussed and then a common theme was decided and agreed upon one. Very rarely, maybe on three or four occasions did Maria and Anne disagree on what was being discussed. During these times both Anne and Maria explained what their understanding was and then it was decided upon. During these times, it seemed that the disagreements revolved around Anne being able to recognize that the issue may have touched a personal note and Maria’s theme was used.

Following these meetings, Anne then wrote down all of the themes/notes on one sheet of paper and documented how many times in the interview the theme emerged. Upon review it seemed that many of the themes existed in more than one form. An example of this could be differences, which at one point was discussed as similarities. It was therefore discussed as a theme of differences and similarities. If different words were used that represented the same theme, they were then merged them under one theme. After Anne completed this process, Maria reviewed the sheet of codes and she agreed with the codes as Anne had condensed them. It was at this time that the next interview could be conducted. After each interview the coding sheet was then compared to the previous data sheets to see if themes were becoming redundant. After 10 of the interviews had been conducted and the coding sheets were reviewed, it was determined that redundancy had been reached and data collection was then stopped due to reaching a level of saturation. This means that by interviewing more people new data was not
necessarily likely for this particular study. As will be seen in the following pages, redundancy is not seen in every theme. Saturation was reached with the primary themes that are presented. Secondary themes were felt to be less common and may be more influenced by personal life experiences and not as relevant for many adoptees. It does not imply that the stories are the same but that the explanations and reasons behind the themes were becoming similar.

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) report that the primary presentation of results should yield “rich descriptions” (p. 174). They continue to say that “Illustrative quotations and descriptions convey a deep understanding of what setting and people are like and provide support for your interpretations” (p. 174). They advocate for the research to be filled with examples. Therefore, the majority of Chapter IV will be examples from the ten participants in their own words regarding their experiences as adult adoptees regarding their decision to search or not search for their birthparents.

Summary

This qualitative research seeks to explore the psychological processes involved in the decision of whether or not a person decides to externally search for their birthparents. An ethnographic interview took place utilizing the constant comparative method with the result of grounded theory. Ten interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and evaluated. The purpose of the interviews are to examine common themes that exist for adult adoptees in why they have or have not engaged in an external search process for the biological parents.
Although this study was initially set up to examine the external reasons why and adult adoptee searches, it became apparent through the interviews with the adult adoptees that the decision to externally search for birthparents was not easily distinguishable from the internal process of searching. For all of the adoptees who participated in this study, whether they have searched or not searched for their origins, the internal search process existed for all of them. The themes which emerged and are discussed thoroughly in Chapter IV cannot always be distinguished in reference to what is an external process and what is an internal process. Therefore the search categories will describe their external search process but incorporate both internal and external themes.
CHAPTER IV

Results

This chapter presents the findings of the ethnographic inquiry conducted that employed a semi-structured interview. It focuses on the life experiences of the 10 participants, as they perceive their personal adoption story to evolve. The purpose of the interviews was to allow the adoptees to have an opportunity to express their individual stories about the decision of whether or not to externally search for their birthparent(s). It further examined the differences in the psychological processes involved in the decision of whether or not an adult adoptee externally searches for their birthparent(s).

As discussed earlier, the decision to search for birthparents is a lifelong process (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992). The themes that are presented below emerged in an interview aimed specifically at understanding the adoptee’s perspective of being adopted. Each of the themes may not be directly related to a decision of whether or not to externally search for birthparents, but are themes that emerged in relation to the interview and present aspects of the adoptee’s stories including their connection to the biological and adopted families, their view on their adoption status and story, as well as their internal search process. As can be gathered from the data below, an adoptee has many facets to his/her personality over and above their connection to adoption. These unique pieces of the participant’s personality must be taken into consideration as well.
Each of the 10 stories is unique, special, and personal. Despite the individuality present in the interview process, common themes emerged as evident in many of the participants discussing similar topics. Below each of the areas will be presented with excerpts from the participants. Their words best express their own experiences.

Passages from the participants have been categorized by the primary theme in the segment. It needs to be noted that many of the passages are presented in order of the number of people which endorsed the theme and those themes which have the same number of adoptees endorsing them are presented in alphabetical order.

**Decision to Search for Birthparents**

Each of the 10 participants were asked specifically about their decision to search for their birthparents. Tell me in detail about the decision to search or not to search? What has influenced your decision? Any people involved in this with you? Has this changed across your lifespan? Do you see it possibly changing in the future? These questions, though asked at one point during the interview were often referenced at several times throughout the interview. It appeared that there is no simple answer to this question and though the participants may be able to discuss their reasoning, the answer is much more complex than can be verbalized in response to this question. For those adoptees who had not searched for their biological parents at the time of the study, only one of them was able to see her status of searching as a possibly changing. The other three were adamant about their positions. For those adoptees in the process of searching for their biological parents, they were able to verbalize that searching is a process that they want to see through to the end. For the three adoptees who searched and found their biological
parent/family, it was a process for them of both the search process along with developing and maintaining a relationship with them.

Though several of the adoptees may have discussed how people (i.e., adoptive parents) may be one component of why they don’t seek to find their biological parents, they emphasize that it is not the overarching reason for not searching. They each give a personal reason as to their decision.

#1 - Christian (Non Searcher)

Christian discusses that he has no desire to search for his biological parents. He did express an interest and a curiosity about meeting them but notes that it does not override his decision to not search for them. During the interview he talks about how different women that he was dating have been a part of his “trying on” different identities. He acknowledges that he wouldn’t be against finding out more information about his biological family but that he does not seek to meet them.

Right now I have a decision not to search. Like, I never thought about doing more. Like, doing, searching legitimate search. I had some money in my pocket when I had a job and I am like I could like hire one of those private investigators and I am like, Why, you know...that is when I started to see more of these shows and it seemed like the reason some of the people went to search for their parents. Like, I am just so happy with my situation with my folks now that to totally come out with something that I would just like get a sheet of information. I don’t want to really stir up with mustard. What if she wants to meet me and stuff. I don’t really want to do that. I guess the strength of being devoted to my
parents, who I know love me and stuff, is greater than trying to get a sheet of information or trying to make some sort of relationship...because personally I would feel that is an insult if someone did that to me. You know...as I said, like when I have actually thought about it and looked on those talk shows when people have done it and it looks ridiculous to me. You know there was even a case like when someone actually started hooking up with their birthmother because I guess she was hot or something and I am like this 18 year old guy who was hooking up with his birth mother and it was like bizarre. It was on Montel or something...I admit it I watched that....Laugh....I am just like this is so weird like you are going to meet this person and you are going to like be like their friend. There is no way you have can and. Then you see them and sometimes and on one of these shows and they are reunited with their birthmother and they start kissing and hugging each other. It is like you are kissing and hugging a complete friggin stranger.

#2 – Matthew (Found)

Matthew indicated that he never knew that he was adopted and that, when he did find out that he was adopted that there was never a question in his mind about whether or not he was going to find his biological mother. He noted that he was aware that it might not be a “good story” but that he felt that he needed to know as well as had a right to know.

I am the type of person that you address it. Well, like when I went searching for my birthmother I knew there could be a bad story at the other side of it. And I really wasn’t really looking for another or any other type of really relationship
with her. All it was, was a matter of getting some stupid answers like you know like am I going to go bald...or what is my ethnic background and I just felt like even if it was the worst story in the world just like okay just answer me these couple of questions and we will go on our way.

#3 – Karen (Found)

Karen talked about how she always felt that she would search for her biological parents and feels that it has to do with the manner in which her adoptive parents talked about them: in such a positive light. She noted that when it actually came to making the decision to search and find her biological parents that the personal process was more difficult than she had anticipated.

I searched out my birthparents and my whole life ever since I was really small I always said when I turn 18 I am look for my birthparents because, I think, because the way my parents painted the picture of them. That they were such good people that they gave me up and let my parents who couldn’t have kids have another child. Umm. So I searched for them. I didn’t do it when I was 18. I did it.. I think the first letter I wrote I was like 20 or something...And then I got a form back. I was adopted through the state so I got a form letter back saying this is a timely process and everything...And then I followed up with them like 2 years later. To find out what happened.
#4 – Judy (Non Searcher)

Judy indicated that she has no desire to search for her biological parents and notes that she has not really ever thought about it. She noted that other than this conversation, it is not something that typically comes across her mind. She admitted that she would like some medical history, but that that particular information is not enough to cause her to go out and find her biological parents.

No, I haven’t searched at all. I never really felt the need. The one thing I wish I knew is the health information... And I wouldn’t be judgmental about meeting the person. I mean, if the situation presented itself I would never say no but I never went out looking out for it. I never felt this driving need and I think it was more because my parents just... I had really a really fulfilling relationship with both of them... Maybe it would be nice to know the ethnic background just because, it’s history, and what part of the world.

#5 – April (Non Searcher)

April admits that she has been curious and actually looked through some of her parent’s documents on her adoption but that it was enough and that she does not have a desire to meet them.

Well, my mom always told me, “Look I have some information, when you are ready, let me know” And to be honest I never asked her, you know what “I don’t want to know.” But then a couple things came out over the years. Over the last year, maybe the last 2 years, curiosity killed the cat and I did look at my birth records last time I was at the safety deposit box. But I never wanted to know their
names before because I thought I would go to the mall and I would hear someone say that name and it is going to freak me out. But I did look at their names and I know where I was born. I think the most I know is that my birthparents were in their early 20s. They were both college educated and from what I understand the grandfather had a fit I guess because she got pregnant.

Anne stated, “You had talked a little bit about feeling you hurt your mother. Do you think that is kind of like the reason why you are not searching? Or…” April responded, “Actually, if I thought about it, it is probably a big part of it. Yeah, but I think that if my desire outweighed, like if I really really had a desire to do it, I could, I could make her feel comfortable with it. I think the number one reason is I just don’t want to.”

#6 − Jill (Non Searcher)

Jill discussed how her primary reason for not searching for her birthparents is that she does not feel that they are a part of her life. She talked about how she does not feel a connection with them and that for her, her adoptive parents are her parents.

I have never wanted to find my birthparents. I think, I have no ill will. I am not angry or anything like that. I think it is a positive thing. I think it is great that this woman had a baby and actually had the courage to give it away because she wanted a better life for it. My parents really haven’t had any influence in a direct way. Maybe in an indirect way, maybe by being great parents I got a great family. Maybe I have heard some stories of people that were adopted that they were abused or they did not have a good life and maybe then I would want to find my birthparents but I don’t know…My birthparents are my birthparents. My
parents now are my parents. I almost feel like, I don’t know, I almost feel like my birthparents have no part of my life. I know that there was this woman who carried me for 9 months but I don’t know why but to me that does not have any meaning. That might sound cruel but I think it is a great thing what she did...But I don’t think that, she has nothing to do with me. She has nothing to do with my life. I mean if they ever tried to find me. I would...I don’t understand that really. I feel like it would be like me trying to find someone that I sat next to in second grade.

#7 – Lucy (In Process)

Lucy spoke throughout her interview about how she feels that she will search for her biological parents one day but that it is not a priority for her. She talks about how she never realized that she would be able to search and find her biological family but that when she realized that this might actually be possible that she became interested in searching but not overly anxious to meet them.

I think I will. It might not even be for a little while because there is just, particularly with September 11th, but there is so much entailed it feels burdensome to get into the city to try and get the information that I need. You know I have to make arrangements for 2 kids. Or to have to drag them with me and my husband who hates New York, who hates anything north of Newark and umm, and like I said, it is just not such a pressing need. But I know that I will do it...At some point, but I just don’t know when. Especially with the time frame that is involved at this point where if there are any players alive in this it has got to be cousins in
all likelihood. Maybe...So I don’t feel like if I don’t do it today. It was never that there was a point that I was not going to search. For so long in my history, people just didn’t. So it was just like this non-issue. And then as the subject matter came up, well maybe starting in the 70s, I am guessing when I first heard about people talking about you know we should change the laws and this and that. I was always like, “I don’t feel.” I can understand that somebody would feel a huge need for it, but I didn’t feel that need. But then, like I said, there was this bizarre experience when all of a sudden I found out that there was a possibility that I could find something out with some relative ease. Without having to go to court, without that kind of stuff being involved. I mean that was a profound experience...I think I will but I don’t think I am going to run out and do it tomorrow.

It may be that Lucy has lived her life believing that finding her biological family was not an option and now that it is a possibility that she has to go through a psychological preparedness experience which has been expressed by several of the other adult adoptees.

#8 – Cathy (In Process)

Cathy discussed how she vacillates through periods of where she is really invested in searching and finding her biological parents and then at other times where she is not as invested. She indicated that at the time of the interview she sought out more information and that any answers would be sent to her therapist (only because she was not able to get the information herself) and that she would have to see where the information would lead her.
I am not sure. I guess birthparents could if they wanted to. My personal adoption is closed. I can't. I happen to know my mom's name which I just recently maneuvered and discovered. As far as I know. It was through Catholic Charities and I called them numerous times and they can't get me any...They can't give me any identifying information...I go through these time periods where sometimes I will be all gung ho about it and I want to my find my mom and dad and okay I am going to do it and I will call Catholic - I will make all those phone calls and then I will stop for a few weeks and I won't think about it. I am very, I am very ambivalent about what I want to do. So in one of my gung ho times I called Catholic Charities and I was like talking to my caseworker who is very nice and I know she wanted to tell me. But she just legally can't and she gave me the name of a woman who works in Ohio and who helps people find. She has like a support group and they go to the library and they help people. So, I called this woman and she ended up getting, she ended up somehow finding out my last name...My mom's last name. So then I was like okay now where do I go from here. Now I have a friend who is a detective...and he was like, he gave me the number of a private investigator so I could technically find out where she is right now...But he is very expensive and I just don't even know if that the way I want to go yet. So, I speak to him on the phone and he gave me some ways I could proceed on my own. So then I called the hospital of where I was born and asked for my birth records and I made I made it seem like I just wanted my birth records...so they sent, they couldn't release it to me, they need to release it to a doctor so I gave them my
therapists name and they sent my medical records to her, to my therapist. Which had my biological mom’s name on it and my biological grandmother’s name on it, because they had to sign it and whatever. So then I gave that it to my detective friend…and he did whatever he did and came up with a phone number and an address for maybe my grandma. But we are not entirely sure. So my therapist wrote a letter to her and asking her if she is the right person and all of that and she hasn’t heard back. This is about a month ago.

Cathy goes on to describe the search process as “overwhelming” and feels that it is set up that way so that people quit searching.

I do find the process overwhelming and I think that they, especially with closed adoptions they make it difficult so people will give up. I thought about giving up many times and just say forget this it’s too, but I am like that as a person. If anything is too hard I give up, you know but, I think they purposely do that.

#9 – Sarah (Found)

Sarah indicated that prior to finding her biological mother that her primary goal of meeting her would be to say “Thank you for the courage to give me life.” She noted that her goal was not to necessarily develop and maintain a relationship with her but now that it has happened that she now feels that this is an obligation that she has.

Abortion was illegal then but I am sure she could have had that. And that umm, I am doing okay. So, as an adult adoptee it went from more of a presence and curiosity every once in a while to maybe this is something I would eventually like to do one day…find my birthparent, my birthmother. I don’t have anything
against my birthfather but I just kind of made this assumption I guess all along that my birthmother had me. She had to go through something probably more significant that my birthfather...Then I pursued my master’s degree and I – those same questions came up. And I was like, no I want to finish my degree. It was more an issue of stability...And then I got the information again. So, what lead me ultimately making the steps to finding her was being in a job where it was consistent and then I am in a job I like, it is stable, and I am single so I time to maybe get to know someone...Mmm...If they want a relationship and then just felt old enough to do it, mature enough or whatever (laugh). Umm, and then I hired someone from the West Coast...I hired someone. I went through this process of looking at different ways to find out this information. Some cost $500. This woman I hired is $150.00. I felt better about that because you do feel like “oh this is my right to know something.”

#10 – Paula (In Process)

Paula discusses how after her mother’s death that her father gave her some paperwork related to her adoption and so she had this information at her disposable. She commented during the interview that she always felt that she was going to search but that she did wait until after her father’s death and this way she would not “hurt him.”

So, I had those records and my mother’s name was on it. And my father said this is yours take good care of it, it is your life, you know. And so I put it away and didn’t ever get it out again to think about. But she was there. And when I was in my early 30s, uhh, Fran Jone’s book came out, a woman I was babysitting,
her kid gave it to me, because she had borrowed it from the library and said “You ought to read this” and so I read it and I started talking to my neighbor about it and my neighbor turned beat red and I thought mmm, what does she have to do with adoption. And then a day or two later she said, I am interested in that book you read, and she said, “I am on the other side of the coin.” And I said, “What do you mean” and she said, “I am a birthmother, I gave up my daughter.” So she and I were close already but that made us even closer...and yeah, yeah. I think I must have told her at some point. And, that, it was after reading Fran’s book that I decided to search. And I went to one ALMA meeting in the city, but it was such a it is right down there.

All 10 of the participants spoke about their decision about whether or not to externally search for her biological parents. For those who were currently searching for their biological parents and for those who searched and found their biological parents, the actual procedure of deciding when and how to search along with the search itself was not an overnight decision. It was a process. Even Matthew, who stated that as soon as he found out that he was adopted that he was going to search for his biological parents, the process itself took several months to complete.

Primary Themes

The following themes are common topics which were brought up by at least four or more of the participants during the interview process regarding their decision of whether or not they decided to search for their birthparents. The number of four participants was set up as an arbitrary cut-off point for a major theme. It was felt that
since each of the three groups had a minimum of three participants in the category that if four participants brought up a theme than it would extend beyond their search category. A brief definition of each theme will be discussed. Table 1 displays the primary themes and the number of people who endorsed the theme during their interview.

Table 1

*Primary Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Adoptees who Endorsed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biology - Medical and Cultural/Ethnicity</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences vs. Similarities</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abandonment &amp; Loss</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance vs. Rejection</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge vs. Lack of Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secrets</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption as Good vs. Bad</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict with Siblings</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections to Biological Family and “Adoption”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existence</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation vs. Individuation</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special/Unique</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appearances</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Number of Adoptees who Endorsed</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chosen/Wanted</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curious</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression of Emotion</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regimented/Expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
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<td>Process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attachment/Bonding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Birthday/Celebration</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boundaries</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nature vs. Nurture</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Biology - Medical and Cultural/Ethnicity**

Biology is defined as comments made by the adoptees in relationship to their biological or genetic medical history and the cultures and ethnicities of their biological families. In terms of closed adoption (of which all of the participants in this research were considered to be), little information regarding their biological parents is given to the adoptive parents upon the adoption. Typically the information given is based on the biological parents medical history at the time of the pregnancy and there is no information given as the adoptee grows up in order to understand if the parents or other family members family medical history changes. Also, typically adoption agencies in
closed adoption may or may not disclose the parent’s ethnicity and religion but little is
gathered about how the family lives these elements of their lives.

This theme was extremely prevalent throughout the interviews. All 10 participants
discussed the biological components of their relationship to their biological family
consisting of both their medical and genetic makeup as well as their cultural and ethnic
identity. Table 2 depicts the distribution across the three categories.

Table 2

*Theme of Biology - Medical and Cultural/Ethnicity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Discussed</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>Non Searcher</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Total</td>
<td>10 (10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#1 - *Christian (Non Searcher).* Christian’s primary statement about biology is his
lack of knowledge both of his medical history along with his strong desire to know his
ethnicity.

The only part that really bothered me. I can think back I guess it still bothers me
about it…is not knowing my ethnicity or if there is any medical things that were
in my past.

Christian then discusses that he feels his adopted family is his family and that
biology is the only true connection that he has with his biological parents. He stated, “But
besides general information, my parents are the ones who raised me. The other parents
were just like created me.”
Christian states that he feels that he has a right to his medical history and discusses how he has a medical problem, pancreatitis. He notes that the doctor informed him that this problem is genetic.

And also like with the medical history like I think it kind of...in a way I kind of wish it was more of an open thing that I had because not like I said I want to go home and hang out, run out and go find them, hang out with my birthmother, and go to the mall and stuff. But just the fact that I have this thing called pancreatitis and for some reason I have some sort of biological aversion to alcohol and if I drink too much it hurts my pancreas and I could become a diabetic they said. So like I was drinking like a fish up until I was like 22. And I had no idea you know and then all of the sudden I am in the hospital with this pancreas problem and they were like “Oh yeah, you have chronic pancreatitis” which is like, I wasn’t drinking anymore than the next guy. And I asked them, and they said it was probably genetic. I was like that would have been good to know. Stuff that like that really bugs me out, you know. I kind of...it’s kind of annoying just in that when people tell you like. Like my mom, her mom had Alzheimer’s, and now she is all worried about it. Like it sucks but at least she knows what she is up against. I don’t know what the maladies are. I think the closed adoption if it is what I think it is like with the closed files and it kind of thwarts those kind of things. So I wish... I think it would be better if you give the birthmother’s name or whatever and the medical history and the background. I don’t even need names, actually, just background and cultural information. I think that would be helpful. Because that is really only the stuff that I desire. You know.
#2 – Matthew (Found). Matthew discusses how after he found out that he was adopted that he began questioning so many things that he had believed as truth such as his family medical history. He notes how it all of a sudden became a world of unknowns. He admits that after further contemplation of biology that in reality, it doesn’t make all the difference in the world but that it does affect and change one’s worldview.

I just started thinking about doctor’s forms that you fill out. Like I have diabetes on my grandmother’s side and what a crock all that was. Just like the idea about for me, not so much that it necessarily needed to be the medical history, but it was the line that I had to stop and think about it and any given time...I think that like in almost every day. Now maybe they would not have been as intense if I had grown up with those things and learned over time be accustomed to or even not caring after awhile. How important is it to know your ethnicity? Does it change anything if you whether you are Italian or Irish? Not really. But it sort of...I never really asked if I was adopted. But think of all of a sudden being told.

Matthew discusses that he feels that despite not knowing that he was adopted that he perceives that at some unconscious level that he know that he was different than his adopted family.

I think...I am not convinced that there is not an innate thing, or biological connection, is on some level detected or known by babies and I think that the way I felt about being a little disconnected from the family, very different from them, not really being able to put a finger on it, like what it was or anything, or even having an inkling that we were adopted.
#3 - Karen (Found). Karen discusses how she felt prior to meeting her biological parents. She noted that she was seeking information on her medical history along with an idea of who she looked like in her family. She acknowledges that “I was really looking to see my roots really” when she decided to search for her birth family.

As shallow as it is, I just want to know who I look like and medical information and I would be happy to meet her once or to just talk to her and that it is. I am not looking for any family.

She continues to talk about the lack of knowledge that she had about her ethnicity and the desire she had to know “where she came from.”

Not knowing. Who you come from. I think, you know, before I knew my birthparents, the questions. Not knowing who you look like. Not knowing your heritage. Both my birthparents are Irish American and my mother is Irish American and German and my father is Slovakian, mixed Eastern European. Growing up everyone would say I look like my mother’s side of the family, very Irish. That was the Irish side of the family. I think growing up I kind of clung to that like, but I’m Irish. It says in those papers they are Irish, so I am Irish.

After she meets them, Karen discusses that in reality it does not really matter who you look like in this world, it is important the relationship that you have with the people in your life.

I think that after being in reunion and working out everything and integrating that into my life I realize that is not what makes you who you are. It is not about whose color hair you have.
Karen further indicates that prior to meeting her biological parents she had asthma and allergies and after she met them she found out that they had asthma and allergies in their family history and emphasized that this information was not at all informative to her and did not impact her medical status.

I remember people you know like when I would go to the doctor all the time they would always ask medical history and I never knew and now that I know it is really not that big a deal. Like there is a history of asthma and allergies. Big deal (laugh). Like I have asthma and allergies and it is not a big mystery. Had I never contacted them, it wouldn’t have made a difference.

She continues to discuss that despite the genetic connection to her biological family that it gives them something to discuss but does not in and of itself make them a family.

And I remember saying I don’t see it so much as family as “almost,” which is a weird concept like we talk about hereditary things we have in common. We talk about, I look very much like her facially, I have asthma. Physical, other traits like my birthfather, like hereditary traits. I have gray hair and he has gray hair since he was like in his 20s. So things like that we have in common, yet it is not like I feel that they are family.

#4 – Judy (Non Searcher). Judy discusses that she has never searched and does not feel the need or drive to do that but that she would appreciate some knowledge of her medical history. “I haven’t searched at all. I never really felt the need. The one thing I wish I knew is the health information.”
When asked about the worst thing about being adopted she implied that the only thing she would like changed is some knowledge of her medical information.

Hmm, the worst part about it, I can't really iden...other than, I think the not knowing the medical history is to me the worst part. Umm, otherwise I can't say anything; I don't see a worst part.

#5 – April (Non Searcher). April states that she has no problem with not knowing her medical history and states that only 10% of problems are genetic so that it is not the most meaningful piece of information available and does not impact her desire of whether or not to search for her birth family.

I know that a lot of people would make the argument well what about medical reasons. I mean 10% of diseases are genetic. It is not, if even that. I mean, it is like. If as long as you take care of yourself and get checks and stuff like that. There is not a lot I am going to be able to do anyway. So, for me that is not a big factor anyway.

#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). Jill acknowledges that one of the worst things about being adopted is the lack of medical information. She notes that when she was younger she was concerned about their social economic status but now she tends to think more about whether or not they have medical issues which may be genetic such as cancer.

Umm, maybe not knowing medical things. I mean now that I am older. I mean when I was younger I probably didn't even think about it. Well, no, no no, maybe I did. Maybe when I was younger it would pass my mind. I would never want to find my birthparents but just wondering like when I was little thinking well
maybe they are rich or maybe they are poor. Things like that. But now it is just wondering I mean like if they had cancer. Anything like that.

#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy discusses how she does not have any medical information and then talks about how she has a flutter in her eye which was probably connected to an infection that her mother had while she was pregnant with her.

I like have no medical information or that kind of stuff, which I wouldn’t mind getting...And then when I go to the eye doctor I have a flutter in my eye and the ophthalmologist pointed out to me about 15 years ago or so, again not all that long ago. Umm, that probably comes from some kind of in utero infection. Pause. And now there is this other tidbit of information. Laugh. Now I have in utero infection going on with a story about a birthmother who died during or shortly after birth.

#8 – Cathy (In Process). Cathy discusses her quest for knowledge about her ethnicity.

The first time I ever thought about it, I wanted to get my background, like what nationality I was because here I was telling people that I was Irish, Polish, and German. And that is what my parents are.

#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah notes that she has enjoyed finding out information from her biological mother about genetic and biological issues.

...health issues, I always go to the doctors and I don’t know what I have. Laugh. So she was very open. She has given me health information and I found out that my birth grandfather was a professor another one that was a lawyer. Some things that made me go, “Oh.” You know these things I have wanted to do make sense.
#10 – Paula (In Process). Paula admits that she has always wondered about her biological connection to her biological family but that she didn’t always allow herself to think about these things while growing up.

And my perception...I think that there was always (pause) a desire to know where I came from inside me. But because it seemed so impossible, I didn’t let myself consciously think about every looking or anything.

Differences versus Similarities

The theme of similarities and differences was prevalent throughout all 10 of the interviews. Differences is defined as feeling unlike their family members, while similar is defined as feeling like their family members. Adoptees often brought up how they were similar or different from their adoptive family. They may share about their differences in terms of personality, appearances, values, and morals. The participants discuss how they are unsure of how their biological parents view these elements and may wonder about whether or not they are more similar to their biological parents or to their adoptive family. Table 3 shows the distribution across the three categories.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Discussed</th>
<th>Search Category</th>
<th>Non Searcher</th>
<th>In Process</th>
<th>Found</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Overall Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 (10)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
#1 – Christian (Non Searcher). Christian discussed how his sister went to a private school while he went to a public school.

But I went through the public school system. I have a sister who she was adopted, and umm older she’s 29, she lives in Virginia right now. And uh so she went to private school and I went to public school.

Christian also discusses the various ways in which the two of them are different ranging from school, to personality, to views on adoption. He notes that he has never talked to her about her perceptions of being an adult adoptee but indicates that he feels that the two of them would have very different things to say regarding this topic.

#2 – Matthew (Found). Matthew spoke about some of the similarities between his adopted and biological families. He notes that, for example, that both families are connected to Florida. He states, “It is actually very odd the coincidences and parallels that all are lives took.”

Matthew then begins to talk about his relationship to his biological mother and how in many ways they are very similar.

Yes. She is a contemporary. I have friends that are older than that, very close friends. I am half way between her and her youngest son. So to me, although she said she does feel maternally toward me, and there are times, it is very weird, and we are so close and so I...well it is a little scary like Oedipus complex. Laugh... In that respect if I am feeling down or something. I can get on the phone with her, I can get on the phone and be maternal. We hang together. She has come here and stayed at the house many times. We go out to restaurants, we have a couple
of drinks, we come home, we yak it up, it is we stay up to like 2:00, 3:00 in the morning, yapping.

3 – Karen (Found). Karen emphasizes how her adoptive family is similar in so many ways with the exception of her brother who is also adopted. She states that he really is a mismatch when you look at interests and personality.

He is like no one else in my family. It is very interesting. Because my personality seems to match my families. And my brother is completely just the opposite of everyone in family. He is very quiet, very reserved, not that it is bad, he is just different from everybody. His personality type is just totally different.

She further indicates that she is very different than her brother and that at this point she has accepted their differences. She states, “But I just have to accept the things about him that are different or that I don’t like and you know I want his children in my life. I want, you know...I have just kind of accepted our differences this level of our relationship. It is not close but it is not bad.”

4 – Judy (Non Searcher). Judy discusses how she has followed in her mother’s path of being a “full-time mother” and being available to her children when they were home and not working. She states that this is exactly how she raised her family.

She was a homemaker until I went to school full-time and then she worked part-time but she was always home when I got home from school. She took off on the days that I had off and made time or took time off to come be involved with the school and that is just...I did basically the same thing with my own kids as much as I could. Luckily I was able to do that.
Judy also views herself as similar to her adopted mother by the philosophy of giving back to the community. She emphasizes that she has worked and remained active in the community and this another way in which she is similar to her mother.

I think it is more my political views were more formed by the fact that both, particularly my mother was active in community affairs and did things and just that whole thing that you should give back. I don’t have a heck of a lot of patience for people who say to me, “Well I work, so I can’t be involved in my kids school.” My mother worked and she was involved.

#5 – April (Non Searcher). April discusses how despite growing up in the same household she is very different than her brother. She states, “My brother is adopted as well but he had a very different experience growing up based on his adoption.”

In terms of being different from her brother, she continues that she participated in his wedding and views their relationship as fun, but notes that they have very different personalities.

It is pretty good. My brother is not...I consider myself a real warm and fuzzy person and he is not. So we don’t have the same approach to life but we definitely have fun when we are together. He got married last fall and I was very much, I was in the wedding, I was very much a part of it. Umm, he is, I find him very selfish.

#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). Jill speaks briefly about the similarity she feels in relation to her adopted father. She states, “Like I said we are both very, we are both very stubborn.”
#7 – Lucy \textit{(In Process)}. Lucy emphasizes on multiple occasions throughout the interview process that she views herself as aligning with “different” people. In this first example, Lucy talks about being in an inter-racial marriage and having two adopted children who are multi-racial in ethnicity.

We are an inter-racial marriage. Ken is African American and both of these guys are mixed. He has got Hispanic, Black, and White background: specifically South American, African American and German. Henry has got Native American, African American, and Irish.

She mentions how her brother does not have children and is not interested in adopting. She talks about how they couldn’t be much more different if they tried. Whereas she feels that she that she has always identified with the “other” and that this has in her mind affected her willingness to have a “different” family.

Clearly he is not interested in adopting himself. So he and I are like opposite poles or probably our feelings about the whole situation. I think it affected me in terms of always identifying with the “other.” That feeling of somehow being different and identifying with someone who in any shape or form was different. It probably affected me in terms of my willingness to have an inter-racial marriage...I mean I knew it wasn’t the norm...I would say a feeling for the underdog. A person who looks or talks or acts differently...but I think somewhere I must have like that influence to feel that it was okay to be different, it was okay to kind of buck the system.
#8 — Cathy (In Process). Cathy discusses how she feels different from her adopted family to the extent of entering a career choice that was not well respected due to the family belief that you don’t talk about your problems outside of the family.

But they were just very angry, unhappy people. Which I am not at all. And they came from the school that you don’t talk about your problems outside of the family. Meanwhile here I am in the field of psychology. And all we do is talk about our problems.

She further indicates that conflict was common in the family environment and it was very difficult to agree on anything.

We are very conflicted a lot. Umm, we didn’t really see eye to eye on anything. There was a big generation gap also so they didn’t understand a lot of things. I, they were difficult.

Cathy continues to discuss how she was different from her brother, but that in reality she was the one that was different from her entire adopted family. She talks about how she felt “outside of the circle.”

My brother is very unhappy, very angry. He handled all this. I think he handled all of this totally differently than me. But, umm, I just never really got along with him at all. I, he really was completely different and I was really outside of the circle. My brother fit in a little bit more than I did. But... he too was a little bit outside the circle. But my parents are very rigid, very strict, very old fashioned. And I am not any of those things. Laugh. So it was a difficult childhood. I had a lot of chores to do, and I know that sound like “well of course you have chores,” but much more than anybody I knew.
She states that she physically resembles her adopted father but that in all other ways how she is different from them. She describes personality differences ranging from a lack of passion about food to the pace in which they walked.

If I had to say I looked like somebody I would say my dad. But physically I was different from them. They love to eat. They love, they are obsessed with food and not that I, I like to eat too, but it is just different. They get mad at me because I don’t eat as much as them. That was just something that was annoying my whole childhood. Like their lives really revolved around food. And mine didn’t. They hated that about me. I wouldn’t eat a lot and they hated that too. I was very athletic and they just really couldn’t be bothered with any. I mean my dad liked to watch sports but...and they were older too so their bodies broke down a little faster and it was just weird. They walk very slow and I walk fast...we were at opposite ends on. They made me really feel like I am an outsider so.

Cathy is now discussing how she has heard things about her biological mother and that they sound similar to how she is. She states, “They said that my mom was a people pleaser, which is exactly like me. Laugh. They said that my mom is irresponsible which you know I am a little irresponsible.”

Cathy further indicates that she wished she was “normal” and that this process of searching and finding out who is similar to was easier.

I have said everything. It is confusing and I wish I knew how to proceed. I wish I knew. I wish it felt a little more normal. Felt like – I just wish I – I guess I wish I knew someone who had a successful experience or at least you know how I said I don’t know what I want out of this.
Sarah (Found). Sarah describes the differences she feels with her and her adopted family. She talks about difference in her level of ambition ranging to her level of higher self-assurance than her parents. She indicates that it was these differences which were part of her decision to search for her biological family, to find out where she got some of her traits.

Definitely, when I was little, my mom played a significant role. She took care of me. As I got older, I think that I am very ambitious. And no one in my family has pursued a master’s degree and higher level education and moving away, and I think, finding things that my mom and I connect on now is a little bit harder. And that was probably one of the reasons that propelled me to find my birthmother. Another reason besides the thank you is like why am I so driven? My parents aren’t the, not that they are passive, not they are not hard workers...I think when I was younger I felt a lot more similar because of the way I looked so adoption wasn’t an issue. My parents are very, they are into biking and tennis and are very active. So that component we got along fine. I think when I kind of (pause) my mom isn’t, in hindsight looking back, my mom isn’t as self-assured as I am.

Cathy learns that she has some similarities to her biological mother. She states, "She was a teacher and then she was a principal and then she was an administrator. So that kind of made sense of ‘Oh gosh, I went into teaching too’."

Cathy states that she feels that her biological mother tried to portray herself so that she wouldn’t judge her. She feels that if her mother was less of a needy person that they would be a better match.
Martha has been very open about their relationship. Why, what happened? I think on one level, Martha has tried to paint a better picture. Thinking that maybe I think badly of her and you know. I didn’t find her to judge her. I think that I found her and kind of gave her a gift. You know, I don’t have hang up’s about it. But I think almost for her, if I was more needy or had some problems that it would have been a better match maybe which is you know I thought.

#10 – Paula (In Process). Paula discusses how she is very different from her adoptive mother due to her mental illness.

My parents were in their very early 40s when they got me and my father had a real serious problem with alcoholism and my mother had a real serious problem with heart disease and true paranoia. I think she was diagnosed with a character disorder when I was about 7 or 8 years old. Umm, a couple of summers I went to camp and she went to a sanitarium.

Paula emphasizes that she has tried her best to give both of her children a childhood because she never felt that she was a kid.

My children, I don’t think my children can believe what it was like. So for me, it was an enormous joy to raise my children, not in a perfect environment, but they got to be children.

*Fantasy*

All 10 of the participants discussed their fantasies across their lifespan in relation to their biological families. This was a question that was asked of each of them. Fantasy is defined as the adoptee’s thoughts about their biological parents, based on their
interpretation of facts which were given to them as well as their views of who they were as people. All adoptees interviewed were able to share their fantasies about the biological parents. Some of the fantasies were specific about how much they had thought about their biological parents and what type of people they were, whereas others stated that they were not able to visualize them and really had not given much thought but were able to think and share some of the immediate thoughts about who they thought they were. For those adoptees who had searched and found their biological parents they were able to share about their differences in terms of what they had fantasized they would be like and how they actually were as a person when they met them. Table 4 depicts the distribution across the three categories.

Table 4

| Theme of Fantasy
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#1—Christian (Non Searcher). Christian discusses his fantasy of his biological parents in relation to his interest in the military. He also jumps to the conclusion that his biological parents are married despite the knowledge that his mother was 14 years old.

I think that Jung believed that in previous lives or sometimes these interests like that get, like the military, handed down transgenerationally or like ancestors you had way back, like 2000 year ago were in the military or something. But I guess
like for a fantasy maybe that they were in the army or something like that. I guess
I am just trying to explain my love for the military and stuff. So she probably
wasn’t in the military but I think her husband was.

#2 - Matthew (Found). Since Matthew was not aware of his adoption status until
a few months before he met her, he did not have any childhood fantasies of being
adopted. He reported that he kept asking his biological mother how she felt about being
pregnant with him and that she replied that she enjoyed the feeling of being pregnant with
him.

It is very interesting and I have asked her several times how she felt about it. She
enjoyed being pregnant and felt it gave her a good feeling to know that this child
was going to a good place and that she was doing the right thing. So she...I think
did pretty well and had...I think now she may have a little more feelings about
some of the things she missed with me.

#3 - Karen (Found). Karen indicates that her fantasy growing up was that her
biological parents would marry; to know that they truly loved each other and that her
birth wasn’t a mistake.

What could more of a fantasy than they got married and lived happily ever after.
It wasn’t that she got raped; it wasn’t that she had a one night stand. It could have
been anything really horrible, you know, not even horrible, but just not ideal. I
think I always fantasized that they were always together. That they really loved
each other. That it wasn’t a mistake that I was conceived. It’s funny, I always
thought about my fantasy was always that they would be together that they were
in love, but I never thought beyond it that I would beyond it of having siblings.
#4 – Judy (Non Searcher). Judy indicates that she only recalls fantasizing about her biological mother and not her father, but then continues on to say that she feels that she was conceived out of wedlock and that her father was in the military.

Umm, I never thought of anybody other than my birthmother. I didn’t fantasize who the father was or whether or not I had. I mean they said, my father, my adopted father had said that it was because there were too many other children. But I don’t know I just kind of let that go and I didn’t concentrate on the fact that there were other children or anything like that...I suspect the result of an out of wedlock relationship of a young girl with a returning serviceman or something like that. Umm, they don’t want...when she got older and got married they didn’t want to admit to having had a child

#5 – April (Non Searcher). April denies ever having fantasized about her biological mother. She reports that if she ever met her she would allow her to make the first move and whatever that was that she would reciprocate.

I don’t even know where to start. I don’t even know. It would probably depend on her response. Will she hug me or be like, “I don’t know.” I am very warm and fuzzy. If she leaned out to hug me I would reciprocate. And I would hope that it would be something like that. But honestly I have never, it is so not on my radar screen that I have not even fantasized about that

#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). Jill denies ever having a vivid image of her mother and notes that she has always been a “blob.” She notes that she feels that she is an average American looking person and that this is why she doesn’t have a true image of her.
I never really had a mental picture of her. Even now, when I think of the woman, if I have a picture in my mind they are like just like blobs, just like a figure or something. Like I never thought, oh she is tall with blond hair. The only time I would think of things like that is when people would say things to me like, “Oh, I know someone who looks just like you.” You know like really, a lot of people say that. But I think it is just because I think I look - like a lot of people have brown hair, blue eyes. I think I just look American I guess. I don’t know. But I don’t honestly I don’t have like a picture. Like I said, it was more when I was little, maybe they are rich, maybe they are poor, maybe they have other kids, but it was never, it was like something that popped into my mind and then like pop out.

#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy discusses how she has come to realize that she was conceived around New Years Eve and began having a fantasy about her parents out celebrating the New Year.

Interestingly enough I don’t know how old I was, but it wasn’t all that long ago, I would say within the last 10 years that somebody made the comment to me, my birthday is September 2nd, and they said “Oh you are a New Years Eve baby.” I was like oh my God that’s right. Laugh. So I have this fantasy was, first of all was the whole story true or were these people just out celebrating New Years Eve.

Lucy continues her fantasy about her father’s death and indicates that she feels that his death was an accident not caused by his own fault. She also has questions about how long, if at all, she remained in her grandparent’s care and why they had to give her away for adoption. All this along with the question of whether or not her birth mother ever saw her before she died.
Well, the piece about the car accident. I think my assumption had always been that somebody (pause) that it wouldn’t have been my biological dad’s fault. An accident in that sense. And it has always been very weird to me because I can’t remember what my mother said to me or if she just didn’t know about this piece about my biological mother during either during or shortly after childbirth, you know, wondering whether or not she would have seen me. And I guess I just wonder, how long did my grandparents keep me if, at all, before deciding to place me. Because when my parents went to pick me up, it was at a foster home...now I don’t know how long I had been in that foster home.

#8 – Cathy (In Process). Cathy seems to be struggling with having some knowledge of the circumstances of her conception and birth and it is unclear about what part of the passage is fantasy and what part may be reality. She appears to feel more comfortable with discussing the information as she knows it to be the truth and shy away from fantasy.

I know my mom got pregnant when she was young. I think she was 16. My mom and dad were dating and they lived on the east coast somewhere. I am not really sure where. When my biological grandparents found out that my mom was pregnant her dad put in for a transfer and moved to Ohio. My dad ended up following her. So I don’t know if they were romantic, because he must have really loved her. And they were planning on keeping me and getting married and stuff but then they decided at the last minute that she was too young and that wasn’t what she wanted. So they gave me up for adoption. So that is pretty much all I know.
She then is able to verbalize that her fantasy is that they are nice and that she will be able to see herself in them as well as have them accept her and have a comfortable relationship.

Okay, well I think they are really nice people (laugh). Now I mean I hope they are. I guess my fantasy, I guess my fantasy is to meet them, pause, and kind of be able to see myself in them. Like what I am going to look like, like 20 years from now...but part of my fantasy is to meet them and to have them be really accepting of me and me be accepting of them. I know I would be accepting of them. But just to have them want to know about me. What has happened in my life and I would like it to be comfortable and not awkward.

In her fantasy, she acknowledges that she seeks them to be different than her adopted family. She states, “I would like them to be completely different (laugh) than my adopted parents. So believe me, different. That is my fantasy, I mean if they are not completely different than I can see myself being accepting of that because that is what I have done my whole life.”

#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah verbalizes her fantasy is that her mother was single and alone during her pregnancy.

As I got older and maturity kicked in (laugh) and my sense of probably in college that someone had to go through a birth, probably alone, perhaps, it was 1969, when it was controversial to be pregnant and single.

#10 – Paula (In Process). Paula verbalizes that when she was a child, that she fantasized about her adopted father marrying her biological mother.
But it was kind of boring after a while. And so I can remember thinking gee, if my birthmother – I didn’t call her birthmother – but whatever I called her then if she were still alive maybe she and my father could meet each other and they would like each other and they could get married and she could do the grocery shopping and I wouldn’t have to come out on Saturday mornings (laugh).

Another fantasy is connected to the war and that her biological father was in the military and was off to sea as her biological mother found out that she was pregnant.

So I saw a ton a war movies and I can remember dreaming or thinking, daydreaming maybe that seeing my parents and my father was going to go on a ship and go to war and my mother was saying goodbye to him and she had long brown hair going down her back and all he – and all I can – and he was much taller than she and all I could see was the top of his flat top military cap. You know.

Identity

Identity as a theme was prevalent throughout all ten of the interviews. Identity is defined as the adoptees perception of who they are as an individual. Each adoptee spoke in detail about who they are as individuals and they spoke about how they were as children and how this has changed for them across their lifespan – how their relationships with people have changed, how they have changed, and how they got to the place in life where they are now. Table 5 explains the distribution across the three categories.

#1 – Christian (Non Searcher). Christian discusses how he changed his conceptualization about his identity on multiple occasions. He noted that it was typically
surrounded by a woman who he was interested in and she would suggest a nationality to him of which he would “try on.” The most prevalent stage he notes was his “Guido” stage. Christian notes that he has gone through stages of identity throughout his life, but that they were most prevalent during his teenage years.

Table 5

Theme of Identity

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I think it just a sense of identification. Like just I feel like I told you that I have adopted pride. So it’s cool when I am hanging out with adopted people because then you kind of bond together and stuff but I have always wanted to have like a…I guess I go through stages like when I was in high school. I went through my Guido Italian stage and I pretended that I was Italian…but uh, so anyway back to this girl. She went to a psychic and the psychic said your boyfriend has warm blood – meaning like part Spanish or something. Then I was like “oh yeah – then I would say I was like from Spain you know. Then like almost hearing a psychic say that was kind of cool. It was like “that’s it” you know. So I went through that stage when I thought I was part Spanish. And then another girl a couple years before that relationship said that I looked Russian. Because she was Russian and
said I looked Russian and so I said. It wasn’t as pronounced as the Guido stage
where I drove the car that I perceived a Guido type person would drive.

He continues on that he is tiring to keep trying on new identities and discusses
how it is been difficult.

So it was almost like I am getting tossed around by you know like you are Jewish
now and then this and that and at the time it is kind of funny you know but deep
down it kind of hurts because like this really sucks.

#2 - Matthew (Found). Matthew talks about how he viewed himself as always
having a strong sense of identity but that finding out he was not the biological child of his
parents was devastating to his identity.

Well it really was a big shock you know for that time because...I think I grew up
with a pretty good sense of self and you know I am not a really fragile person in
that respect. But it really rocked the world. We walked outside and my brother
and I, even though he was much taller than I am, we don’t look that far apart nor
do we look that far apart from our parents that there is really any clue and it is just
like really everything you don’t know if anything is true.

Matthew then discusses the similarities in his identity to his biological mother and for the
time in his life is aware of how strong genetics are in his life.

It is actually amazing. How much alike we are in our taste and in our mannerisms.
Kind of scary if you really think you are a product of yourself and you make your
own choices. I really see genetics.
Matthew then discusses how he saw a bit of his personality in his biological father and how he views himself as actually a middle version of the two of his biological parents.

He was a forthcoming kind of you know didn’t care what people thought. A little on the crass side. It is actually interesting because I am kind of right in the middle of the two of them.

Matthew then describes how he always felt different in terms of his self identity than his adopted parents despite not knowing his adoption status. He indicates that he is far different from his adopted parents as well as his brother.

Most kids think that right. I said to John, not long before I found out about the adoption. I said you know I just felt like if this is the track of your life. I always just felt like that I was right here (pointed off the track). Running along side it, but not running quite on it. And really having no idea. I always knew growing up, like philosophically, I was very different from my parents. I just couldn’t understand some of the…and very different from my brother also. What I found humorous, what tasks or hobbies I enjoyed doing. Just an entire different boat.

Matthew discusses his first awareness after finding out that he was adopted that he did not know aspects of himself such as his identity. He talks earlier about having a secure sense of self and now acknowledging that he does not have knowledge of multiple areas of his life.

You know I remember being about, I think like a day or two after this occurred, I am in my office and my office is right outside the courthouse and meanwhile people keep walking in needing an attorney and this one guy had walked in and
he had a thick accent, Italian accent, and a lot of people took me for Italian, which is part of what I am, and so he said, “What are you? You know like Italian”...You know all of a sudden for like the first time that moment’s hesitation you are kind of stumped.

#3 -- Karen (Found). Karen discusses her belief that she had her “identity crisis” later in life than many people and was rebellious in college, instead of high school.

Instead of in high school, having that rebellious stage, I think I did that in college. Because I was not, I was really asserting my independence. I started dressing differently and wearing my hair differently and I was working out who I was and everything. But we were still close. There was never a period where we were cut off from each other or anything like that.

Karen talks about how she views herself as a very independent and confident person and felt that she could basically accomplish professionally whatever she wanted. She now acknowledges that she is more traditional since she is a parent and talks about how she feels that her parents have helped influence her self identity as a parent.

I was very independent, very confident, I went away to school. I had no fear to go away. I wasn’t like I couldn’t leave the nest kind of thing. My dad was very supportive of that. Anywhere you get into college you can go. It was never you can’t go out of state or you have to stay close to home and now that I am married I have come full circle. Now I am more traditional, I stay at home with my kids, I clean and I cook. I think as both of my parents have influenced me, I have gravitated toward one or the other more throughout my life
She also discusses how she had a sense of self because she had no question about her adoptive parents as her true parents.

I did have the benefit of growing up the way I grew up, growing up with a secure sense of self. You know with the way it was and the whole business. I didn’t have any question about who my parents were.

#4 – Judy (Non Searcher). Judy discusses how she has recently thought about how she may have valued herself less than she would have had she not been adopted. She states that it was not caused by her adoptive parents but feels that it is just an average part of being a teenager and young adult questioning your role in society.

I talked about this with my husband the other day and I think I might have, without realizing it, at one point when I was younger maybe valued myself a little less because someone at some point in my life didn’t want me, but it was never because of anything my parents...did or said. You know you grow out of it. I think you grow through a phase in your late teens and early twenties where you doubt who you are or what your whole purpose in life.

Judy emphasized on several occasions that while growing up she was happiest with a good book and that she did not need other people around to be happy. She states, “I was just one of these kids give me a good book and a corner and I am happy.”

#5 – April (Non Searcher). April discussed how she always felt insecure about being adopted. She indicated that she was fearful of how she would react if people made statements about adopted people in front of her without knowing that she was adopted.

I mean I never felt differently of myself per se but I guess I was always insecure that people...one of the big things was, because no one knew, people would say a
lot of things in front of me, not knowing, that I was adopted, about adopted people.

April further discusses that she did suffered normal teenage problems and upon reflection of these years as an adult that her mother was reasonable in her requests and expectations.

Well, I mean I think I had a normal teenage mother relationship. She drove me nuts. We would have a curfew. It wasn’t unreasonable in hindsight. But at the time it was just annoying. I don’t think it was out of line with anybody else’s parents...she cared. She wanted to know where we were, when we were coming, just normal stuff.

#6 — Jill (Non Searcher). When asked how Jill thought adoption had affected her life, she replied, “I don’t know that is a hard question because in a way I don’t. I don’t really feel that it has affected my life,” indicating that she felt that adoption was a natural part of her life and did not affect her identity as a whole.

#7 — Lucy (In Process). Lucy indicates that adoption would not be in the forefront of her life had it not been for her two adopted children. She states, “If I didn’t have the kids I think it would be background noise maybe.”

Lucy talks about the fact that she is not able to get a copy of her amended birth certificate for the home study for the application for her second son. She is told that they can’t find her and when they do find her in the database they deny her access to her identity, even her adopted identity.

Then I had this bizarre experience when we were going through James’s adoption and we were dealing with an agency...and doing the Home Study because the one
for Henry was outdated. I had to come up with my birth certificate which I don’t have. Which I said well, for Henry’s I was just able to use my passport because when I originally applied for my passport I still had my birth certificate… I understand agencies will accept that. “Oh, no no we need a copy of your birth certificate”. All right. So I call…to get it. I guess it would be the amended birth certificate. I gave my parents name, my name, yadda yadda, yadda and they couldn’t find it. So I said, All right I will go to the agency I was adopted from and I will go through them. I said, “I don’t want the original, obviously.” “Do you have a copy of the amended one for this adoption?” “Yes we do.” “Can you get me a copy?” “No we can’t because the records are sealed”. I said “the amended one for me with my own parent’s names on it I can’t have a copy of like when…does have a copy of it.” “Nope, can’t.” This is like so bizarre and so what should the woman do offer is “I can send you an affidavit that this certificate exists that we have it, what the date the place of birth was.”

#8 – Cathy (In Process). Cathy discusses how she has recently been examining her life. She indicates that the process of self-exploration is difficult, but did note that therapy, in which she participates, has been helpful to her. Cathy states that she feels that she has a good mind, but that overall the process of searching for self-identity is confusing.

I feel like when people get to their late 20s, they kind of start to think about their life and everything and that and so the last couple of years it has been on my mind a lot. And I really have been thinking about it a lot…it is confusing to me. It is weird to me. I realize now. I am in therapy now. And I realize that I have a lot of
my own personal issues that could be a result of being adopted but you know it
took this many years to realize it or whatever, so...I think it is confusing – I feel, I
have a good mindset about it. I, mentally, handle it very well.

Cathy reminisces about a situation when her mother had asked her whether or not
she had told her boyfriend that she was adopted and feeling like she had committed a
great sin. She indicates that she originally felt special and chosen but now was confused
and not clear on why she was being judged.

I think I was very confused and I was like “What is she talking about.” I
remember my mom being very angry so I thought I had done something wrong,
so I think I kind of linked it with something terrible because of the way my mom
reacted you know. Narcissistically, I think part of me was like “Oh I am special
and different” you know but as I got older not really in a good way, it didn’t feel
like it. I remember being confused and not fully understanding what was going
on.

Cathy also notes that the process of finding her identity now in her late 20s has been
difficult and confusing for her. “And I was very confused and you know it was just a very
weird time for me. It still is. That whole section of my life is confusing. You know.”

#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah indicates that she does not feel that being adopted has
impacted her overall identity, but that she did identify more with her adopted father than
with her adopted mother. She indicates that she views herself as more similar to him.

So, umm, I don’t remember struggling with being adopted as an identity crisis. I
think he is the one I probably identify more with, more than my mom, I think
because I do have a strong personality and my dad is kind of a strong person.
Umm, I bonded with him maybe more in terms of understanding me (pause) and his knowledge of things outside of my mom’s world.

#10 — Paula (In Process). The first time identity comes up for Paula she mentions that it was her father’s impact in her life which makes her feel that she could accomplish anything. “He always gave me the feeling that I could do anything in the world that I wanted to do. He was a nonexist before the word ever was thought of.”

Paula identifies herself with the adoption movement and talks about how this has had a tremendous impact on her life.

But once I got involved with searching and got involved with the movement, then I would say that becoming an adoptee became a much larger part of my identity because I identified myself with the movement.

Paula relates her search for her birth family as “It affirmed my sense that it was not only a psychological quest but a spiritual quest.” She also values herself as having tenacity as a virtue.

And that there was value in this tenacity. And ironically the social worker I had talked with at Spence who had given the information had called me tenacious with clenched teeth. You really are tenacious.

Abandonment and Loss

Abandonment and loss was a common theme. Abandonment and loss was a prevalent theme across the interviews. Abandonment and loss are defined by the adoptees in relationship as being “left” as an infant and not having a relationship with a primary caretaker due to not having this relationship. This theme is related to how the
adoptees were able to address their being relinquished as infants by their biological parents and why they perceive that their parents made the decision for adoption. The loss referring to not growing up with their biological parents and being raised by a family who was in reality is only their family based on chance or fate. Several of the adoptees discuss wanting to thank their biological mother for making the decision to place them for adoption and to allow them to have a life with a family who was able to love and support them. Table 6 shows the distribution across the three categories.

Table 6

*Theme of Abandonment and Loss*

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<tr>
<td>Overall Total</td>
<td>9 (10)</td>
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*#1 – Christian (Non Searcher).* Christian initially speaks of abandonment not in terms of his relationship with his family but in relation to his sister. He discusses that it was not until they were both adults that they were able to develop a relationship based on respect and mutuality and during their childhood they both tended to live independent lives. He speaks about how he seeks a closer relationship with her. Christian also discusses how he needs to take better care of his family because they are aging and implying that they will not always be around.

I see my parents are getting older and deteriorating and I am thinking like gee you know this is going to be my family like when I get married and stuff. It is going
to be my sister. This girl that I have been kind of neglecting...we have been neglecting each other all of these years....but so now, to answer to your question, like I am just trying to think about the future and I do want a good relationship with my sister and I think we just got off on the wrong track growing up. I don’t know if it happens to brother and sisters but I think we are coming back together.

Christian talked about the lack of relationship that existed between himself and his extended family. He framed this in an optimistic manner by indicating that it was this distance and lack of connection with them that aided his independence. He stated, “And that also kept...that there was no extended family to give us support or something. Which helped our individuality, you know.”

#2 – Matthew (Found). Matthew speaks about the loss of not knowing about his adoption status and frames his not knowing it in a positive manner by stating, “I can’t say that my parent’s decisions about not telling us was a bad thing. I didn’t grow up with this feeling with this sense oh my parent’s dumped me and you know...Some other people that I have talked to have that.” In this part of the interview, Matthew talks about how he grew up, in his opinion, with a sense of security because he never knew about being left by his biological parents.

#3 – Karen (Found). Karen talks about how she has found out through the relationship she has with her biological mother that she was in denial about her actual pregnancy. Karen discusses the variety of losses her biological mother has experienced and indicates that these stressors together impacted her ability to acknowledge her pregnancy.
She [her biological mother] was adopted as I said. And her adopted family, she had no brothers or sisters, and her parents, her adopted father died when she was like 5 years old. She was raised by her mother and her stepfather. Her mother got cancer and died when she was 22, no 21, her mother died right before she had me. I think that was part of the reason you know she was in denial about being pregnant. I think she thought maybe she was missing her period from like being depressed or going through the trauma of losing her mother. Like her mother was diagnosed with cancer and then died pretty soon after that.

Karen also discusses how her biological parents have responded to the loss of one of their biological children.

You know, we have, their names are Steve and Bob, and Steve unfortunately died in his sleep in December in a freaky kind of thing and it devastated them, and [they] are completely devastated still. Bob is the younger one and he is in college. Not that I call them and talk to them or anything like that.

Karen does not discuss abandonment or loss issues specifically related to herself. She discusses the loss experienced by others.

#4 – Judy (Non Searcher). Judy discusses abandonment and loss in reference to children in the foster care system who are removed from their biological parents. She indicates that it must be extremely difficult to have a child removed from their care and how a person just "can't" give up their child.

I have a little problem with the system now that allows a child to be taken away from somebody after they have had them for a couple of years. I understand, probably as a parent, this you can't give your child up.
#5 - April (Non Searcher). April discusses loss in reference to her adopted father. She indicates that he had a lifestyle that didn’t include her and that he did not have custody of her. She continues to minimize her feelings about his unavailability.

He was doing the clubs and the limos and the this and that. The glamorous lifestyle. He didn’t abandon us per say but he certainly did not want custody and my mom wouldn’t of had that anyways...my dad lived like an hour away. And we would go on weekends and visit him. He could’ve been a lot worse but umm, he wasn’t father of the year but at the same time it could have been a lot worse.

#6 - Jill (Non Searcher). Jill discusses her strong reactions to a show she remembers watching as a child and how the children were adopted and the other one’s were left behind. She recalls how she associated this show with how she was left behind herself as an infant.

The only thing I can ever remember when I was little about adoption was at Christmas time there was this one Cabbage Patch kids show on. I don’t know if you have ever seen it, but it is a movie and they had it on during Christmas. And it was about the kids in the Cabbage Patch being adopted. And it always made me upset. I just remember this one Christmas I remember watching it and I cried and I got so upset. It was the one time I can remember my mom telling me...I remember everything. “You know what’s the matter, what’s wrong” and I said, “I don’t understand like why my parents didn’t want me” or something like that. That was the only time and that is all I remember about it...I think what made me upset about it is that the kids in the cabbage patch were being taken away from one another. I think from what I can remember it wasn’t like, I remember they
would go to their parents. Like the people who adopted them, they were great but I remember being sad for the other kids who were left there.

#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy discusses that she has been told that both of her parents were deceased and that it wasn’t her biological parents who gave her up for adoption but it was her biological grandparents who actually made the decision.

My story was that my birthfather was supposedly killed in a car accident before I was born and then my birthmother died during or shortly after childbirth. I was placed for adoption by my birth grandparents.

She indicates that her brother has more adoption issues because he was born to a single mother, while her parents did not actually give her up, they were deceased; she makes the connection that because she was not “left”, it implied that it was not that she wasn’t wanted and this helped her to have a more positive experience with adoption, specifically when compared to her brother.

My brother on the other hand came through the...agency which at that time was for single unwed mothers...So he has more issues around adoption than I do. I never had terribly many issues around adoption.

She continues and indicates that he had questions about being abandoned whereas she did not have questions about why she was placed for adoption.

And the only reason that I know that his adoption was more of an issue for him than it ever was for me is that my mother had mentioned that around the age of 13 he had come to here for questions about “how come my birthmother had given me up” and that kind of stuff and he clearly was upset by it. My mother tried to comfort him and as much as possible, but I never had that same question.
#8 – Cathy (In Process). Cathy discusses how her feeling of being different from the people around her have impacted her in a way in which she feels that she doesn’t belong. She implies that if she were raised with her biological family that would feel that she belongs.

I have some abandonment issues...I feel different from people a lot. Even from my own family I felt always like an outsider. So, but for the most part I mean...it is confusing and unsettling in a way.

#10 – Paula (In Process). Paula discusses early on in the interview how her adopted mother died when she was 12 years old. She discusses how her mother was removed from all of her medication and that her mother requested that the nurse go and buy a magazine for Paula that she had never allowed her to read. Paula interpreted this as her mother giving her permission to grow up despite the fact that she would not be around to see her do it. She indicates that she was only able to see her a few times in the hospital before she died.

Umm, my mother died when I was 12...she had a massive heart attack and went into the hospital and was there for about 8 weeks and when she was in the hospital...they withdrew her at some point from all the medication she was on because she was so sick. I think they knew she was going to...knew she was going to die. And um, when she got withdrawn from all that medication, it seemed like her mind kind of cleared up...she calmed down and her paranoia evaded. I didn’t see her but once or twice during the 8 weeks because in those days they wouldn’t let kids under 16 into the hospital. Umm, but she wrote me a
note and she had a nurse go out and buy me a True Story magazine. Well, a year
before that she was would have shot me dead.

Paula continues about her experience with her adopted mother and discusses how her
relationship with her was unpredictable. She discusses how at times her mother treated
her as a friend but later in the interview implies that she did not have a mother-daughter
relationship with her.

Umm, she treated me, it was uneven. Sometimes she treated me like a friend.
She loved to play cards so she taught me how to play all kinds of poker and
solitaire and double solitaire stuff like that. So, we played cards a lot, we played
Monopoly, we played Scrabble. And, she took me to a lot of movies because she
loved movies.

Paula discusses how her mother was not able to attend to her needs and originally
did not believe her when she indicated that she was not able to read. It wasn’t until the
housekeeper took over on her physical care when she moved in to live with her father,
after her mother’s death, that her physical needs were beginning to be cared for.

I would tell her that I couldn’t see very well and she didn’t believe me for a long
time and then when I was about 7, I was complaining again because I couldn’t see
and she said if you can tell what movie is showing at that theatre I will take you to
it and if you can’t, I won’t. Well, I couldn’t read it and so I said, “I can’t read it”
and she knew I loved to go to movies. So then she finally took me to an eye
doctor. She never took me to a dentist. She drank a lot of Coca Cola. I drank a
lot of Coca Cola. After she died and the woman who became our housekeeper
took me to her dentist, I had 17 cavities because my teeth had never been looked
at. I think if I were in that home today, that I am not sure what would happen because it would have depended on how much people knew about my father.

Paula discusses how her mother, despite dressing her, at times, in nice clothes and sending her to private school, was emotionally not available for her and at times not able to physically attend to her needs.

But if it were only me and my mother I think I would have been taken away from her at some point because, because I was really neglected and um, physically neglected. And I had nice clothes and I went to private schools when I was in New York, for a couple of years when I was in New York...but she was so emotionally needy that she...that she didn’t know how to nurture me very well.

Paula compares the way her mother treated her to the manner in which her father treated her. She describes him as also having a friendly relationship to her but the reality as she describes it, is that she was never treated like a child. She was treated as an equal. “Because, he treated me like a buddy. I mean I don’t know what it is like to be treated like a kid. I mean, I felt like a grownup.”

Paula verbalizes her overwhelming feelings of sadness as she is confronted with stories in which abandonment and loss are relevant issues.

And if I would see a television show where separation was a part of the story. I would just get overcome with the sadness and I can remember getting really frustrated and just screaming out in frustration to my husband and crying and stuff. Whenever I saw anything that had an abandonment theme in it, it was very desolating to me.
Paula describes in great detail across the interview her seeking out of Sally, whom she believes is her biological mother. Paula discusses how her friend Fran worked near a restaurant which Sally and her husband used to frequent. Fran would go to dinner and sit near Sally and her husband. Paula describes an event in which Fran and Sally begin talking and Sally equates having to give up her cello and how it is similar to the loss of giving up a baby for adoption.

So they would always get a seat right across from Sally and Adam. They really talked a lot and while we were in Japan one night, they were there for dinner and she is talking to Sally and Sally is really in a bad mood and sad and stuff and while Adam was out going to the bathroom, Sally told her that she had just sold her cello and that was devastating loss to her and she said, “It is like giving up a baby for adoption.” And Fran thought, “Oh, my goodness.” So she called me as soon as she got home and said, “Listen to what Sally said.” Okay.

Paula concludes that adoption is a alternative because it is permanent and equates permanency as having far better consequences than suffering further loss. Paula states, “So I think that adoption is way better than foster care, because it is permanent. It is far more permanent.”

Acceptance versus Rejection

Acceptance is defined as a sense of approval of who the adoptee is as a person with rejection being defined as not feeling a sense of approval as an individual. This emerged as adoptees began to discuss not only their feelings of being similar or different from their families, but how their families accept or reject them and how they view their
families. Several of the adoptees who are in contact with their biological families discuss how they may accept and reject elements of their biological parents and also how their parents accept or reject elements of who they are.

Themes of acceptance and rejection were relevant and discussed by 9 of the 10 participants. Table 7 shows the distribution across the three categories. This theme, following abandonment and loss, was extremely prevalent throughout the interviews.

Table 7

*Theme of Acceptance versus Rejection*

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<tr>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall Total</td>
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#1 - *Christian (Non Searcher).* Christian compared the difference of being conceived in the “back of a 57 Chevy” to having his adoptive parents plan for a period of time to adopt him as well as have to pay money to parent him.

This sounds kind of weird but I know my parents wanted me kind of thing. It wasn’t like I was in the back of a 57 Chevy and they were, my parents were just messing around and you know had me by mistake and had to freak out. Like they actually paid money and planned for years to get me. And then they went there and I guess they picked me out or whatever. It sort of made me feel important or whatever. You know…like I was more accepted I guess.
Christian also spoke about how he developed a closer relationship with his adopted father after he began to get involved in collecting items from World War II.

But now you really grew up and realized the value of things. So when I had an interest in WWII he said “well maybe you should collect some WWII stuff” and he helped me to do that. We would go to garage sales together…it was like a common bond for us.

He also sought out approval at the end of the interview when one of the last things he said was “Do you think I did alright?” This question is often associated with seeking acceptance of being “good enough.”

#3 – Karen (Found). Karen speaks about her process of searching and along with general fears about her conception, the main point she discusses here is about the possibility of her biological mother not wanting to meet her.

You know the reality of “wow” I can meet these people or person that I only this idea of, this image and what if it wasn’t this romantic story of my conception. What if she was raped or what if she didn’t want to meet me. So I think that, the reality of it spooked me a little bit.

She further discusses that her biological mother was also adopted and that after Karen found her, her mother had the courage to seek out her biological history and was then rejected and denied access to her roots.

My birthmother is also adopted and her…after I contacted her and she came clean with her whole family she tried to search for her birthmother and her birthmother rejected her and that was a big thing. I don’t know if that played into her trying to bring me into her whole life so much, you know trying to make me like her
daughter. One year after I contacted them, she searched for her birthmother. And her birthmother, from a very different time and generation, she probably, I don’t even know if she is still alive anymore. But she was probably in her 70s when my birthmother looked for her.

Karen also discusses how her adopted mother was invested in her living out her “Catholic” upbringing and was hurt when she married a Jewish man. She describes her concern about her first pregnancy and how her mom was going to have potential problems with her decision on how to raise her children. Karen discusses her fear of telling her parents her decision on allowing her children to choose their own religion/spiritual path as opposed to planning it for them. She describes how her sister helped her to cope and just speak the truth.

Oh please, for 9 months before I had my son I was like oh my god it is going to rear it’s ugly head to my sister…and she was like you just have to tell them. It worked out.

#4 – Judy (Non Searcher). Judy talks about one of the reasons she has decided to not search for her birth family is due to fear of rejection. “So I think secretly I didn’t want anyone to ever be in a position to rej…quote on quote, reject me. Again. I just didn’t want to give anyone any reasons to do that.”

Judy later discusses how her childhood was full of wonderful memories and how she was accepted into the family and her adoption status was not an important factor in their family.

But, the household was very…it was warm and loving. Just my mother was always making cookies, oh, she could bake these wonderful things. We didn’t have a lot
of money but my father worked when I was real young...and he had a series of
jobs. I don’t imagine when they were working full-time that they ever earned,
because neither or them were college graduates.

#5 – April (Non Searcher). April discusses how she has overhead people
throughout her life blame things on adoption status and in her mind by keeping her
adoption to herself, she could not be rejected based on that standing.

I mean, people say a lot of ignorant stuff. And just some other things, like when
we were growing up as teenagers I overheard a conversation that this kid who had
run away and they were all talking about his family and they were like, “Well you
know he is adopted.” And he didn’t run away because of that, he ran away
because of whatever his other issues were. But the point is that people, I always
found that people were biased and I never wanted to be able to say that for me. It
was like, if I have issues or something is going on in my life, it is because of fate,
it is not because I am adopted. But I never wanted to give them that ammunition.

April discusses how she has accepted that her adoptive father left her family. In
this segment, April talks about how her adopted father and that this new woman has
helped him to realize, somewhat, the importance of family. She discusses how he has
improved somewhat in his availability but that it will never be the type of comfortable
relationship that she would truly want.

Then he left that woman and started dating another one who is about 10 years
older than me. She was actually very down to earth. She kind of re-established
that family is important in his mind, again he is a chameleon so he thought that
way and at that time he kind of reached out to me and I figured well let’s see what
happens, 6 months later. And ever since then we have been on a much better path although it doesn’t erase like I just know he wasn’t always there for me and he never will be I mean, I have also accepted that.

She very briefly states, “But I don’t think I could count on him if I needed something.” April recalls an event when she was younger in which she broke down with her mother and asked her to not give her away.

I don’t even really remember it happening but what happened was we were in the kitchen and my mom was making dinner and this is when I was five and was bringing a plate of food over to the table and I dropped it by accident and my mom said I started freaking out. Which is not normal. She is like “Oh my god what’s wrong” and I just said, “Mom, please don’t give me away.”

April talks about how her mother felt that it would be better if she told people that she was adopted as opposed to keeping it a secret. April recalls, “She always respected my decision and it is not like she went behind my back and told people”.

In terms of extended family, April discusses how she always felt connected and accepted by them and never left that she was not a true part of the family.

But they were always my cousins. I don’t ever recall them throwing, saying “You are really not my cousin.” I mean I don’t recall anything like that. It was always like you are my cousin and that is it.

April discusses one of the reasons she has decided not to search for her birth family is due to their feelings of privacy. As she is talking she then moves into a discussion of the benefits versus risk ratio that appears to be directly connected to whether or not she would be accepted or rejected by them if she sought them out. April
compares this lack of control to a ratio equation and at this point in time in her process has decided it is not worth the risk.

I think that is kind of an invasion of privacy in a sense. I know that is kind of paradoxical because then it then shuts the door to my heritage but at the same time, I don't know. Maybe they would have made different decisions had they known it was going to be open years later. So, umm, I always have a different perspective on birthparents in the sense of. I think it is a risk versus benefit ratio.

As April moves into the discussion of her biological family, she discusses how she feels that it wasn't her birthmother's decision to "give her up" but it was her pressure from her family to make the decision. It seems that April is seeking ways to acknowledge that the rejection of not being raised by her birthmother was not due to her own decision.

But I did look at their names and I know where I was born. I think the most I know is that my birthparents were in their early 20s. They were both college educated and from what I understand the grandfather had a fit I guess because she got pregnant. And that is why I was put up for adoption because it was more of a grandfather pressure, family pressure.

April further discusses how she does know about how she was conceived and brought into this world. The lack of control she feels by not having knowledge, but at the same time not wanting the knowledge for fear of what she may find out in terms of why she was rejected originally and placed for adoption.

It could be, maybe she is searching for me now, I don't know. Or it could be that the family knows nothing about me and I would ruin her life. I mean, you have no idea. There is so much unknown. I think there are some search engines that if
you throw your name out there and the other person is a match and they hook you up or whatever. You know I just don’t…I didn’t want to find out that I was the product of a rape. There are certain things that maybe I don’t want to know.

April states that from the information she has her mother was Canadian but was sent to the United States in order to not embarrass or stigmatize her family. This was a rejection of her pregnancy and her family’s willingness to reject her pregnancy and chastise her for what she had done.

I was born in Boston. I think, I am not really sure, but I think that the family sent her to the states to have me and so I think she was Canadian. And then she came here. I guess because it was a stigma they sent her to Massachusetts to have the baby and then go back.

April kept her adoption status a secret for many years. She talks briefly about her not telling for fear of what they may think of her because she is adopted. April discusses how she spent most of her childhood figuring out how not to let her friends know that she was not being raised by her biological family.

I was always afraid, just afraid to cross that line, which is really stupid, but…you know it is so hard to shake something that you have lived with for so long.

Always that fear of what if, what if they don’t like me.

#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). April, as just discussed, mentions her keeping her adoption status a secret for fear of how others may view her. Jill, on the other hand, conceptualizes this in the opposite way, and discusses how she likes people to know because then they often engage her in questions which may help her to feel more connected and accepted by others in her life.
The only way I think I really ever think about it is when people want to ask me questions which is pretty interesting because people will usually say “Can I ask you, do you mind?” But you know I like to talk about it. I like people to know that it is a good thing.

#7 - Lucy (In Process). Lucy discusses early on in the interview that she always felt a part of her adopted family and felt accepted. “I was adopted into a very accepting family. I mean there has never been any question as to whether or not I was a member of the family.” She talks about intricacies of having an open adoption in that her son has access to information which adoptees in the closed system do not have. Lucy indicates that it now causes them to have to balance what he knows as well as when he learns it. Henry has been asking questions about his biological mother and is seeking to meet her. The problem arises when she and her husband try and reach out to her and she doesn’t respond. Lucy is concerned about how this may be viewed as rejection and revisited across his life.

Lucy has two children who are adopted and both of the adoptions are semi-open in that Lucy and her husband have met the biological family and, specifically with Henry’s birth mom made this beautiful album for him and he has always had access to, to show his class. Of course I got all kinds from the class, all kinds of questions asked by the kids that I would have preferred that he hadn’t been subjected to. I didn’t know he was bringing it to school the day he took it. Fortunately, the teacher had adopted children herself so it was like the ideal situation for it to happen in…but he wants to meet her and we have written and we haven’t gotten an answer. But so now we have all that stuff that he is going to
have to deal with that I am not dealing with. In a way it was easier to not have to deal with it.

Lucy discusses rejection further in relation to her not being the original planned adoptive parents for James. He was supposed to be adopted by another family but when he was born they decided he would not fit in with their family and the birth mom was then without an adoption plan for her son. She and her husband were then called and they decided to adopt James, but only after he had been rejected by previous family.

There was another family that was supposed to take him. They actually had come to that contact with her prior to birth, came to the hospital and were present at the birth and decided that he was too dark.

#8 - Cathy (In Process). Cathy discusses her feelings about wanting to know information but not wanting to disrupt anyone’s life. It seems that Cathy is fearful that her showing up in her biological mother’s life may be “bad” for her and the fear that she may be upset and reject her for her intrusion.

I am very hesitant. I am very scared. I am very like I don’t even know. I don’t want to disrupt anybody’s life because if like my mom has married someone else started and never told anybody, I shouldn’t be the one to come along and cause problems in their marriage or anything. I just don’t want to bring up bad feelings. I don’t want to do that. I am very curious.

Cathy continues about how she does not feel strong enough to be able to handle yet another rejection by her biological family.

I don’t know if I can handle the rejection like if no I don’t want to have anything to do with you. I don’t know if I…I think intellectually like I could handle it, but
I don’t know if emotionally I could handle it. Yet another, what I perceive, rejection.

Cathy discusses how people who are not adopted don’t know how she feels and perceives herself to be alone in the world because she does know from where she came.

I found, this may be arrogant but, that a lot of people don’t understand, unless they are in the position. They don’t understand. They take for granted, they know who their parents are. They look like someone. They get their personality from someone. They just take for granted that what it is like to not know any of that and it feels very alone. You know but I don’t think my mom understands.

#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah talks about how her sister has issues with being rejected but feels that she doesn’t feel the same about herself. Sarah discusses how this is surprising to her because they were both raised in the same house.

My sister definitely would never find her birthparents. She feels like they didn’t want her. She has totally a different perspective, even though we were raised in the same home. Umm, so she has a big rejection mentality.

Sarah then discusses how she was initially fearful of interrupting her biological mother’s life and was apprehensive. She felt that an appropriate compromise was to use a confidential intermediary and therefore give her mother the opportunity to say no to meeting her.

I also felt like even though a part of it is it is my right to know information I felt like this could potentially interrupt someone’s life and I didn’t want to cause havoc in someone’s life. I think what prevented me earlier from doing this is like this could really open up something that is bad. And that is what my intention -
so with a confidential intermediary you give that person a right to respond. And they can say no.

Sarah talks about how her biological half-sister currently resides in Australia and discusses how her biological mother was initially concerned about how her daughter would be affected by her reuniting with her birth daughter since she was so far away.

The half-sister knows, very concerned about her because of the distance. Wanting to make sure that things were okay with finding me and reconnecting with me. Almost wanted her approval.

Sarah discusses her tumultuous relationship with her biological mother and states that she does not really “like” the person she is and would not stick around and be a part of her life if it wasn’t for the biological connection between the two of them. On several occasions during the interview, Sarah indicates that she is in the relationship for the “long haul” despite her true feelings for her.

I mean her personality and the way she has reacted to me, if it was a dating relationship I would not date a person like that. So what do you do with someone you wouldn’t date and move away from somebody that is your birthmother, you know that you are committed to. She is not someone who I would have stuck with in dating wise, at all.

#10 – Paula (In Process). Paula describes her relationship with her adoptive parents and how her dad and her had similar interests and that her mother was very sensitive to feeling rejected. Paula describes an example of this with Christmas gifts when her father gave her a gift she really liked and they spent the day together
assembling it and her mother reacted by staying in bed all day because Paula was not playing with the doll she had bought for her.

One Christmas he gave me a chemistry set, it bored me. He didn’t care. But next year he gave me an erector set and we spent all day Christmas day building a merry go round and then we got to the very end and like the last two pieces were missing and we were just like oh, and it wouldn’t go around you know. My mother spent the whole day in bed because she got me some friggin doll that I told her I didn’t like when she showed it to me at the store. And, she was mad because my dad and I spent the day building this erector set. Well, she didn’t want to help us.

Paula discusses how she was seeking information on Sally (the woman who she perceived was her biological mother) by developing relationships with her family. Paula describes how open they were to her despite lack of proof. “When discussing how she was accepted into the home of her alleged uncle. Yeah, no concrete evidence.” This acceptance was noted by several of the alleged family members.

Another example of acceptance was noted when Paula discusses her desire to please her biological mother and be accepted into her life by pleasing her with a theatrical performance and wishing that she was there to see her.

In my head, I figured she was dead and I can remember I was in the chorus in high school and I loved drama and when I was a senior we did “Call Me Madam” and I had the lead. I can remember standing across the street from the junior high school that had the auditorium where we did the play thinking, “Wow – my
mother would be so proud if she knew I had this role.” You know, my
birthmother.

*Knowledge versus Lack of Knowledge*

Knowledge is defined as the amount of information the adoptee has about their
life with lack of knowledge defined as the realization of how much information they do
not have about their life. This theme is related to how the adoptee discusses their amount
of knowledge regarding their adoption and their biological family. For example, Matthew
discusses how he had no knowledge of his biological family until he was older and notes
the pros and cons, in his viewpoint, of how this lack of knowledge impacted his life.
Lucy, on the other hand, discusses how she always knew that she was adopted but did not
have the knowledge until recently that despite her closed adoption that she was able to
possibly be successful at actualizing a search. The theme of knowledge versus lack of
knowledge was addressed in nine of the 10 interviews. Table 8 shows the distribution
across the three categories.

**Table 8**

*Theme of Knowledge versus Lack of Knowledge*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Category</th>
<th>Non Searcher</th>
<th>In Process</th>
<th>Found</th>
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<td>Overall Total</td>
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#1 – Christian (Non Searcher). Christian discusses his desire and quest for knowledge as more important than his pride in being adopted. He notes that he would give just about anything to have a piece of paper answering some general questions. He emphasizes that he only holds onto his unique status as an adoptee because in his view that is all that he has at his disposal.

I think the bottom is that probably I think that rather than being adopted to be quite honest it would just be better to just know this information. So I think I would know. If you could just give me a sheet like right now that says you are this, this, and this. This is your ethnic background and whatever I would throw the adoption pride thing out the door just to have that information. But…I am just clinging to what I do have that makes me unique and it is like the only thing that I have that makes me unique.

Christian acknowledges his desire to know what his life would have been like if he had grown up with his biological parents.

It is kind of interesting to me that like how I would have turned out had I grown up in that area. But I guess I get along with my parents so well and you know… I love my parents a lot.

Christian further indicates that he is envious of those people who have their histories at their fingertips. He states that for him hearing a new possibility for his identity only makes him “try it on” and that he would prefer to have the facts.

It is surfacing some of those feelings like really kind of just like feeling kind of empty not knowing that one piece about yourself. Feeling kind of envious of those people who do know about like when talking about the information. For
me, for some reason that is the really annoying part of my life just because for my study of history and everything. For example, I was watching something on WWII history a couple nights ago and they were talking about the Russians and how the Russians are such good fighters and through their history and their hardship and I would like to know. Those questions come up a lot you know and every time I usually get like I said. I don’t really think about it until I get a relationship and then I usually talk about this stuff.

#2 – Matthew (Found). Matthew talks about how for most of his life he lived in a false sense of identity and that during the time while searching for his birth family when people asked a question of him, he actually had to stop and think and many times did not know the answers.

People would say to you, how many brothers or sisters do you have? You know. It would be kind of like a thought. It could be anybody out there. When people said... I just started thinking about doctor’s forms that you fill out. Like I have diabetes on my grandmother’s side and what a crock all that was. Just like the idea about for me, not so much that it necessarily needed to be the medical history, but it was the line that I had to stop and think about it and any given time.

Matthew continues to discuss his search process and states that he could not get enough knowledge quick enough. He indicates that it took him 6 months to complete the task and how for him this was too long to not have access to his information. Matthew did verbalize that for most people what took him 6 months takes others years to find out a small portion of what he did.
It was like I can’t get information fast enough. I don’t even know that I knew that it was going to be that difficult of a task. It didn’t dawn on me like how hard. The only reason how hard, the only reason I was able to find out 6 months seems doesn’t seem like a short time, there are a lot of people who search for years, and either don’t find, never find, or what not, I was extremely diligent and I also had available the time, I am in my own business.

Matthew discusses his beliefs that adopted people should have access to greater history and knowledge than they actually do. He indicates that non-identifying information is not always good information.

But I certainly think that people, I feel very strongly that if you are giving a child up for adoption, I think that it should be a requirement that you give a full-historical. They say that they give, that you can get, non-identifying information, but it is “BS.” I mean, number one, the people can put down next to nothing. I wasted 6 or 7 months for my non-identifying information and it said like 2 or 3 things: white male born to a female, you know.

#3 – Karen (Found). Karen reports that both her and her brother basically always knew that they were adopted and it was because of this that adoption did not seem like such a big deal. She indicates, “And my brother and I were both adopted and it was just something that was very much common knowledge. You know it was never like this big story.”

Karen states that “The closed [adoption] affected me in the sense that it made my curiosity stronger and it made me search. That much I know.” This statement indicates that the quest for knowledge is extremely strong.
#4 – Judy (Non Searcher). Judy discusses how she finds it disturbing to not have access to her medical history and that there needs to be a better system that helps give adoptees access to this information.

Because I think if they are going to say that you don't have a right to meet your birthparents. If they’re willing but then deny you. I think something needs to be set up where you can have that medical information. That is very frustrating to me. I am so sick of telling doctors, “I don’t know my medical history.”

Judy continues by indicating that a national registry could be set up in order to assist in giving the adoptee information about their heritage and medical history in order to have a better understanding of genetic possibility.

I wish they could set up a national registry where you could register what you know. Maybe my birthmother didn’t know anything about my father’s medical history. Even if the birthmother could register with some kind of code or something the medical history to at least... have access to that. I would feel better about that. Maybe it would be nice to know the ethnic background just because, it’s history.

#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). In terms of knowledge of being adopted, Jill reports that is a common question she is asked. Her answer is that she has always known and that there was no monumental moment of finding out.

But when I ask my mom she said that they always told me kind of so I never remember a certain time...we have something to tell you. “You are not ours” or whatever. But no there was never a time that. People ask me that all the time. You know when did you find out. But I have always known.
Jill talks about how lucky she is because she was raised by a wonderful adoptive family but notes that there needs to be more adoption research available on a variety of topics. Jill states that information should be available along with support groups.

I think there needs to be more information out there for people, even people like me that maybe just want to do research on it or parents who want to adopt children who maybe they are not sure if they want to find their birthparents, I mean. I just think their needs to be like support groups for people who want to find their parents, I mean that is a big deal. Even, I am lucky, I guess I feel like I haven’t had any adverse affects from being adopted but I am sure there are a lot of people who have different feelings than I do. I am very positive about it. I have a great family. I am very lucky.

#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy discusses how she has access to very little information on her adoption and the only history she has is from her adopted parents.

Well, I was adopted from...a closed adoption state. So, I have very little information on my background. What I have is through my parents...what my mother told me. But other than some bare rudiments as to why I was placed for adoption as far as she knows.

Lucy speaks about how a closed adoption, in her perception, has been easier for me because knowledge is a difficult tool when you don’t have a history to fall back on.

I think it made it easier. It would be very hard to know. Because once again the story I had been given. I didn’t have a birthmother to go back too. It was just like a non-issue. On the other hand, I also think I don’t think I particularly remember asking.
Lucy indicates that her brother was adopted from a different state than hers and a law passed in his state of birth indicates that adoptees can have access to their files. She notes that her brother requested only medical records and not personal record and she doesn’t know what the outcome of this was but that it wasn’t to his liking.

Then as an adult, I guess...passed a law that told the agencies that they had to tell adoptees that they can have access to their medical records, that they could actually have access to their files. But do they want just medical and/or personal. And my brother wrote back and said just medical, he did not want the rest of it. Apparently it was a story that he particularly didn’t want to hear. He never told me the details and I hadn’t asked but the way he told me it was very clear that he got information that he didn’t particularly want.

Lucy talks about her only knowledge of adoption is from her adopted mother and that she has no reason to doubt the facts as she knows them.

This is part of who I am and these are part of the facts as I have been given them and I have absolutely no reason to doubt my mother. She has never tried to reel her way out of telling me stuff about being adopted.

Lucy shares the event in which she finds out that despite being adopted from a closed adoption state that she may have enough non-identifying information to identify her biological family. She discusses her emotional reaction to this and how she drove home in tears.

When I heard that there was this possibility about being able to find out more information, I still remember that day...one of the big bookstores was having some kind of adoption day. So there were people who were there who were active
with the groups that are trying to open things up and find people whatever. I was like, I walked up to the desk and said, “I don’t have any information and I know I come from a closed adoption state, so I don’t really figure there is probably nothing I can get” and they were like “Well, no, not necessarily.” “Which state are you from?” “What do you know about yourself?” “Well I know the day and the hospital and they were like, ‘you have enough information to figure out who you are’.” And then they told me about the birth records section of the public library and unfortunately at the time I lost the original birth certificate that I had that had the number up on the top. That opened up to me that had never been a possibility I drove home in tears.

Lucy switches gears and talks about how both of her sons are products of a semi-open adoption and in her view how this is more complicated than her closed adoption. Lucy discusses that she now is able to interpret for her son what type of person his biological mother seemed to be. All types of potential questions that are not privy to closed adoption knowledge.

Just, it wasn’t just her giving the book, it was that we had so much information for him and I could say to him, “Here is what your mom seemed like to me.” All the sudden there is all this information and when you don’t have it. You don’t have to think about it, you don’t have to worry about. You may wonder about it, but it’s done deal, it’s no questions asked…yeah, he has all these pieces of information about himself and if he asks me questions about who she was and what went on and you know it is not totally guess work on my part to give him the
answers. It is not like, "Well I can imagine that." It is more like well from what she said. And that puts a whole different spin on things.

Lucy states that it wasn't that she ever decided that she wasn't going to search for her biological parents but that in the era in which she grew up, adoptees didn't search. She indicates that she didn't feel a huge need to meet them but then when she realized that there was a reality of actually gathering information that she became somewhat overwhelmed.

It was never that there was a point that I was not going to search. For so long in my history, people just didn't. So it was just like this non-issue. And then as the subject matter came up, well maybe starting in the 70s, I am guessing when I first heard about people talking about you know we should change the laws and this and that. I was always like, "I don't feel." I can understand that somebody would feel a huge need for it, but I didn't feel that need. But then, like I said, there was this bizarre experience when all of a sudden I found out that there was a possibility that I could find something out with some relative ease.

Lucy further discusses how she is not able to answer the questions about her medical history and how this represents that "unknown" for her. She talks about how this could be perceived as either liberating or the inability to prepare for the future.

Well, first of all, every time I go to the doctor and they ask for the family history I am like I don't need to answer these questions because I don't know the answers...which is kind of liberating in one kind of way but, on the other hand, you do kind of want to know what you are in for (laugh). And I don't and when
things happen to me I am totally unprepared for it. Yeah. Umm, yeah so it like this big unknown.

In conclusion of this theme for Lucy, she notes that for her the worst part about being adopted is that she is not able to get a direct answer to her questions.

Just the worst thing is that you have questions that you can’t get a direct answer for at least in my situation. I’ll probably never have direct answer for most of the questions that might ever come up. And so you either just say that the questions are not important. In the big scheme of things or you just start to kind of wonder at some level.

#8 – Cathy (In Process). In terms of the quest of knowledge, Cathy acknowledges, “I have a lot of unanswered questions and I am curious.”

#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah indicates that before she decided to search for her biological family that she not have access to a lot of information. “I think I would have wanted more details... in hindsight maybe."

Sarah discusses her decision to go with a confidential intermediary but sought out the cheaper one because feeling that was her own information that she was seeking and that she shouldn’t have to pay that much to gain access to one’s own history.

Then I hired someone from the West Coast. Have you heard about Confidential Intermediary? I hired someone. I went through this process of looking at different ways to find out this information. Some cost $500. This woman I hired is $150.00. I felt better about that because, you do feel like “oh this is my right to know something.”
Sarah states that adoption should be discussed on a case by case basis as well as overall that adoptees should have access to their own information.

I think each individual case needs individual concern. I don’t think that there is this viewpoint out there that children who are put up, adoptees have a right to their information.

#10 – Paula (In Process). Paula discusses that her mother was the person who instilled the knowledge about adoption and recalls always knowing that she was adopted.

When I was a child, mother was the primary informant about adoption stuff. They told me as far back as I can remember you know. I think I knew the word before I could say it right.

Paula’s father gave her the information he had about her biological family after her adopted mother died. She stated, “So, I had those records and my mother’s name was on it. And my father said this is yours take good care of it – it is your life, you know.”

Paula shares her reactions to a letter which she was privy to that was written from her adopted mother to her sister about how she came into their lives. Paula talks about how this story has an important connection to her history but that it is missing some pages and therefore it is unclear if the story changed drastically on the missing pages or it was following the same path.

And there was a letter that my mother had written to [her sister] before they got me and it was about me. And she said that there was a baby that they thought was going to be theirs and what they were struggling with and they went out to buy clothes and then they got a call from the agency that my birthmother was changing her mind and so my parents were like this - not knowing if they were
going to get me or not. Well, that letter was transforming to me because, pause, and ironically but it so fits everything else, the (pause) well, that letter said that my parents had met and married...in 1935 and that my father had died in an air accident...and my mother came back to this country destitute and that is why she had to give me up. Well, it didn’t make sense because if she was married I would think the last thing she would do is give me – well anyway. Umm, so that letter was such a gift that my cousin found it and that my mother wrote. My mother would have let me search. She would have been crazy if I had searched. But it was her gift to me. So that gave me a lot more information and it told me not only more factual information but it also let me know that my mother had a hard time deciding to give me up. Because, this is like page 8 of the letter and it says, “The babies, we were to have picked her up today but the agency called this morning and said, the mother was wavering again and they want her to spend the entire weekend with the baby” so somewhere in the middle of the sentence the next two pages of the letter were missing. So I never knew what it said. Then the last page of the letter was there and it said, Paula came to live with us today and we have a daughter.

Paula admits that this letter is just one indication that she does not have access to all the information about her birth. She states, “All these missing pieces, it is just a metaphor for my entire life.”

In the following excerpt, Paula discusses how the person she thought was her biological mother died and how she found out about her death by the nurse who was caring for her. Paula shares her story of how she informed one of Sally’s [the woman she
believed to be her biological mother] doctors that she believed that this woman was her biological mother and requested that the doctor run a DNA test on Sally [the same day she died] in order to find out if she was in fact her biological mother. She was informed that it was not possible that Sally was her biological mother and therefore the knowledge that she has about her life has just been upset.

“There is a woman sitting here who thinks that the woman who died in your hospital this morning was her birthmother and she needs blood for a DNA test”. And the guy said, “Fine.” So I went in and got it that afternoon…now there is a real fast forward. I was away for 5 weeks when I came back the lab said that there was no way she could be my birth mother and I was blown out of the water. Literally. And, and I was just kind of numb all day about it. I didn’t cry at first and then in the middle of the night I was just thinking about all these ways that I had heard God telling me that I was right even though I didn’t have a relationship with her and the thing that was strongest in my mind.

Secrets

Secrets is defined as the belief that they were not to talk about particular things outside of the family. This theme emerged for adoptees who felt that there adoptive status was either considered a closed topic in their household or it was a topic that was open to discussion in the household. Karen notes, for example, how she found out for example about being adopted from the babysitter, by accident, as she overheard her discussing their adoption status with her brother. The theme of secrets was discussed by 9
of the 10 participants. Only one non searcher did not discuss this theme. Table 9 depicts the distribution across the three categories.

Table 9

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<th>Theme Discussed</th>
<th>Non Searcher</th>
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#1 – Christian (Non Searcher). Christian discussed that he did not know his biological heritage that his adopted parents told him to just use their heritage. He indicates, “They said well you use our family lineage. And I was like ‘Ok’ and it kind of seemed a little weird but that pretty much I kind of just masked that part of my life.”

In this situation, Christian talks about how his mother gave him access to some of his biological information but he was told to keep it a secret from his sister because she did not have similar information for his sister.

So I am like do you have any information like if I ever do need it. And she says “Oh yeah, here is your birthmother’s name and stuff” and then she said “Don’t tell your sister, because the agency we adopted with her through did not give out this information and she might be mad about the information that she doesn’t have...And I guess ever since my mom said that I had information that she didn’t about...it kind of gave me the idea like don’t talk to your sister about this.
When asking about whether or not he would search for birthparents, Christian replied, "It is like...Hmm...I guess. The bottom line is I would just do it behind their back." Christian was brought up in a world in which secrets were kept from each other and that was the norm.

Christian indicated that while growing up he learned to avoid speaking the truth about certain issues such as about culture and ethnicity. He notes that it is bothersome to not know information.

Well it is definitely like I said, growing up with it you have to sing and dance around certain issues. With like cause people talk a lot about their culture and ethnicity and all that stuff. And you know whenever that comes up – not knowing that information it is kind of annoying. And also like with the medical history like I think it kind of...in a way I kind of wish it was more of an open thing.

#2 – Matthew (Found). Matthew discusses how he never knew he was adopted until a few years ago and this was kept secret from him and his brother.

We didn't know that we were adopted until a couple years ago...well I found out when I was about 34 years old. I am 38 now. Well maybe a little earlier than that maybe 33 years old. So I think I have some different perceptions than people who I know are adopted and umm at an early age.

Matthew discusses how he is now in contact with both his biological parents and adopted parents and despite this he would not be able to get access to his birth certificate. He notes that it felt as if his life was a secret and that he was expected to not have knowledge of his history.
It was an interesting ride like when I found it I was adopted because you just don’t even know anything about it and the idea of being an adult and sort of being treated like there is a secret and you can’t find out anything about your life. Even to this day I have found my birthparents and my adopted parents know that I found them and I wouldn’t even be able to get my birth certificate even if I really wanted to and had there permission and what not. So my perception of adoption is I think it is a pretty great thing and over abortion that is...people make mistakes and what not but I don’t think hard of a price to pay to go to term with the child and give them up for adoption.

Matthew continues on the path of secrets by noting that after his biological mother had given relinquished Matthew and she later married, that she then adopted a child. Her daughter did not know that she was adopted and had always believed that she was a biological child of her mother’s. He states, “Oddly her first child she adopted. She doesn’t know that she adopted.”

When Matthew also met his birthmother, she kept the fact that he was her son a secret and her other family members began thinking that they were having an affair.

I also think she wanted to feel me out a little bit and it was kind of...in hindsight it worked out very nice. It gave us - It was really about a year before we came clean with the kids. They thought she was having an affair.

Matthew indicates that he is gay and that it was a “secret” in that people did not acknowledge what they didn’t want to see and he noted that his mother and father were not aware that he was gay. Matthew states that his aunt and uncle knew and they were
also covering for him with his parents. He mentions the story about how he actually confronted his father about this and how the story unraveled.

   Even umm, even later on...Pause...I don’t know if you got the picture, but I am gay and ....my aunt and uncle knew this. They would hear my mother saying stuff like. Like I would have discussions with my aunt and uncle they knew. My mother would be on the phone with that aunt saying that “Well you know Mark is just playing the field. He hasn’t found the right girl yet.” I was like...you know. They really liked John and asked my father about the anniversary party and I kept saying, “What about John?” He was like, “Well you know, your mother might not be very comfortable with it.” You know, I said “Dad, look I will come to the party, but I am not going to stay that long. It is not a political statement. All I am going to go with people and be who I am, what I want to be, and you know what the truth of the matter is that I am 30 years old and not married, I am going to be 40 years old and I am not going to be married and the other truth of the matter is if you don’t think all these people don’t know about you, you are really kidding yourself.” They are all sitting there saying...they are the only one’s who don’t know about. People know these things. This is a reality. This wall is a reality, you can’t walk through it. I am gay that is a reality. If you lose friends over it, they weren’t friends. That is all there is to it.

   Matthew states that he feels uncomfortable sharing with this adoptive parents that he stays the night at his biological mother’s house with John and will evade the questions and state that they are staying at friend’s homes.
So I don’t tell them at all. I say, “Oh, I am staying at friends” and get very evasive and that is not good either because that I am not a good liar and I don’t mind being gay also, when you start out there are a lot of lies that you are coming to terms with yourselves, you lie to your parents, at least I did and maybe today it is a little different. But it sort of like a whole new coming out process with my parents – or not coming out or being in the closet, because I am forced to lie about all that stuff.

#3 – Karen (Found). Karen discusses how no one knew that her birthmother was pregnant throughout her 9 months with the exception of her birth family. Karen’s existence was a secret.

So, I don’t know how my birthmother pulled it off. But she said like high waistlines were in fashion in the 70s...one person other than my birthfather knew she was pregnant. She had me early so I guess she wasn’t really like. She was showing but not gigantic. She is a small person anyway. She had me. No one knew about it and they gave me up for adoption and their kids certainly didn’t know about me.

In terms of her pregnancy, Karen also indicates that her mother did not confirm her pregnancy until she was more than half way through it.

She knew she was pregnant, but she didn’t confirm it like by going to the doctor until she was like 5 months pregnant and then had me 6 weeks early. So she really wasn’t, it wasn’t like, you know, it wasn’t like you know confirmed for that long. Like for maybe 3 months she knew she was pregnant and then she had me unexpectedly six weeks early.
Karen also mentions the theme of secrets when she talks about reuniting with her birthmother. For the first few months they were contact with the exception of her birthfather, her biological family did not tell others about Karen. She states, “As I said, once they told everybody they felt that the cat was out of the bag.”

#3 – April (Non Searcher). April mentions that her brother was open about being adopted but that she kept this information to herself, a secret. She states, “But he, all his friends, always knew, it was common knowledge. Where I hid it growing up he did not.”

April acknowledges that only a handful of people knew that she was adopted for fear of them rejecting her. She states, “No one at work. Very very few people. And so I always lived with the fact, ‘Oh my god what if they find out.’ I don’t want them to find out from someone else and not me.”

#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). Jill emphasizes that in her life adoption was not kept secret and was considered an open topic for discussion. She states, “But I always, I guess we always had a good relationship in that things were not like secret.” She also indicates, “But adoption was never. It was never a closed subject. I guess it was always open.”

Jill indicates that she wants people to feel comfortable asking her questions about adoption and wants it to be an easy process.

I enjoy letting people in. I think some people wanna ask but they don’t they feel uncomfortable. They don’t know if people are uncomfortable talking about it. I think it is interesting.

#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy indicates that her family was very open to discussing adoption and that she has followed the same path in discussing adoption with
her children. She states that it is because of this openness about adoption that is why she does not have any specific issues with adoption.

So I have always known I was adopted. My parents told me at a very early age. In fact, that is one of the earliest stories I ever remember being told about and I have kind of used that as a model with my own kids...it was no secret. Everybody knew I was adopted, but nobody ever raised it as an issue. Nobody ever mentioned it and nobody ever teased me about it. So, for me there was always this comfort level about it.

#8 – Cathy (In Process). Cathy recalls that adoption was a secret in her house and that she found out she was adopted by her babysitter. She does not specifically recall how her mother handled talking to her about it with the exception that she was told that her being adopted was no one’s business and that she was not “different” from other children.

My parents were very secretive about it and we didn’t talk about it. It is almost like it didn’t really happen....I found out from my babysitter when I was like 7 years old. It was an accident the way I found out. I didn’t find out from my parents and my mom never really explained it to me. She just said “This is the way it is. Don’t tell anybody. You are not any different from anybody else, nobody needs to know. She made it like it was no big deal. And that was it. But then as I get older that I am very different and it is weird and even now it is weird. I think for my mom I think it was an embarrassing thing. I think she saw it as something about herself: she couldn’t have children. I don’t even know if that
was the case. I don’t even know who it was, my mom or my dad [that was not able to have children].

She further recalls that her mother used to check in as she was getting older to find out if Cathy had told anyone about her being adopted. She states, “Oh have you told them that you are adopted?” Like, “Oh man.” Like “don’t tell them.”

Adoption was not discussed in her house and Cathy indicates that she saw a Precious Moments collectible item about adoption. She suggested to her parents that maybe they might buy it for her and the response was that an item like that would let others know about the secret and refused to buy the item. This conversation also shut Cathy down from discussing adoption again with them.

The only other time I remember talking to my parents about it is, this is also when I was an adult. I collect Precious Moments right and there is a Precious Moments that has a mom, a dad, and a little boy and he is holding an adoption certificate. And I like precious moments because they all have little sayings on the bottom. Yeah. And it says on the bottom, like something like “God bless the day we found you” and I thought that was just so nice. It makes me feel like, we are really happy we found you and it didn’t happen biologically. I just thought it was so nice and I told my parents and I was like “Oh maybe you should get this for my birthday or something. And my mom is like “And let everybody know that you are adopted?” Like oh my God – that still to this day is her mind frame. Can’t let anyone know it is top secret so we don’t talk about it anymore at all. It was the last time I spoke to her about it. I was like forget it, she is not going to, she is never going to let it be my thing. It is all about her and her thing.
#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah reports that her adopted parents didn’t have much information available about her biological parents but that whatever they had, they shared. She states, “They didn’t know a lot, but whenever we would ask them and they to answer, so they didn’t hide things, which is really good.”

Sarah notes that her biological mother did tell both her husband and daughter about Sarah’s existence but did keep it initially a secret from both of them. “She told her daughter at 16 about me. And her husband didn’t know until about 2 years into their marriage and then he was like “Well can we go get her.” (laugh). So he has been supportive.

#10 – Paula (In Process). Paula discusses how she felt appropriate to discuss her perception of being adopted with her adoptive father and that he was open with her and corrected some of the misperceptions that she had learned initially from her mother.

I just screwed up my courage and asked him what he knew about my birth family. And he told – I said, “Did my birthmother, did my first mother really die when – after you guys adopted me?” And he said, “Where did you get that idea?” And I said, “Well, that’s what mommy told me.” And he said, “That is what she wanted you to believe – No, we never had that information” and then I said, “What do know about my birthfather?” and it may have been, I can’t remember whether my mother had told me that it was a crash over China thing, but my father definitely told me that at that time that my father had died in an air crash.

Paula notes that she had several misperceptions about closed adoption and initially thought she was not entitled to any knowledge about her birth family. After reading a book she reports that she became more aware that she had the “right” to search.
And so until I read Fran Jones’s book, in spite of what I said, when I was in college and I thought in 5 years I would be able to look for my birthparents when I went to [city], well I wouldn’t of had the faintest clue of how to do that… but until I read Fran’s book, I really felt like a closed adoption meant that whatever had happened before just was never to be a part of my understanding of who I was. It was just, it was a secret. It was none of my business.

Paula notes that she did not begin her search process (external search) until after her father died. She indicated that she was fearful of telling him about the decision to search and therefore waited until he died. Paula further states that she also had a difficult time keeping her search away from her other extended family members and when she finally told the truth, her aunt was accepting of her decision.

Umm, because once – okay, my father died in 1974, our children were born in 70 and 71 and uh (pause) and so I didn’t start searching until after he died. And I know that I projected the fear of ever telling him I was searching, which I didn’t really start until after he was gone so it wasn’t an issue of telling him. But the way my other friends were afraid to tell their parents, I was even afraid to tell my relatives. It took me a year, year and a half to tell my dad’s sister and her husband and I only ended up telling them because she would call — it seemed like she would always call the Saturday I was… at an ALMA meeting and I would call her back and she would say, “Where were you?”... Oh, what were you doing there?” And after about 3 or 4 months I thought, “Oh, forget it, I am just going to tell her.” And she said, “Oh, that’s exciting, I am glad you are doing that” and I was like “Sigh” — Off my chest.
Control

Control was defined by the adoptees in the study as a desire to have a sense of power and knowledge in their life. This theme was relevant to adoptees who felt that they had no control over their lives and how they felt that by being adopted, choices that others may have in life they don’t have. Specifically, this emerges for them when others ask them information that they don’t have that they feel that they should have the answers to such as “what is your ethnicity?” by an outside person and they are not able to give them an answer.

Control was brought up as a theme in eight of the 10 interviews. Table 10 shows the distribution across the three categories.

Table 10

*Theme of Control*

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<tr>
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*#1 – Christian (Non Searcher).* Christian discusses his need for control and how he views adoption as the main impediment to having control over his life. He indicates that regardless of how he looks at it, his adoption status is out of his control.
It is kind of like the one thing in my life that I don’t have control over. You know. I am a control freak and just knowing that I can’t ... there is no way that I can dance or sing around this one and give people answers.

#2 – Matthew (Found). Throughout the search process, Matthew expresses how he was able to maneuver the system and was in control of the process. In the first passage, Matthew was seeking information from a person who potentially knew his birthmother and stated, “I am an attorney, I talk”... she gave up like the information. If you prime them right you sing like a canary.

In the next section, Matthew discusses how he lost control when he found his biological uncle and was waiting by the phone for him to call.

So I called John and then I had given my home number I think and he said he was going to call back that evening and now the tables were turned and I lost control a little bit. Here I was doing all this searching and now all of a sudden we got we... now we have to sit around and wait. I can’t go out, it’s a Friday night. And he called I didn’t know who it was.

Matthew also mentions that there is a dichotomy which exists in searching. He indicates that when you search you have to be prepared for what you find, but on the one hand states that there is no way to be prepared for this. Therefore it is not possible to have control over the search process.

You know you stop... absolutely and I think that if you are going to be a person who is going to search you have to be really really prepared and you never can be and never are.
#3 – Karen (Found). Karen indicates that she recalls always wanting to search for her birth family, but then acknowledges that when she turned 18, and was able to legally search for them that she realized how fearful she was and needed to take time before completing the search. Karen states, “There was never any guilt attached with it. They always made it seem like it would be a great idea and I guess when I turned 18, it was a little scary.”

Karen then talks about how she began writing letters to her biological mother and that she would send them through the adoption agency and not directly to her mother. She notes that she gave her mother her home address and that her mother would send the letters directly to her home, thereby giving her mother control over the process. Karen states, “I couldn’t send letters directly to her house but she could send stuff directly to me…. she wrote directly to me. I gave it them, I didn’t care.”

Karen discusses how she believes that there is no way to be prepared for the search and reunion process. She describes the difficulty in defining the relationships with her biological family and how it is a constant process of adjusting and acclimating. Karen indicates that she is in this relationship for the duration but admits that if she had known how difficult it might have been she may not have completed the search.

I really just, I have frequently said to people, there is nothing in the world that can prepare you for what you are going to face when you find them. I really, I didn’t do any research, I didn’t do any research, I didn’t do anything like that. I just went into it very blindly. I was very like we both want to see each other, we each want to know who each other are, and it is just going to be fine. I didn’t anticipate what the repercussions were going to be. Luckily 9 years later all the dust is
settled and everybody has kind of worked out their niche and we have made compartments for each other in our lives and it has worked out and it has been able to work. But they, I am not the type of person who I cut people out of my life or I say this doesn’t work I am not going to deal with it. Like I am generally the type of person to work things through.

Karen indicates her need for control and belief that she deserves it by stating, “It has got to be my way or the highway.” This is in reference to continuing a relationship with her biological parents.

#4 – Judy (Non Searcher). Judy discusses how she has no desire to meet her biological parents and feels that it is related to her fulfilling relationship with her adoptive family. She states that she has not made it easy for someone if they were searching for her, thereby unconsciously having control over the search process.

I just, it is probably because I felt so fulfilled by my relationship with them. It never got to even the point that if we weren’t having a perfectly good time and you know because every relationship has its ups and downs. I just never. I just didn’t care. I feel bad for my birthmother because if she wanted to find me (laugh) because I just didn’t.

#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). Jill discusses how she has no desire to find her birth family and how she lacks the understanding of why people want to search for them. She states, “I feel I would never want to find my birthparents and I don’t understand why people would want to find them.” Jill has control at this point and does not plan on relinquishing it.
#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy mentions that the adoption agency received some bad publicity at one point for not fully sharing the biological parent’s medical history and therefore she is not positive that the information she has about her parents is accurate. Therefore it is the adoption agency which has control over her in her view. She states, “Neither my parents nor I can be assured that we know what the truth is”.

Lucy also discusses that fate is what really makes the world the way it is and that people really don’t have control over their lives. She indicates, “I had a friend back in Oregon who used to call it the exogenous E factor. Just put you someplace on earth right then and there is so little that you have to do with that.”

In the following passage, Lucy is talking about writing to Henry’s birthmother who wrote her asking to see her biological son. Lucy stated that she need to give some control to her son to make that decision when he was old enough and not make those decisions for him.

So much is out of your control and I wrote her back and said, “So much is out of your control when you are adopted, you are passed from one family to another,” I said, “I need to leave the decision in his hands by and large as to when he wants to see you and under what circumstances.”

#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah discusses how she is currently seeking a career change and that it was because she has control over her professional life that she is able to make these changes in her life.

Currently, I am looking for a job. I work in Millburn school district as a second grade teacher. Got current sinus infections from the building basement environment. And chose to resign. Also, knowing that teaching wasn’t a long
term career goal for me, that I wanted to do something else. So, currently I am looking for something that is compatible with the potential of going back to school.

Sarah discusses how her parents gave her control over the adoption knowledge and stated to her as a child that she could have whatever information was available if she waited until she was 18 years old.

So through a book they brought up the idea of adoption. And they were very open. They said, when you turn 18 you are an adult and that is your right to right to find your birthparents, so I didn’t find this information in a secret way. They were open to saying this is your right, this is your choice.

Sarah also indicates that she felt comfortable asking her parents questions about her adoption status and did not feel that she had to wait until they told her the answers to some of her questions. “I think when I was very young they brought it up so it was known and then they wouldn’t pursue it too much, they would just wait for us to ask questions.”

Sarah talks about how she made initial contact with her mother and tried to both develop a relationship with her, yet maintain some sense of control.

And, we talked on the phone in the first time in September. And, I initiated the whole thing. Like I, she got my letter and pictures and then she responded with a letter and she signed a release form and then I wrote her a note saying “can we schedule a time to call” because I really thought well, you don’t just pick up the phone and catch someone running out the door, “Hi.” So she responded positively to that. We set up a time to talk and talked on the phone. It was pretty, I was
pretty scared and pretty emotional because it was huge. I kept thinking this is the
hugest thing you can do. It is not dating, it is not...it is huger than dating and
marriage, even though those things are significant but you know those people.

Sarah also states that it was because she sensed that she was losing control that
she needed to add “healthy” boundaries to their relationships. “You know what and I
need to be sensitive to people that need that. But in this situation it was like sucking me
in.” She also mentions that at the time of the interview she was having difficulty with her
relationship with her biological mother and states, “I am kind of on a string right now,”
implying that at some point she did lose some control.

#10 – Paula (In Process). As mentioned earlier, Paula spent a large part of the
interview discussing how she thought she had found her biological mother and states,
“But I have no way if I can’t even be sure if she was my mother how on earth can I
know” indicating that she may never have the answers to her questions despite her strong
need for knowledge and connection.

Paula also indicates that part of her frustration with the adoption system and one
of the primary reasons by she is such an advocate for open adoption is because, “And I
realized that part of what was so frustrating about it, is that the adoptee is so completely
powerless over our own lives to know who we are when we were born and that is so
insane.”

Adoption as Good versus Bad

The next theme is the perceptions of the participants of how adoption has been
good and/or bad in their lives. Adoption as good is defined by an adoptee discussing
positive elements of adoption whereas adoption as bad is defined as an adoptee discussing negative elements of adoption. This emerged for several of the adoptee who indicated that they had experienced adoption as either good or as bad. For example, April discusses how she was punished for being adopted and talks about several negative experiences that she had when others found out that she was adopted. Karen discusses that her adoption story was always considered good and it was because of the way that her adoptive parents portrayed her biological parents that she felt she was allowed to search and that it was okay to be adopted. Table 11 depicts the distribution across the three categories.

Table 11
**Theme of Adoption as Good versus Bad**

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#1 – Christian (Non Searcher). Christian talks about adoption as having “adoption pride.” He conceptualizes adoption as having been an important and positive part of his life, yet has realistic views on some of the drawbacks of adoption.

Like when people are like “Oh your adopted.” It is like almost like pride that I tell them I am adopted. Because it is like everyone else has some sort of neat part of their personality that makes them different like… and I can say that I am adopted. The part that I don’t like is not knowing like people have Irish pride or have
Italian pride. Being adopted I don’t know what kind of pride I have so I guess I have adopted pride (laugh) you know…it’s kind of cool being adopted and people will look at that and say. It is like your own little club. But...And I am sitting there by myself with no one to hang out with. So like I think that is when I turned to this adoption pride.

#3 – Karen (Found). Karen discusses the positive impact being adopted has had on her life. She talks about adoption not as a “big story” but as a part of her life. She further talks about how her brother is adopted but later on her adoptive parents were able to conceive and give birth to a biological daughter. Her overall perception of adoption is positive in relation to her adopted family.

I think it’s definitely very positively impacted my life. Umm. People always ask me when did your parents tell you were adopted you know. People expect this big story and that it was a very traumatic thing or that there was a moment that it happened and my older brother is adopted and I am adopted. Then my parents had my sister and they didn’t think they could have kids and miraculously they had a baby after me.

Karen also stated, “I really…it made me appreciate my adopted parents that much more. I really appreciated the life that I had growing up and that my parents were you know like Ozzie and Harriet or something.”

#4 – Judy (Non Searcher). Judy succinctly states, “To me it was a very positive experience.”

#5 – April (Non Searcher). On the other hand, unfortunately April has a different more negative view of adoption, and blames society for her experiences. She talks about
an experience in school when she felt rejected for her adoption status and how this has become imbedded into her personal philosophy.

If you asked me a few years ago it would have been different but…I think now it is a lot more out of the closet per se. I think when I was young I had some bad experiences when I was about 5 years old and what I mean by that is that I had for example, I had a teacher, this is in the early seventies I guess, but I had a teacher who told us that adopted children were unwanted, their parents didn’t want them and so it kind of cast a negative picture. There was a family down the street who they wouldn’t let their kids play with me because I was adopted. So I had some bad experiences early on which I internalized as, I better not tell people about this. And I didn’t start opening up really until about 3 years ago and I am 34, so it really took me a long time to get over that even though your head says your true friends or family are going to love you for who you are not because of your birth status but it is funny how something that happens when you are a little kid you can’t shake it, even though your head knows well that’s stupid. But now I am in a phase, I don’t run around shouting it from the roof tops but if it does come up in conversation, I am much more likely to say, “Well I am adopted.” Even though I had a good adoption experience within my family.

On the flip side, April discusses how adoption was positive in her family life and how her always “knowing” that she was adopted has been very helpful to her.

Well, in the house, I never, ever unless it was with an outside person, I never thought of myself as adopted. It just never, maybe because we knew, I knew about it forever.
#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). Jill states, “I look at adoption very positively. I think it is a great thing.” She continues on to say “It hasn’t affected me negatively in any way. I mean even – I have never gotten made fun of, anything like that. It has always been positive. My friends ask about it.”

#8 – Cathy (In Process). Cathy discusses how she found out that she was adopted from her babysitter and felt that it must be a bad thing since she didn’t already know about her adoption status. She then continues to discuss the difference in how her brother has internalizing being adoption and how she perceived her adoption status as different from him. She talks about how she felt extremely negative toward him trying to make money off of a bet that he could prove he was adopted to his high school friends.

I think the babysitter was telling him and I just happened to overhear and I remember him being angry about it. So I don’t have a lot of good memories about it. I remember thinking like I remember it being like a bad thing…and he had a whole different experience than me. He used to go to, we used to – we went to the same high school for 1 year. Umm, he was a senior and I was a freshman and I was on the field hockey team with some of his friends and they were like, Oh he said to me “Oh, Joey is so funny, he made this joke and said that he was adopted. He made a bet and was going to bring in his birth certificate and they were like laughing, like it was a big funny thing and like that was the most ridiculous thing they ever heard. And I didn’t kind of know how to react because he is adopted.
#9 - Sarah (Found). Sarah discusses in the following excerpt how she feels that a birthmother has a lot of courage to give a child away to be adopted because of the stigma attached to being single and pregnant.

That was just what came up for me in this whole issue of being adopted. As I got older and maturity kicked in (laugh) and my sense of, probably in college, that someone had to go through a birth, probably alone, perhaps, it was 1969, when it was controversial to be pregnant and single. That I think that person had a lot of courage and if there was any reason to find them it would be to say “Thank you.”

Umm, I mean there are other reasons. But, mine wasn’t over this clash of who am I or maybe something that sticks out as more so – “thank you for the courage to give me life.”

Sarah discusses in detail how her biological mother has a negative attitude toward adoption, whereas Sarah personally disagrees with her on this topic. Sarah indicates that she feels that since it was more her family’s decision to have her give her child for adoption that this is why it is been difficult for her.

And then it got particularly hard last mid-term when I went down to visit them. She, I think she never wanted to give me up, so there is a guilt that surrounds that. Like it really wasn’t her choice to give me up for adoption so she doesn’t look at adoption as positive. She thinks it is the most damaging thing to a person. Um, I think she struggled with it for years. Thought about me on my birthday and would have liked to have raised me. I think she, she has been on anti-depressants, the negative side of this whole, for years. There might be bio-chemistry things too, but I think it really has taken its toll. Like there is some underlying
depression...verbalized that me finding her has found her peace and like filled a void that was always there. Our relationship started getting harder, when I was down there one time, I kind of made a comment that was (pause) kind of joking and she took it very personally and just like withdrew from me. And then she kind of lashed out at me. And it is like, where is this coming from?

Conflict with Siblings

Conflict with siblings was defined by adoptees who discussed having difficulty in their relationship with their siblings (adopted or biological). Several adoptees discussed their difficulties which arose with their adoptive siblings. All of the adoptees with siblings did not grow up with a biological sibling. Karen notes her relationship with her brother who was adopted as well as her sister who is the biological daughter of her adoptive parents. Several of the participants discuss how they are very different from their sibling and how they are more similar to their adoptive parents than their sibling(s).

This theme was discussed by 7 of the 10 participants. It is important to note that this theme emerged with all participants that had siblings with one exception who was a non searcher. Table 12 shows the distribution across the three categories.

#1 – Christian (Non Searcher). Christian discusses his tumultuous relationship with his sister basically emphasizing that the conflict existed because of his sister’s belief that he was the favorite child. Christian acknowledges that he did get certain privileges that she did not earn growing up. He discusses throughout the interview the desire to have a closer relationship with her in the future.
Table 12

**Theme of Conflict with Siblings**

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So she would get mad at me and things like that. My sister, I think, always felt that I was my parent’s favorite and I can’t really blame her because I think there was at least, with my mom, a difference in how she was treated...like she always got mad at me because she thought I had it too easy...they would forbid her to go to parties when she was in high school but they would let me go to parties. They would get mad at her for drinking but they would buy me beer when I was in high school. I mean there was also an equality in whenever my mom and my sister would go shopping there would be arguments. Yet I would come back from shopping with my mom with all these clothes and like we would both have smiles on our faces and so I think she had some problems with that...I guess when I went to college things really changed you know, she would come to me and be like “Christian – do you have any alcohol?” You know and just like behind the scenes kind of stuff.

#2 – Matthew (*Found*). Matthew discusses how his conflict with his brother revolves around the two of them being very different people. He emphasizes that their difficulties have been long-standing and to date have not changed much.
He is 2 years older than I. Makes him 40 years old, almost 41. He physically is about 1 foot taller, a lot heavier than I am. He has had his problems going along. He abused drugs. He has been clean and sober, if you will, for several years. We don’t get along really well. In fact we never got really got along that well. He is entirely a different person than I am. He met his birthmother...saw her once or twice and never saw the father and he actually has a full-blooded sister because that birthmother ended up marrying the father and then later divorced...I don’t think he keeps up with that sister...he has indicated to me from the way he speaks that he has some issues about it, about what his father is all about and why that he really doesn’t really give a crap about ...about the whole thing.

#3—Karen (Found). Karen, similar to Matthew, discusses how she has always viewed herself as different from her brother and that these differences are the reason they are not close emotionally. She indicates that she does not agree with his parenting philosophy and that they really don’t have much in common to discuss.

Really do not have that much of a relationship with him. We are civil. Not that there is anything between us, but we just really don’t have anything in common and I don’t agree with the way he and his wife raise their kids. The way they parent is different from the way I parent, so it is not like I can call them and say so what did you do about this, because they let the 2 year old stay up until 11:00 at night, 1:00 in the morning, whenever they want to go to bed. That’s not the way I do things so I can’t relate to them. We talk. I talk a lot to his wife. I don’t really talk to him on the phone.
Karen discusses throughout the interview about how close of a relationship she has with her sister. She further admits that she does have difficulty letting her make her own mistakes and wants to take care of her and at times this can cause tension.

It was quite crazy and I was the protective older sister and so I was upset with that but it was probably more my issue that I was going to miss her than letting her make her mistakes.

#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). Also, Jill mentions that she is not close to her brother mainly because he is different from her.

But I don’t know if that has to do with them or just me, because my brother is totally different. But he also has a learning disability but...he is just more...you know where he is not really mature at 17.

She continues to talk about how their relationship has begun to change as they have grown older. Jill recalls vividly the day he entered the family home and she begins talking about fighting soon thereafter.

Well we are 7 years apart. That was difficult actually. I love him to death now that we are older we get along 100 times better, but when we were younger it was very, I hated him. I don't know why. You know what? I guess I almost feel like...we were so far apart we just couldn’t get along. Like we couldn't share. We couldn’t do things together. Maybe that is what made me angry you know. It was funny because I can remember when I was an only child - I remember saying, “Oh you have to get another kid.” You know, you guys have to get another kid...I remember they brought him home...the day that they brought him home and that was exciting. But it was hard when we were younger. You know we fought a lot.
A lot, I mean a lot. We would like throw things at each other. He was always very, you know like, if he needed something he would come to me. But, even now I tell him if you need anything just ask. Just always ask. Now that he is older we get a long. We argue still but...so even now sometimes we argue but I find that when I used to live away from home after college and I would go home like say, for the weekend or we would fight more. Now that I am home all the time I think we fight less. But you know we have a lot better relationship. He tells me things. If something is bothering him. He will just come in and talk to me.

#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy indicates that there was always rivalry issues between her and her brother, she states, “So, there was always a lot of sibling rivalry between the two of us.”

She continues to say, that her mother always interrupted their arguments and did not allow them to handle or solve their difficulties on their own. Lucy indicates that this has not changed even in her older age.

It has just always been a problem. We fought when we were kids. We stopped I think...we would start to play together and quickly fall into a fight and my mother would sort of break it up and instead of saying “Handle it. Call me when you actually get injured.” But she would be too much the operator between us...still almost to this day, she is in assisted living at this point, close by here, and would act if she could as the operator between us. To the point that my brother would call her and complain about me and then she would tell me and like that.
Lucy indicates that her difficulties with her brother have been longstanding and have not changed over time. She states, "It is not any different than it ever was. It is not a casual kind of relationship but it is not a comfortable type of relationship."

I had little doubt that were something to happen to me and I needed my brother’s help we would get it. He is there for that. He is there for emergencies. He is there for advice because he is in finance and that kind of stuff. But for casual brotherly, sisterly, friendly relationship he is just not available for that.

#8 — Cathy (In Process). Cathy discusses her relationship with her brother and how she doesn’t really have a relationship with him and is typically just polite. She further indicates that he left home for approximately 10 years and didn’t really talk to the family during that period of time. She notes that despite his rebellion in life, she always felt that he was the favorite child and could not do anything wrong.

We are just kind of polite to each other and I can’t really tell him. I think I told him once how I really felt and he sent me this e-mail all mad at me and he didn’t talk to me for almost a month, which, he didn’t get along with the parents either, he left for 10 years and didn’t speak to them for 10 years and when he came, my dad was dying. That was the first time he had spoken to my dad in 10 years. You know, they made up and everything, and now he talks to my mom, but ironically he was the favorite, which is so weird to me because he was really a problem child. They adored him. Like he could do no wrong.

She continues to discuss how she feels he is extremely judgmental and therefore she tends to not discuss topics of importance to her. At this point in the interview, Cathy
also mentions how there were so many similarities between her brother and adopted father.

So, my brother is very judgmental and so I don’t talk too much about it with him. I would never tell him that if I was to pursue my parents, I would never tell him. Because he would be like, “I told you not to.” He is very judgmental. So we don’t talk about too much. It will come up in conversation where he will say something to me like “I can’t believe I am exactly like daddy.” I am like, “Yeah, I think that is weird.” They are not even biologically related, you know, so stuff like that would come up and we don’t have like in depth conversations about it. Because I just know that I can’t. He will be way too judgmental, trying to boss me around about it and I don’t like that, so I choose not to speak to him.

#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah discusses her relationship with her sister as very close and positive; she indicates that she was not very close with her brother because they were different. She describes herself as more of a “tomboy” while her sister was into “girl things.” Sarah further indicates that since she has moved out to the east that she has also changed more and acclimated more to the lifestyle on the east and this pulls them ever further apart than previously.

My sister and I clashed a lot. We were 2 years apart and I think being girls she...I am much, I am very independent and kind of out there and she is less so, more dependent and so conscious things like that. So there was somewhat of a struggle just personality wise. I think when I was very little we played fine together but during the middle school years it was just like, I was into sports and she was into boys constantly (laugh). And my brother now he is married to someone who I
would say is more controlling so I would say she kind of dominates their relationship so that kind of inhibits me furthering the relationship, although we are fine. I would just say that us having a friendship that has grown hasn’t really happened. My sister...we are friends, but I am the one that would probably have to initiate contact, just because of her self-esteem and things. I don’t know if she would initiate contacting me, but if I do call her she is very receptive to our friendship and I think we, she has settled down a lot, which makes for a calmer relationship with her. And now more parents, I think I have lived out here for 8 years, so with my parents they know me, but I think, the culture is very different here and I have kind of gotten acclimated to the east, so it is, there is a disconnect when I go home and I have a life which is very different from them. Although we keep in contact through the phone and everything.

Connections to Biological Family and “Adoption”

Connections to Biological Family and “Adoption” is defined as a sense of a emotional and/or physical relationship in relationship to biology and their adoption status. Specifically, who the adoptee is in relation to their genetic (nature) history as compared to their adoptive (environmental) family. Karen, who found her biological parents, discusses the difference in her relationship with her biological parents compared to her adoptive parents. This is also true of the other two adoptees who searched and found their biological family. For those adoptees, both non searchers and in process, when this theme emerged it was based on how they were aware and wondering about the amount of connection to their biological family.
This theme was acknowledged by 7 of the 10 participants in the study. Table 13 shows the distribution across the three categories.

Table 13

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#1 – Christian (Non Searcher). Christian discusses how he is seeking connections to his heritage by looking at his areas of interest. He tells a brief story about possibly being Jewish and then connects this with his interest in WWII and the holocaust.

I also dated this Jewish girl okay and she said I could be probably be Jewish because she’s like with a last name Smith should be shortened from Smithowitz. Then I am thinking, because I collect things from like WWII and the holocaust and especially. I have a real heavy-duty interest in the holocaust.

#2 – Matthew (Found). Matthew indicates that when he began looking for his biological family after finding out that he was adopted that he never imaged that he would develop a relationship with his birthmother, which is exactly what was the outcome. He states, “And I was never really expecting a relationship. What I knew was not looking for a replacement family, it was a total surprise.”

#3 – Karen (Found). Karen continues to discuss her relationship with her biological family as different then family, and states that it is more like a relationship
with in-laws. She discusses how she may have two full biological brothers, but that in her mind they are not her actual brothers.

They are much more relaxed about it now. But it was weird trying to work it out. Linda would always say “You’re brothers.” But they are not my brothers. I don’t know them. To me they are not my brothers. I equate my relationship with them to like in-laws. They are like very close friends where they are almost like family. They include me in family type things, you know, like I will go down there, now I will go down twice a year.

She also continues to address the difference in the relationship and indicates that she does not say this to be mean, but it is the way that she feels.

There is a difference. Not to be mean or anything, but you can’t force something that wasn’t so I think it really finally unfortunately through this tragic event they understand how I feel, that there is a difference.

#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). Jill discusses she has no desire to meet her birthparents and states that this is not because she has a negative view of them but that her adoptive parents are her parents. She notes that her biological parents are just that, biological, and therefore she is connected to them in that manner, but in no other ways.

I have never wanted to find my birthparents...I have no ill will. I am not angry or anything like that. I think it is a positive thing. I think it is great that this woman had a baby and actually had the courage to give it away because she wanted a better life for it. My parents really haven’t had any influence in a direct way. Maybe in an indirect way, maybe by being great parents. I got a great family. Maybe I have heard some stories of people that were adopted that they were
abused or they did not have a good life and maybe then I would want to find my birthparents but I don’t know. My birthparents are my birthparents. My parents now are my parents. I almost feel like, I don’t know, I almost feel like my birthparents have no part of my life. I know that there was this woman who carried me for 9 months but I don’t know why but to me that does not have any meaning. That might sound cruel but I think it is a great thing what she did.

#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy speaks about the interchangeability of families and the emphasis people place on biological connections. She challenges this thought process about the need for these connections by emphasizing the power of the relationship.

I think it was a powerful experience for me to be adopted. I think the whole story was told in a very powerful way to begin with. My parents, my mother in particular, was usually the one who relayed the story to me. Had made it seem this kind of miraculous event, which is still the way I feel about it. About any adoption, that we bring two biologically unrelated people together and that they can form a connection that is so powerful between that biology really makes no difference…recognizing how interchangeable we are as families…yeah so it is the interchangeability of that, of all of that stuff. When I see people so entrenched in one worldview. I just can’t comprehend it. When out of my own personal circumstances you know, there by the grace of God, I would be somewhere else, doing something else, thinking something else, raised as something else… Somewhere along the way, people were talking about probably this business of needing to have a biological child and not being able consider adoption until they knew that that was not going to be there. It is like you know why don’t people
have an issue with this with their children. If you think about marriage, if you think about it, it is two adults who adopted each other. You don’t, you generally don’t have a biological relationship and yet that does not get in the way of loving each other. So now why does this become an issue all of a sudden now that they are thinking in terms of children. That they have to have this biological relationship.

Lucy admits that finding out that she has the possibility of finding out information about her biological family becomes overwhelming and states, “All of a sudden there was this possibility that I could find out the names of these people. If nothing else just to go to their grave.” She discusses how just to know and see who they are and where they are buried would be meaningful to her.

#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah briefly states, “There is a respect, a connection” in reference to her birthmother. She indicates that if it wasn’t for this connection this would not be a relationship she would continue to have with anyone.

#10 – Paula (In Process). Paula discusses how she feels that she has a connection to people who are involved somehow in adoption and that she is meant to connect with them. She starts off this theme by talking about how a neighbor gave her a book to read which actually became quite important in her search process but it also brought her closer to a neighbor who is a birthmother.

And so I put it away and didn’t ever get it out again to think about. But she was there. And when I was in my early 30s, Fran Jones’s book came out, and a woman I was babysitting, her kid gave it to me, because she had borrowed it from the library and said “You ought to read this” and so I read it and I started talking
to my neighbor about it and my neighbor turned beat red and I thought what does she have to do with adoption. And then a day or two later she said, “I am interested in that book you read”, and she said, “I am on the other side of the coin.” And I said, “What do you mean” and she said, “I am a birthmother, I gave up my daughter,” so she and I were close already but that made us even closer.

Paula continues to discuss her connection to others involved in adoption in the following passage.

And yet, I feel like I have this adoption radar that is inside and is unconscious because I have had so many experiences over the years where I remember meeting a woman in the park and my kid almost kicked her kid because my kid was swinging wildly and her kid ran in front. So she and I started talking as we rescued her child from my child. And, I told her that I was adopted and within 2 minutes I found out that she was a birthmother. The woman I lived next door to when my babies were born was a birthmother. I told her. And it just seems like I am always connected with people in a very unconscious way and later found out.

Paula further discusses her connection her feeling connected to Sally, who she perceived was her birthmother but then found out upon her death that a DNA test came back indicating that it was not possible for Sally to be her mother.

I just feel so strongly that I am connected to that family and whether Sally is my mother or it was a good friend of hers or a relative it had to be someone who knew her if it wasn’t she.
Paula describes a very powerful connection that one has to a biological child. She indicates that she felt very connected to her own children but that there was something missing. Paula states that she feels it is because she does not know where she belongs on the human continuum. She mentions that her breastfeeding her children, in her mind her husband was closer to her children because of his awareness of his biological connection to the world.

The way that feel a little comfortable describing is after our daughter was born was when I think I had really a huge sense of the loss of my own mother, birthmother. And the feeling, I felt like here I am, I have got this baby daughter. What would it take to give her up and I can’t imagine giving her up. And I can go forward in my children’s lives but I have no sense of where I fit on the human continuum. Life starts with me because I have no antecedents...I can remember talking with my husband about feeling connected to my children and I nursed my kids and it was important to me to feel physically connected to them. But it seemed to me that my husband felt more physically connected to them or bonded with them in some way than I did and I couldn’t understand that. Then when I thought about it, okay, he knows where he is on the continuum because he can look at his mother’s face, his father’s, and his grandmother’s. And I can’t go back one generation at all. I think, I was looking for who, what she was like, more for a mother than a father...and I wanted to know why she gave me up. So who and why...So, those are the two most normal fundamental questions that a person asks when loss is experienced and so that is my question, who was she and why did she make this decision.
Paula continues to discuss that because she is not aware of who she is biologically connected to that she feels connected to all people and that this has helped her to be connected to everyone that exists.

Part of it is theological and part of it is psychological and social that I believe that I am a sister to everybody in the world...in a sense. That, and this is ironic when I say that I don’t know where my place is on the human continuum but I feel like I can related to all kinds of people: rich people, poor people.

Paula also states that she has looked around her on several occasions and wondered, “Is that person my mother” and that this unknown has caused her to feel related to humanity as a whole.

I can walk down the street and I think I have a hello face. And I don’t know how much this has to do with adoption but I always think, I can remember 20 years ago, I would be in New York and I would see a bag lady and I would think, well she could be my mother, and I would go around 3 times and then I would get out of the car and give her money, just because she could be my mother. So, and in some sense I feel related to the whole family of humanity. And I think not having my own genealogy for sure gives me a kind of freedom to do that, that I might not have if I had generations behind me that I knew who they were.

Existence

Existence is defined as the adoptee’s discussion of how their biological mothers had the option of having an abortion instead of giving them up for adoption. For the adoptees where this theme emerged, they were each aware of the options that their
biological mother had such as having an abortion, keeping them, as well as the choice of adoption.

In terms of the theme of existence, this theme was discussed by seven of the participants during their interview. Table 14 depicts the distribution across the three categories.

Table 14

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#1 — Christian (Non Searcher). Christian indicates that he is aware that his birthmother had a choice to have an abortion and noted that this was one of the reasons why he agrees with the pro-life political stance. “I don’t know how adopted people are with that whole abortion issue and I was probably like 2 seconds away from like being like totally off.”

#2 — Matthew (Found). Matthew indicates that prior to knowing he was adopted he really didn’t think at all about adoption or abortion but since finding out he was adopted he realized that his mother may have contemplated aborting her pregnancy with him.

So I think I have some different perceptions than people who I know are adopted and at an early age. I didn’t have a whole hell of a lot opinions about adoption
and probably not that many about abortion either. Until I found out that I was adopted because it certainly changed all of that. Not of course in favor of abortion because I was a prime candidate.

#5 - April (Non Searcher). April discusses how she is pro-choice, but is aware that she may not have existed if her biological mother had taken that as her choice.

But, even being adopted, where I certainly could have been a product of an abortion. I still believe that if someone wants that, then fine, they should be able to get it safely and legally.

#7 - Lucy (In Process). Lucy indicates that she needed to have access to her birth certificate but she was being told that she couldn’t have access to it because she was adopted. And then after pursuing it further, the city was telling her that they could not locate records indicating her existence.

So I had this feeling that something that was mine that had my name on it. Something so personal, I couldn’t have access to it. And the city of New York was telling me I didn’t exist for all intents and purposes.

Lucy discusses the difficulty that she feels a birthmother must go through when contemplating what to do when they realize they can’t raise a child. She indicates that there is no good answer because any way you look at it, you need to live with the consequences.

You place your child and then you have all of your doubts and what, did I do the right thing. Unless it was a completely open adoption. Umm, you have an abortion and then you have all your doubts and guilts. So either way if you didn’t
plan that pregnancy and you are not in a position to raise that child, pause, you are going to have some kind of legacy a to live with.

#8 – Cathy (In Process). Cathy talks about her beliefs about abortion and acknowledges that she may have been aborted and that people assume that she should be pro-life. She indicates that she doesn’t feel that she would ever have an abortion but that she doesn’t feel that she has the right to make that decision for any body else.

I know that I am very open minded. I know I am – I guess I am liberal. Well, it is interesting with like abortion and stuff. Umm, I am not against it, which is weird to me because I could have been aborted but I wasn’t and so I think that a lot of people think that I should definitely be against abortion because...but I am not. You know I don’t – for myself I don’t know if I would ever do that but I don’t feel...I don’t think I have the right to make a decision for somebody else.

#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah bluntly states, “No, it makes you kind of go, “mmm, my life could have been wiped out” indicating that she is aware that she could have been aborted. She indicates that she is pro-life but that her beliefs on this stem from her religious traits not her adoption status.

#10 – Paula (In Process). Paula acknowledges that she is aware that her biological mother could have aborted her. She states that she herself was faced with the possibility of having to contemplate having an abortion and that it was a decision she ended up not having to make because it was an ectopic pregnancy and therefore does not feel that she has the right to make that decision for anybody.

I am glad I was born. I am glad I wasn’t aborted, however, I found out along with all these other stories I told you. I had an experience where I learned that the
doctor who delivered me, did send women to abortionists if they wanted to go. And so my mother could have chosen to abort me. And, I am glad she didn’t. I (pause), I faced the possibility of having an abortion myself when I was pregnant in my early 40s and I was really scared and my husband was petrified at the thought of having a child that late in life. Umm, and I, I was just psychically numb for 2 or 3 weeks during that time. And during that time, and what eventually happened was it was an ectopic pregnancy and so God took the heat off and I didn’t have to make a decision. I believe that, that each person has to make their own decision. I think that abortion is a very painful decision and I would suspect that many women who have abortions have a huge sense of loss for the rest of their lives about their child. I mean I felt it when I had an ectopic pregnancy and that kid never had a heartbeat.

Separation versus Individuation

Separation and Individuation is defined as the adoptee’s ability to separate from their adoptive family in order to achieve an identity separate from their family. As noted earlier, this is a component of the Erikson’s theory of development and is considered a necessary stage of development. Adoptee’s discuss below how this normal stage of development was further exacerbated by their adoption status. Several of the adoptees discuss how they felt that they were not allowed to leave their families when they were approaching college age. Others noted that they felt that they needed to be on their own in order to “find themselves.”
This theme was addressed in 7 of the 10 interviews. Table 15 shows the distribution across the three categories.

Table 15

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#1 – Christian (Non Searcher). Christian discussed how his older sister left home and moved to another state and he then discusses how he never really went that far away from his parents.

My sister was (laugh) one of those, she was out of here you know. Like she wouldn’t come home on all breaks when she went away to college. Yeah, I picked a, it odd because I picked a college that was close to...I went to college...it is like an hour away so I could come home on weekends, which I did a lot. My sister picked like the farthest school. All she applied to schools all over the country.

#5 – April (Non Searcher). April discusses how her parents left their family and their security and moved to the United States together when they first married.

My parents met and married in England. My mom is from Scotland and my dad is from England. Both working class families. They met and married and came
over here. They both have spouses, I’m sorry, siblings over there, but they are they only ones who came over to the United States.

April further noted that her parents divorced. She states, “My parents are divorced now. They divorced when I was 8.”

#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). Jill discusses how open her parents were to allowing her to be her own person. She was allowed to make her own decisions. She reported that they would check in and make sure she understood the possible ramifications of her decisions but allowed her to make mistakes.

They were never demanding on me. But I think that is what made me who I am. I am very independent. I always did well in school but they were always, whatever I wanted to do. I mean there was this one time I guess I was 17 and I wanted to get a tattoo and (laugh) and I said “Mom I am going to get a tattoo” and she said “Are you sure?” I said “Yeah” and me and my best friend went to go get them and she said “Okay.” If that is what you want to do. So they are very, you know very supportive. Very just open. It was my choice. I was always very independent, very mature.

Jill continues and states that she talked to her parents as she wanted and wasn’t bound by “weekly phone calls” as compared to many of her peers.

During college, people call their parents like every week. I would go like 3 weeks without calling home but it was no big deal. My mom would call me after about three weeks and would just be like, “Calling to see how everything is.” And I would call and say “everything is good” and that is it.
#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy, the following segment, describes her need to leave her family and seek her independence beginning with college and continuing on after college when she moved to the West coast. Lucy indicates that it was not because she felt her family was too enmeshed but that she needed to “find herself.”

If anything, I had this kind of unconscious need, when I hit college years, to go to a college that was a little further away from college that was a little bit further away from home. To get some independence and actually after college, moved out to the West coast for quite some time. Which I think was the only way that I felt like I could get away. It was not so much that my parents that my parents were so crushing in terms of encroaching on my life, I think that they were fairly respectful about it. But it was the only way that I could like make a break.

#8 – Cathy (In Process). Cathy discusses how even after living away from home, upon her return to the family house where she lives for some of graduate school, she parents placed restrictions on her which she indicated made her feel very young and unappreciated.

I spent 4 years in college in the Bronx and then I went home and even though I was in graduate school I was commuting for 2 years and that was terrible. Because my parents acted like I had never gone to college and I was 18 and I was supposed to have a curfew.

Cathy shares the story about her adopted parents trying to keep a secret about her brother’s biological mother looking for him. He found out and ended up moving across the country to live with her. Cathy indicates that his birthmother also wanted her to come
live with them. After several years, Cathy states that her brother no longer speaks to his biological mother and now has a negative attitude toward reunification with birth family.

Yeah, interesting story. My brother actually, when my brother turned 18 and we were living in New York. He was at home, one of his times where he came back and his biological mother tried to contact him and she said she wanted to meet him. My parents, now somehow intercepted the correspondence and said, “No way.” Because in Ohio you can contact your biological child when they are 18 and in [this state] it is 21. So my parents said, “No way, not until he is 21.” They didn’t emotionally think he could handle it because he was such a mess. You know drugs, alcohol, everything. They just didn’t think he could handle it. My brother somehow found out that they prevented it and got very angry at them and ended up contacting her himself and moved...to meet her and ended up living with her for a little while. The whole thing was bizarre. It got to the point where she was calling me because I was about to go to college and she wanted me to go to college [there] and come live with them and I am like “wait a minute.” I had very mixed emotions about it. Because I don’t even know this woman and she is tearing apart my family and she is trying to you know. And my brother ended up living with her for a while and they ended up hating each other and not getting along and he left, but he stayed [there] and met his wife. Told me that it was a very confusing thing and that I should never ever speak with my biological parents and I tried to explain to him that umm, it is a personal thing and that it is something I have to decide for myself. And my experience is not going to be the same as yours.
#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah speaks about separation and individuation as it relates to her biological mother. She states that they have had a difficult time getting to the same place in their relationship and that Sarah has needed to separate herself somewhat from the current situation and take a break.

But in this dynamic it is really hard. And umm, I am going to send her a Christmas present. I don’t know if she is going to respond. I am not going to call her...this is just like recent. And if she, I don’t know if she will respond. I don’t know if she will send a Christmas present. And, but I will continue to send her a birthday card or Christmas present or whatever or whatever because I am committed to the long haul. I didn’t. If she can’t take it, on the one hand she has really been excited and on the other hand there has been this darkness and turmoil and hardness, which makes sense. So I have had friends who have asked me like “Do you regret this?” And I am like “No, I felt that I really wanted to say thank you and that is what I did.” And she, I think, would be the first to say that she is very glad to know that I am okay.

#10 – Paula (In Process). Paula discusses how her adopted parents separated for a couple of years and during this time she lived with her mother and spent every other weekend with her father.

See they were separated. They were separated for 2 full years when I was maybe, Oh, I can’t even remember, somewhere between 8 and 10. It must have been those years. Umm, but during that time, except for a brief period, like 2 or 3 months, she and I lived [city] and he lived in [city] so every other weekend I would spend with him and I just lived for those weekends.
Paula ends the theme by indicating that her father probably would have allowed her to search for his biological family, but that it would have been difficult for him.

I think intellectually my father would have understood why I needed to search but I think that emotionally it would have been painful, been difficult.

**Special/Unique**

Special/Unique is defined as the adoptee's perception of themselves as distinctive and uncommon due to their adoption status. Several of the participants felt that they aspect of themselves made them special and offered them a unique perspective on life.

The theme of special and unique was brought up by seven of the 10 participants. Table 16 shows the distribution across the three categories.

#1 – Christian (Non Searcher). Christian indicates that because he was chosen by his adoptive parents that this helped him to feel more special and accepted.

Table 16

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And then they went there and I guess they picked me out or whatever. It sort of made me feel important or whatever. You know...like I was more accepted I guess.

He notes that since adoption is that only aspect at this point in his life that makes him feel special that this is what he holds onto.

But...I am just clinging to what I do have that makes me unique and it is like the only thing that I have that makes me unique. In terms of that area, or that realm of things.

#2 – Matthew (Found). Matthew indicates that what helps him to feel special is that he is not “stuck” with his adopted parents and that he can separate from them. He states, “You are not subject to the biological trappings perhaps. That is probably the best part. You can separate from them if you want to.”

#3 – Karen (Found). Karen reports that because of the way her parents presented adoption to her that she always knew that she was special.

My parents presented it in such a positive light that I always knew. I mean as a kid I felt like I was the most special kid in the world. My parents you know always portrayed my birthparents in a very positive light. They loved me so much that they put my needs before theirs and gave me up. So it was a very positive experience. I think it really. I mean, as a kid I had no problem with self-confidence.

#4 – Judy (Non Searcher). Judy reports that her parents helped her to realize that she “special and precious.” She states, “But I think that’s part of it how I was raised and just a sense of the whole household, children were special and precious.”
#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). Jill acknowledges that she does not know what her life would have been like had she been raised by her biological family, but she states that she was given the opportunity to be raised by a great family.

Like who knows maybe I would have had a great life, who knows. But I am glad that my parents got me. You know. I like being adopted. I like to talk about it. I like educating people, answering their questions. I don’t know. The family, the love, I couldn’t of asked for a better family. I had great parents, a great brother. So, I mean, I was very lucky...some kids just don’t realize how lucky they are, you know what I mean.

#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy indicates that despite her being adopted she was the favorite grandchild. “From what I understood from what my parents had to say that I was just about my grandparent’s favorite.”

Lucy talks in detail below about the great celebration surrounding her adoption and how her parents made her feel so special in the way they talk about her entering their family and well as about how they celebrate it each year.

To begin, I was adopted on my mother’s birthday. I was brought home on my mother’s birthday in a snowstorm in 1948 that still – they mention it. When there is a record setter, it is “The previous snow storm that...the previous record setter was this storm was 1948.” And so there was this incredible story about how it came to be that particular date because at that point in time the pediatrician came along. To go pick up the child. And umm, the doctor couldn’t come the one day. My father couldn’t do it another. And it wound up kind of coming down to my mother’s birthday and then there was this snowstorm the night before. And they
go out through I don’t know how many feet of snow from North Jersey out to [city] – you know in 1948. Laugh. I don’t think the streets were plowed the next morning you know…so it has this whole epic saga to it. And that there was this coincidence that it occurred on my mother’s birthday. So it had this kind of magical quality to it.

#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah indicates that she feels that there is a specialness which surrounds adoption. She notes, “I don’t know there is a sense of (pause) I don’t know. I guess I always thought – Oh, I am kind of special. Hopefully, not in an arrogant way (laugh). Specialness that surrounds adoption.”

Appearances

Appearances is defined as the physical manifestation of one’s view of their body. this theme discussed how several of the adoptees feel that they look like their adoptive families and therefore people did not necessarily “know” that they were adopted by looking at them. Others discuss how they do not look as much like their adoptive parents and wondering how they are similar or different in terms of their appearances to their biological family.

Six of the 10 participants bring up issues of appearances in their interviews. Table 17 shows the distribution across the three categories.

#1 – Christian (Non Searcher). Christian discusses his desire to know where he gets his physical attributes. “I mean… I think it might be cool to see what my birth mom looks like and to get that heritage part.” He discusses appearances in a desire to know what he looks like.
Table 17

Theme of Appearances

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#3 – Karen (Found). Karen discusses how she physically looks different from her adopted family and how she always wanted to know who she looked like in her family.

I never felt like I didn’t fit in to my family but, and I do somehow in mannerisms or what but people say my sister and I look alike and my mother and I look alike, but I am very tall. My brother is very tall, my adopted brother is very tall. My whole adoptive family is very short. So I think growing up I always felt very self-conscious about being tall. That was one thing that made me stand out maybe. So I always, that was the thing, I always wanted to know who I looked like.

Karen continues on about how people don’t pick up on the physical differences between them and because of the similarities in her mannerisms, particularly to her sister, but also to her entire family.

People think that we look exactly like. She is 5’2,” has blond hair, and we look nothing alike and I think because we grew up together and we have the same mannerisms and stuff, people think we look alike because we act alike or talk alike. I don’t know. I honestly don’t know.
#4 – Judy (Non Searcher). Judy discusses her physical similarities to her adopted family and that if people didn’t know she was adopted, they would not be able to distinguish that she wasn’t their child.

No, I think that her ethnic background just because of how close I looked to my birthparents both the coloring and everything it is in the Europe, it is in that whole area of Europe around Germany maybe into Poland or whatever like that...People would say that I looked like my mother even though I was much taller...I was equally as tall as my father and my father wasn’t a huge man, he was a small man, very well proportioned, always very active and they both were. Yeah it wasn’t a long shot for people that weren’t looking, fishing for the information...they wouldn’t realize that I wasn’t, that they weren’t my birthparents.

#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). Jill also discusses how she looks similar to her adopted parents and that people might comment to her about how similar she looks in appearances to them. She further states that she would have to actually at times would say that she was adopted because people couldn’t figure it out.

It’s funny because some people – my dad is very tall and I guess when you live together you look alike but we all have like blue eyes and brown hair and it is funny because people used to say, “Oh, I see where you get your height from.” Sometimes you don’t want to say “Uh, well no, I am adopted” but sometimes it would come up. Like I would say “Well, not I am adopted” and that is probably how people might find out.
#8 – Cathy (In Process). Cathy discusses several of the reasons she wants to meet her biological parents with one of the primary reasons as a desire to know who she looks like.

I do want to know what she looks like. I want to know what happened to her. I want to know if my parents ended up together. I want to know if I have any sib...I just want to know these things.

Cathy continues on to say that it is more than just physical appearances that she is seeking but also personality similarities to a more global concept of “who am I like in this world?”

I find it very difficult to not look like anyone in this world...I just want to know what they look like and what they are like as people - just personality wise. I want to know if they are like me and if they think like me. I have spent my entire life just not thinking like anybody and it is just - it feels very lonely. So I guess I am more curious than anything.

Cathy discusses how she looks physically different from her adopted family and how a colleague of hers actually commented that she must be adopted after looking at a picture of her and her family and not knowing that she was adopted.

Yeah, I think it was kind. I physically look different. My mom, actually this is really funny, my friend at work just the other day saw a picture of my parents and she is like I am trying to figure out which one you look like and said, “You must be adopted”. And I was completely awkward and I am like “well actually I am” and she thought I was joking. You know she thought it was a joke and it was very awkward and I knew it was awkward for her.
#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah also discusses how she physically resembles her adopted father and brother. And it was really a shock when I would tell people that I was adopted and it was something of a fun thing to do because often times they say, “Oh, you look so much like your dad or your brother.” And be like “Yeah, kind of weird.”

Chosen/Wanted

Chosen/Wanted is defined as an adoptee’s discussion of how their adopted families were able to chose to raise them as their children. They discuss how they were being raised by people who often waited years to have children. Judy, for example, discusses how her family actually went to the hospital and chose her over a little boy.

The theme of being chosen and wanted was discussed by 6 of the 10 participants. Table 18 depicts the distribution across the three categories.

Table 18

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#3 – Karen (Found). Karen discusses her adoptive parents reaction to her and how she has internalized this into her life.
That I was like this golden child and I was chosen. They tell a whole adoption lined up to adopt another baby girl and then they saw me and they fell in love and so it was really very positive for me.

#4 — Judy (Non Searcher). Judy discusses how her parents talked to her about how they chose her over a little boy and actually going to the hospital and picking her out.

Being adopted I always felt that I was privileged because I was chosen...but from early on they would say that I was adopted that they had gone to the hospital and chosen me...The story used to go that it was over a little red head boy and that they had been back and forth and apparently at that time with a private adoption you could go the to hospital and see the available infants.

She also spoke about how parents actually having the task of choosing a child and how much adoptive parents want a child to go through the process of adoption and compares this to peers that she knew in school whose parents treated them as “unwanted.”

So I never developed any of these and I just felt secure in the whole thing that if anybody goes, “Oh your adopted” and I am going “So what I am lucky, I was wanted.” Because I had some friends in high school that I know, you would get the feeling when you would be with their parents that they really weren’t wanted.

Judy also discusses how her parents verbalized and expressed (verbally and nonverbally) their feelings of wanting and loving her.

But really the feeling of being chosen. Because they were just so good about verbalizing that they loved me. Nobody in the household was afraid to say. My
father probably verbalized it more than my mother, but they were demonstrative, they, my mother was a little more reticent but that is just her nature.

#5 – April (Non Searcher). April, similarly, discusses how her parents were willing to do whatever necessary to have children and would often say statements such as “I love you so much, I am so happy that God gave you to me.”

Influences, because my parents made me or made us that we looked for you, you are chosen. We wanted you so badly that we jumped through all these hoops. So it was always a positive thing from their perspective, coming from them.

#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). Jill also talks about how adoptees are wanted in general and more than material things, she was able to grow up in a family with lots of love and care for each other.

Sometimes I look at it that somebody actually wanted you that bad. I don’t know. I guess in a way I got an opportunity to grow up with a family that I don’t know just the way the world works. I just, they got me...like they gave me everything. I mean they gave me material things but they gave me love, I had a great relationship with them.

#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy discusses her view on being adopted is because your adopted parents wanted you and that you didn’t just end up as a “mistake.” She states, “The best thing how much you were really wanted. You know that you weren’t just the end product of some fortuitous event between two people.”

Lucy further indicates that pregnant women are often heard complaining about their discomfort being pregnant and then compares it to adoptive mothers who are willing to wait however long as necessary in order to have their family.
By the end of 9 months most woman are bitching about being pregnant (laugh). To think for 3 years – wow [speaking of her adoptive parents] that I think really makes you feel and I guess I must have known that when I asked for that story when I was in 6th grade, it really makes you feel wanted.

She gives another example of how her mother emphasized how much they wanted a child. Her adopted mother wrote weekly letters to the adoption agency checking on the status of their adopting a child for over 3 years.

It wasn’t just like yeah we picked you up and right brought you home...and my mother would tell about because she was convinced that I think they waited about 3 good years for me at least. I guess right after the war was when they started to try and adopt was my guess. Although they had been married since '39. So she would write them like almost weekly. Saying how are you doing, do you have anything (laugh)? She said that when they came. When she saw her file (laugh) it was like real thick. It was so thick because she had written all these letters...Laugh. So, that is some of the stuff that I had been handed down.

#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah also implies that she grew up knowing that she was wanted and chosen.

I don’t remember a time not knowing that I wasn’t adopted because I think my parents did an excellent job of communicating clearly that I was chosen by them and they couched it in terms of you were chosen special. Having had chosen you. And my sister – older sister is adopted as well. And so we outnumbered the birth kids versus adopted kids in the family.
Sarah recalls how she learned about her adoption by reading a book about a pregnant woman and how her family was designed through a different method and that she was wanted.

I remember once sitting down when I was very young reading a book and my parents about a woman that was pregnant and that went to the hospital and had a baby. As my mom was reading that she said that “I didn’t have you – but we chose you.”

Sarah verbalizes that not all adoptees think about themselves as chosen and that her sister tends to view herself as rejected instead of chosen. “Yeah and now my sister doesn’t think that. She is like “I am rejected.” So, but for me it was like “Yeah I am chosen” (laugh).”

*Curious*

Curious is defined in this study as the inquisitive nature of the adoptee’s to gain more information about their biological heritage. This theme, though aspects of the adoptee’s curiosity may be addressed also in other themes, is separated here to discuss the adoptee’s inherent curiosity about how their life may have been different if they had been raised with their biological family.

Curiosity was brought up as a theme by 6 of the 10 participants. Table 19 shows the distribution across the three categories.

**#3 – Karen (Found).** Karen indicates that she does not recall a time when she was not curious about there biological family. Further, she indicates that it is, in her opinion, because adoption was such a part of her life and was not secret or foreign to her.
Table 19

Theme of Curious

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I was saying not that my parents wouldn’t have been open about being adopted all that and it would have been any that they wouldn’t talk about it. But it was so talked about, it was so apart of our life, maybe because as a kid I was so curious.

#5 – April (Non Searcher). April discusses that despite her non searching status that she is curious about her biological family. She indicates that she cannot predict how she may feel in the future and that if she had the opportunity she would want to see them but that she does not have a need to have them in her life.

I can’t lie and say that I am not curious. People are always saying, “Oh my god you look like so and so”...but you see these shows – Oh my life was not complete until I found my parents, blah, blah, blah, and I don’t have that hole. You know. I am curious, I wish I could see them from a window or something but I don’t have - Right now, I don’t know about the future.

April indicates that she always knew that her adopted mother had some information about her biological family that she would have access to when she wanted and that until recently she never had any desire to review the material. She states she knew where it was if she wanted it and that she was fearful that if she found out their
names that she might hear someone say their name. April mentioned that she did give in to the curiosity and looked at the paperwork.

Well, my mom always told me, “Look I have some information, when you are ready let me know” And to be honest I never asked her, you know what “I don’t want to know.” But then a couple things came out over the years. Over the last year, maybe the last 2 years, curiosity killed the cat and I did look at my birth records last time I was at the safety deposit box. But I never wanted to know their names before because I thought I would go to the mall and I would hear someone say that name and it is going to freak me out...I was there for something else and I think I stumbled on to it. I was like “Oh.” It was a pit in my stomach and then said, “What is the harm.” So I just looked.

#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). Jill acknowledges that at this point in her life she is not curious about her biological family but notes that she is not sure that this won’t change in the future.

For me it was like, I was so lucky. But I mean. I am 24 years old and I don’t know if that. Maybe if I was a little older. Maybe if I had kids. If would have a different effect on me, but I don’t ever see myself differently than anybody else. I never did.

#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy talks about one time when she went to the public library to review birth records and notes that it was curiosity which led her there not a deep need to know her history. She states, “So obviously I went with some sense of curiosity but not real enough that I could find anything and not be like ‘Oh, I have got to go there’. Yeah, it was a sense of curiosity of what could I find out.”
Lucy further talks about how she felt when she realized that she potentially had access to learning more about her biological family.

It was like 3 to 4 years ago when I found out there was a possibility that I could get more information. No, I didn’t feel compelled. I didn’t feel that compulsion that some people do. Yes, it was more like I would be curious to find out. I didn’t feel a compulsion about it.

#8 – Cathy (In Process). Cathy talks about how she has always been curious but that she can only go through the process slowly and one step at a time.

I am always curious about it. I think I get scared off a little bit. Once I get a little bit of information, it is almost like “okay okay that is enough.” Then I stop for a little while. And then I will wake up one day and decide that enough is enough already let me get back to it and work on it again.

#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah also talks about searching as a process which starts with curiosity but for her it went, at this point, all the way to a search and reunion. She states, “So, as an adult adoptee it went from more of a presence and curiosity every once in a while to maybe this is something I would eventually like to do one day.”

Expression of Emotion in Family

Expression of emotion is defined as the adoption’s discussion of how they perceived the expression of emotions in their family whether it be that emotions were not discussed openly in their family or that they were openly discussed. The adoptee’s discuss how their family members were either very open about their emotions or that they did not express them.
Expression of emotion was discussed by 6 of the 10 participants. Table 20 shows the distribution across the three categories.

Table 20

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#1 -- Christian (Non Searcher). Christian indicates that he was very close to his mother and that he “hung out” with his family but that he did not express or verbalize his emotions.

I was more enmeshed with my mother you know she would be the one who would like, when I was little who would take me around the stores and things like that. I would go shopping with her. And Dad and I, we basically we would do some stuff together like we used to drive around to garage sales and kind of do woodworking together but he was like more distant like in that he never kissed me or ever told me he loved me or things like that.

Christian continues on the theme by discussing how in his adoptive family everyone typically keeps their feelings to themselves with the exception of his sister who tends to scare her family by her extreme reactions. He discusses how he would not talk to them about his feelings but if he needed to talk about something he would talks to friends.
It’s like we all keep our emotions inside except for my sister. She would just get right in there and start like freaking out on my parents and they didn’t like that so they would just try and avoid her. Because I think my sister scared them. I really, like if I was pissed at my mom I just kind of would hold it in or talk to my friends about it or talk to others about it. I would never really talk to them about it.

#4 – Judy (Non Searcher). Judy also emphasizes how her adoptive family tends to internalize their emotions. She states, “Exhibition of emotion were (laugh) - we don’t do that.”

#5 – April (Non Searcher). April talks about how it has only been in the last 3 years or so where she has begun to talk about her feelings, particularly as they relate to adoption. She indicates that the majority of the reason for not talking about adoption was due to fear of being rejected.

So I had some bad experiences early on which I internalized as, I better not tell people about this. And I didn’t start opening up really until about 3 years ago and I am 34, so it really took me a long time to get over that, even though your head says your true friends or family are going to love you for who you are not because of your birth status but it is funny how something that happens when you are a little kid you can’t shake it, even though your head knows well that’s stupid.

#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). Jill talks about how it has only been in the last few years in which she would express her feelings of love and admiration for her parents.

After that me and my father whenever I would come home from college and then leave I would be like “Bye Dad” and now I say “I love you” and he says “I love you too.” Even with my mom, I think we had an open relationship but I never
really said, “I love you very much.” Maybe now that I am older maybe I just think
now that I think I am older I should really start really telling them that I love
them.

#8 – Cathy (In Process). Cathy discusses her adopted mother as “closed” and not
comfortable discussing emotions. She describes her in terms of her work ethic but not as
a communicator.

Like...she is not an open person. She is very uncomfortable talking about
feelings. Talking about umm, anything really. She is like a workaholic...she, her
work ethic is amazing. She is hard working, but she is not communicating. She is
not really supportive at all.

Cathy also emphasizes that her mother has not really told her that she was proud
of her but will inform others of such.

She has a hard time, to me she has a hard time saying “I am proud of you”, but
then she will go and tell other people which just blows my mind, but she is not all
positive person at all.

#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah also discussion the lack of communication with her
adopted parents. She states that they knew they were loved by their actions not by their
words.

I just don’t think - my parents weren’t great communicators in terms of feelings.
Definitely I knew we were loved in terms of attention and things that we did
activity wise but I think – they weren’t the greatest as communicating you know
“this makes me feel sad.”
Regimented/Expectations

Regimented/Expectations is defined as belief by the adoptee that they were expected to follow certain rules and standards in order to be accepted by their family. This theme emerged in relation to the adoptee’s perception of their adoptive family and how they believed that they were expected to act, behave, and live their life. Christian, for example, notes that everything in his house has its place and it was very important to keep them there. Further, he notes that he felt that he was always expected to be a good student and bring home A’s.

The theme of regimentation was discussed by 6 of the 10 participants. Three of the four non searchers, one adoptee in the process of searching, and two adoptees who searched and found discussed this theme in their interview. Table 21 shows the distribution across the three categories.

Table 21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Discussed</th>
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#1 – Christian (Non Searcher). Christian indicates that his adopted parents had clear expectation of how he was expected to act and speak.

First of all they are very much like the classic like when you think of one of those movies with the upper class people. You know they are always correcting my
grammar, proper table manners and things like that. But, you know, besides that, they were really like very loving.

Christian also recalls that there was a high emphasis on material goods in his home and there were expectations that you would do whatever necessary to keep them in good order.

You know he...growing up in my house you learned to place a lot of value on things...I remember moving antiques around the house. Like my dad would do this thing where you put your hand around the edges of the furniture so you don’t hit the door or something you hit your hand instead. So you learned that your hand isn’t as precious as like a piece of furniture. So like...that is probably why I am OCD now. But now you really grew up and realized the value of things.

#2 – Matthew (Found). Matthew speaks about his adopted mother and emphasizes how there was a high level of importance placed around neatness. He questions whether or not this is gender related to having two sons or whether or not it is part of her personality.

She was also a very strict person as far as cleanliness. Her house was spotless and as kids you know if we left our books on the stairs she would go off the deep end. She was high strung in that sense. I don’t know if it was because she had boys that she was not this warm, kind of cuddly kind of person. I think she has much more rules about when my brother was a baby he had to have a clean outfit...you know that kind of thing. Very regimented.
Matthew emphasizes that there were clear expectations professionally about either being a lawyer or a doctor. Differences were not accepted and a particular path in life was planned for and expected. Matthew indicates that he is not particularly happy in his field and had it not been for his adoptive parents he would probably not be in the legal profession.

And I don’t think my parents were all that necessarily supportive of the difference. That they would have much rather...that this is the way it is supposed to be and I don’t think that they got that there may be differences because of genetically of where I came from. Like some parents are like living la vida difference. Like my kid is an artist and do whatever he wants to do. That was not the way it was in my house. You were going to grow up and be a doctor or a lawyer. I think they thought they could, whatever they got in terms of kids that they could make them into what they needed them to be. I just think it’s what it was. This is the way it was going to be...I think that I ended up being a lawyer in part because of the direction that they gave me. I don’t particularly care for my career or profession and I probably got into more out a lack of not really knowing what I wanted to do. When you got out of college a lot of times you don’t know what you want to do.

#3 – Karen (Found). Karen indicates that she feels that the expectations placed upon her were more for them to be able to “brag” to their peers. She states, “They want me to be successful so they can brag about me, kind of thing.”

#4 – Judy (Non Searcher). Judy indicates that her adopted family members like calmness in the house which may have been a reaction to their “crazy” childhoods.
Earlier she stated that she was very happy curled up with a good book, which sounds like this behavior would have been reinforced in her home.

They liked a really structured calm environment. Rambunctiousness wasn’t (laughing) greatly appreciated. I think they both experienced so much in their younger years.

#5 – April (Non Searcher). April indicates that her mother had strict expectations of both her and her brother.

She brought us up pretty strict, as much as she could be in a single mom to keep us in line. Her strictness, if you want to call it that, I think, both me and my brother turned out to be pretty decent people in civilization.

#8 – Cathy (In Process). Cathy verbalized that she was expected to be the best that she could be and that she could always try harder and achieve greater.

She was very demanding. I would bring home an A from school and she would say “Why didn’t you get an A+?” You know. And in my, Intellectually, I can understand that she was just trying to push me. But as a child and emotionally, I was like what the heck here, I tried my hardest and so she was very demanding.

Loyalty

Loyalty is defined as the sense of dedication that they feel toward their adopted family. This theme emerged primarily in relation to the non searchers who indicated that searching for their adoptive family might impact their family’s perception of them and that they do not want to hurt them and that searching for their biological family, in their perception, might make them doubt their loyalty to their parents.
The theme of loyalty was discussed by 6 of the 10 participants. Table 22 depicts the distribution across the three categories.

Table 22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Discussed</th>
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<td>Overall Total</td>
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#1 - Christian (Non Searcher). Christian talks about how he never wants to hurt his adopted parents and therefore he did not test the boundaries of their relationship in order to avoid hurting them or risk the potential of being rejected by them.

But you know I don’t want to offend anyone...I never got punished by either of my parents. They kind of had loose boundaries. But I knew basically I kind of...I loved them so much that I never tested the boundaries.

Christian explains that despite wanting to know about his birthparents and get some information about them that he would not do that in order to not hurt his adopted parents.

I guess the strength of being devoted to my parents, who I know love me and stuff, is greater than trying to get a sheet of information or trying to make some sort of relationship.
Christian reports that when he thinks about his life with his adopted parents he realizes just how happy he has been and how he does not want to insult them by searching for his birthparents.

But...it is just because it is almost makes me feel guilty...I kind of think of a movie picture of my life growing up and my parents doing such nice stuff for me and how happy I was as a kid growing up and how happy I am now and it's like I don’t want to insult them and I really have no...[desire to search]. I know I keep staying that.

Christian continues and indicates that he feels that it was his adopted parents who created the person that he is today. He notes that he will probably meet his biological parents after he dies and that is fine with him at this point in his life.

To me it seems pretty harsh but I feel like my dad is like a sperm donor and I am glad they created me but I feel like my parents really created me if you know what I mean...I figure like with when I die someday and I am in heaven like if I am supposed to meet them I probably will. I don’t know how that will all work itself out. I have felt like this for a long time.

Christian also discusses that he considers himself a lucky person to have grown up with his adopted family. He acknowledges appropriate limitations in their parenting abilities, but indicates that he views their parenting skills with him as good and he is thankful for the life that he has.

It has been positive in that just because I consider myself so lucky in how I was. I guess I got the lucky pick of parents like that. There are just so many messed up parents around you know. My parents are far from perfect. There were some
idosyncratic patterns of behavior in my family but for the most part I am really happy with how I turned out and I think they did a pretty good job you know. They were very loving and giving. For me it is like kind of like I said before... just being chosen and knowing that they chose me is like...I definitely see that as a positive thing.

#2 – Matthew (Found). Matthew discusses the internal struggle he feels in terms of his loyalty to his adopted parents versus his relationship with his biological mother. He indicates that he told his adopted parents once that his biological mother resided in Florida and they do as well. He is concerned that they wonder whether or not his parents feel that they will lose him to his biological mother. Matthew indicates that his adopted parents are his parents and that this will not change in his view.

I don’t think she wants to know about it. And she has never asked. Her Alzheimer’s is not...it is very mild right now, so she functions and everything and drives and stuff like that. It is not like she is...but they don’t really want to know. But for the one or two times that I told, spoke to my father about adoption, maybe once I found out and it was kind of a mistake in my opinion and I did mention that she lived down in Florida so now I feel bad because when I go done to visit either of them, you know, I wonder kind of like is my father thinking like “Oh, he’s over there.” He said that part of his fear...was that they didn’t want to share. And I am not sure if it is a fear of losing myself and my brother to our birth family...quite honestly, as I mentioned to you I am so different from my parents. I could never stay at my parent’s house now. I talk about my adopted parents as my parents. They are my parents. Nothing has changed about that.
#4 – Judy (Non Searcher). Judy indicates that he did not refer to her biological mother as a mother because she already had a mother. She states, “I didn’t, I called her the lady. I used to call her the “lady that had me.” I never called her my mother because I had a mother.”

#5 – April (Non Searcher). April verbalizes that one of her primary reasons for not searching for her biological mother is from fear that she would hurt her and that her need to know is not strong enough to risk hurting her.

But frankly for me, but mom doesn’t have a spouse, she doesn’t have a lot of support than other than for me and I think even though whether she will admit it or not I think it would really hurt her. Frankly she was there for me. She was my mother you know and I couldn’t I don’t won’t do that to her. My need to know does not outweigh my respect for her.

She continues on to say that even if her mom died that she was unclear about whether or not she would search for her biological family.

Reason is my mom is a big part of it. I don’t want to. You know if my mom was god forbid was gone, I can’t say that I wouldn’t have a different perspective on it.

April states she feels that needs to respect her mother’s privacy as well since she was the product of a closed adoption. April states, “Maybe the only reason she went through with the pregnancy was because she knew that her privacy would be protected.”

#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). Jill reflects upon her childhood and appears happy for having been given the life that she had and is aware that if her adopted parents had not given her the life that she now has that her life could have been very different.
Like who knows. I could have been in foster care for my whole life. I got all these opportunities. Just maybe both my parents went to college but when I graduated from college there was never, it was never, “Are you going to college?” It was — I don’t ever remember anyone ever saying that question — it was just, I was a junior in high school and I was like I am going to look at colleges. It was just like understood. I mean — I mean lucky.

#8 — Cathy (In Process). Cathy reports that she feels that searching for her biological family would hurt her adopted mother but acknowledges that she may not give her enough credit in order to handle her potential decision to search and therefore has kept this information to herself.

I think it would hurt her. I don’t give my mom enough credit to intellectually understand it. I think she would think that I am doing it for something personal against her. I don’t think she has the ability to understand that it is about me and I just want to find out more about me.

Fear

Fear is defined as the variety of apprehensions they feel toward their life. This theme is brought up by some of the adoptees of their fear of finding out the truth about their biological family. Some of them indicate that all of they have of their biological family are their own fantasies and that by searching for them that they might actually find out in what ways their fantasies were both correct and incorrect. Fear was discussed in 5 of the 10 interviews. Table 23 shows the distribution across the three categories.
Table 23

Theme of Fear

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<td>Overall Total</td>
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</table>

#1 – Christian (Non Searcher). Christian indicates that his primary fear is “What if she wants to meet me and stuff. I don’t really want to do that.” He indicates that he is not willing to meet her at this time. He does verbalize his reasons behind this decision.

#2 – Matthew (Found). Matthew discusses a denial of fear in his interview. He indicates that there was not a moment’s hesitation about whether or not to search for his birth family after finding out that he was adopted.

I don’t think there was a moment when I thought. There was not a moment’s hesitation about it. It was…it was an absolute thing from the moment we confirmed, it was like, of course I am going to like check this out.

#3 – April (Non Searcher). April discusses her fear not so much related to herself but a fear for her biological parents. She notes that when she was given up for adoption it was closed and in her opinion it is not right for her to open the adoption. She relates the fear to how she thinks her biological parents might respond to having their closed adoption opened.

My mom does have my birthparents names. I think she has my original birth certificate. For years, and I have access to it. It is in a safety deposit box but I
have a key. But I always purposely, purposely would not look at it. I just felt that, just for the concept of open versus closed. I think that when my parents, my biological parents made the decision 30 years ago, 30 plus years ago. They did it knowing that it was a closed adoption. I don’t know really if I am in favor of a closed adoption years ago now being open.

She also, in reference to deciding whether or to search that, “There are no guarantees.” She seems fearful of the lack of knowledge of how a reunion with her biological family may look.

#8 – Cathy (In Process). Cathy discusses her fear about potentially meeting her biological parents. She indicates that she views herself as a social person who typically does not have problems meeting new people but that when it comes to meeting them she feels anxious and fearful.

I think I am good at meeting people and talking with people but I have this fear in my mind that if I was ever to meet them that I wouldn’t know what the hell to say to them or I wouldn’t know how to act or what to say to them. I would be so afraid that they wouldn’t like me and that is actually ridiculous you know it really is. I don’t worry about that with anybody else. They are very different and I am not very sure. I haven’t decided what they are in my life, yet it is weird to me. But I think I would be very nervous and very…A, if I had to meet them or B, that they didn’t want to meet me, I think both things are very scary. You know so there is a lot of fear, anxiety, maybe anxiety is a better word than fear. But it all, it is not sorted out yet.
10 - Paula (In Process). Paula discusses her feelings of fear in relation to her adopted mother. She indicates that she was unpredictable and she was never sure how her mother was going to react to her at any particular time.

You know I just didn’t know. And there is this kind of paranoid edge to me that is very deep in my psyche because I never knew what my mother was going to accuse me of... it always inclined to be a little afraid when I am not sure how someone else is going to react. I kind of expect the worse.

Process

Process is defined as the continual growth and development of a person over time. This theme appeared to not be relevant for those adoptees who have decided to not search for their birthparents and primarily impact those adoptees who are in the process of searching for their birthparents or those who have found and discuss the process that they went through. Paula spends the majority of her interview discussing how she has been searching for her biological family for years and describes in detail the measures she has taken to try and locate her biological mother. Others discuss how the actual search process is a process and that it did not go as quickly as they initially thought. Karen notes that she always knew that she was going to search for her biological family around the age of 18, but then when she turned 18 that she would think about it and then “put it away” and then would think about it again later, and that this continued until she finally followed up the searching and found her biological family. It was also discussed that the process does not end with locating your biological family but that it continues throughout
your relationship with your biological family because now you have to incorporate this
"new family" into your life.

Five of the 10 participants discussed the theme of process during their interviews.

Table 24 shows the distribution across the three categories.

Table 24

Theme of Process

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#3 – Karen (Found). Karen describes that she always knew that she wanted to
search for her birth family but that the process of actually making the decision to search
and follow through with searching was not as easy or clear cut as she originally thought.
After contacting the adoption agency, she was told that search and reunion was a process.
She states, "I was adopted through the state so I got a form letter back saying this is a
timely process and everything."

#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy discusses that she believes that she will end up
searching for her birth family but that it is not a pressing need at this point in her life.

I think I will. It might not even be for a little while because there is just,
perticularly with September 11th, but there is so much entailed it feels burdensome
to get into the city to try and get the information that I need. You know I have to
make arrangements for 2 kids or to have to drag them with me...and like I said, it
is just not such a pressing need. But I know that I will do it. At some point, but I just don’t know when. Especially with the time frame that is involved at this point where if there are any players alive in this it has got to be cousins in all likelihood. Maybe.

She succinctly indicated, “I think I will but I don’t think I am going to run out and do it tomorrow.”

#8 – Cathy (In Process). Cathy notes that the decision to search has periods in which her investment and motivation to search waxes and wanes. She indicates, “You know so it wasn’t something that I spent a lot of time thinking about until recently until I am going through this whole ‘where am I in life’ you know and that is when I think I really focused on it a lot.”

She continues to address the process involved by stating:

I go through these time periods where sometimes I will be all gung ho about it and I want to my find my mom and dad and okay I am going to do it and I will call – I will make all those phone calls and then I will stop for a few weeks and I won’t think about it. I am very...I am very ambivalent about what I want to do. So in one of my gung ho times I call...and I was like talking to my caseworker who is very nice and I know she wanted to tell me. But she just legally can’t and she gave me the name of a woman who works in Ohio and who helps people find. She has like a support group and they go to the library and they help people. So, I called this woman and she ended up getting, she ended up somehow finding out my last name. My mom’s last name. So then I was like okay now where do I go
from here. Now I have a friend who is a detective...he gave me the number of a private investigator so I could technically find out where she is right now.

Cathy continues to discuss her how the process “looks” for her.

I think it is more of an involved process now than in was. I did that one thing at 19 and then I don’t think I did anything for a few years. And now it is like, alright I am ready to go kind of get more involved in it.

Cathy also notes that she is not sure yet what role, if she does find them, does she want to play in their life.

I don’t think I would want to have a relationship with them, you know like invite them to my wedding you know it is just so weird to me. I just don’t know how to proceed.

Cathy indicates that she needs to reflect more on her own wants and needs. And that she still finds it difficult to hear people talk about adoptees and wonders what is wrong with her.

So I have a lot of more work to do. A lot more work to do to figure out why I had the reaction that I have. I get very uncomfortable when people make jokes like “Oh she must be adopted.” I have gotten better with it but I am used to it. I remember one time and I was dating someone and his sister made some kind of joke or she said something like “Oh I better get pregnant, she was married, because I don’t want to adopt kids” and I was just like...and I really – and they didn’t know I was adopted or anything but I had to leave the room because if felt – there is something wrong with me?
#9 — Sarah (Found). Sarah talks about how the decision to search for her birthparents was not an overnight decision and was something that she kept coming back to and reflecting on it until she got to the point where she was “ready.”

And I think this is just one of the hugest things you can do. That for me it was just a process of thinking about it, putting it aside, thinking about it. Then coming to a point where — you know what — I can do this and do it in a respectful way. I honestly thought I would find my birth mother — she is in fact on the east and I thought she would be out west. Wouldn’t be that close — you know would overwhelm this person.

Sarah notes that overall in terms of her personality that she is interested in the process of relationships as opposed to a quick development. She indicates, “I think personality wise, I am more of a — let friendship develop over time.”

And I really haven’t — I have never had a longing to find my birthfather — not out of you did this to her you’re bad. It just wasn’t. It has not been a longing so, I don’t know if that will change.

#10 — Paula (In Process). Paula discusses how she invested a lot of time and energy into research and different ways of seeking information regarding her biological family. “I did a tremendous amount of research in the library and writing people and stuff like that.”

Anger

Anger is defined as a strong negative emotion exemplified by frustration. This theme emerged for Matthew primarily because he did not find out he was adopted until
he was an adult and felt that he should have been told prior to finding out the way he did.

Christian discusses anger in relation to others searching for the biological family and how he feels that people exaggerate their emotional connection to the biological family when you meet them (he is referencing television shows that he has seen).

The theme of anger is mentioned in 4 of the 10 interviews. Table 25 depicts the distribution across the three categories.

Table 25

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#1 - Christian (Non Searcher). Christian discusses the lack of relationship and/or connection to his biological family. He mentions seeing adoption reunifications on television shows and how people are emotional and hugging and exhibiting their longingness to meet each other. He talks about his anger toward not understanding the display of emotion.

I am just like this is so weird like you are going to meet this person and you are going to like be like their friend. There is no way you have can any...then you see them and sometimes. On one of these shows and they are reunited with their birthmother and they start kissing and hugging each other. It is like you are kissing and hugging a complete friggin stranger.
Christian discusses his lack of anger with his biological mother because of her decision to give him life.

Which is why I have no anger or anything for her for what she did, but that is why I have no anger or anything because...I think she made the best decision because she gave me a great life.

#2 – Matthew (Found). Matthew discusses how he did not find out he was adopted until his brother was contacted by his biological mother and both he and his brother went and met with their adopted father and were both told that they were adopted. He expresses his anger at the right he should have had to know the truth. “I feel somewhat between 0 and 35 years old there might have been a good time to tell.”

Matthew talks about his anger toward his brother for all the trouble he caused their adopted parents. Matthew indicates that he was the easier child and should have received more “special treatment” because of the accomplishments that he achieved.

So I think that I was more favored because I was an easier child. I shouldn’t say favored. My parents treated us both equally. It amazes me to this day how they could really have affection for my brother. Because he is such a pain in the butt. But I think that I was less troubled in that respect. I got better…Well…I guess I did get better grades and stuff.

#3 – Karen (Found). Karen talks throughout the interview how difficult it has been to have a relationship with her biological parents and stated, “What kind of Pandora’s box did I open.” She later discusses in greater detail the balancing has had to face by now having two sets of parents.
#5 – April (Non Searcher). April discusses the anger she has toward her adopted father for not being available to her throughout her childhood and adult life. She talks about how it was such an effort to be there for her and her desire to have had an easier relationship with her father.

I was going to get ready to go to college and he didn’t want, you know it was just a pain in the neck to get him to go to graduation or even, he just wouldn’t give me any money. I mean I worked to support myself but I mean, he was making a lot of money at the time and it was like an effort to give me $10.00. It was kind of odd, and but, I am trying to thing, that really drove a wedge between us, those years.

Attachment/Bonding

Attachment and bonding are defined as the discussion of a sense of connection to a close family member and/or primary caregiver. April discusses the importance of a father in a child’s life and implies that it does not matter if the father is biological or adoptive but that both a mother and father are needed in order become a healthy adult. Paula discusses how the difference between the relationship with her step-mother and her adoptive father. She noted that even though her adoptive father did not necessarily agree with her choice on a husband that he agreed to be there and support her whereas her step-mother’s primary concern was that her husband would “die” when he found out who she was marrying, implying that there is a bond that develops when a parent, biological or adoptive, raises a child and accepts them unconditionally.
Attachment and Bonding is discussed as a theme in 4 of the 10 interviews. Table 26 shows the distribution across the three categories.

Table 26

<table>
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#3 - Karen (Found). Karen discusses the difficulty she has had in developing an appropriate relationship with her biological parents. She talks about the struggle of initially developing a connection to them and the need to step back and figure out her feelings and the type of relationship that she seeks to have with them. Karen states that she knows that biologically she is their daughter but that she does not feel that is her bond to them.

When I first contacted them, I would go down there a lot. Like for a month or so, I would go down like every weekend. It was really trying to create this bond and know everything about each other and it was really an emotional time. And then I kind of like took a step back. And I told you my birthfather started drinking heavily and it was really a bad scene. I took a step back for like 6 months to 8 months, I don’t remember how long. I needed to figure out where I was standing with all of this. I needed to get a handle on it. I was still kind of like a kid. As old and mature as I thought I was at the time I really wasn’t. And I was just out
of college, just starting my career, and there was a lot for me to sort out that year. Eventually, we came to a happy medium where, I still cringe a little bit when they call me their daughter. They send me cards to my daughter, and I am a little bit like, "I am not your daughter," but I am your daughter.

She further indicates that she has friends with whom she feels as close to as family but yet is aware that they are not her family. She discusses how she has similar feelings about her biological parents and how her feelings have been received by her biological mother.

Yeah, I have friends who are basically like part of the family. You know. You know I have 2 couples like 2 of my friends like come to everything that my family has. I invited them to my cousin's weekend this weekend, you know. They are just almost like part of the family but they are not, they didn't grow up with us. And that is how I feel with them...I feel like I am a close friend. Once she got insulted when I said that. I said like, you are not my mother. She would say I know who didn't grow up with me, I know I am not the mother that raised you but I think we can have a different relationship, just as close but different kind of thing.

#5 - April (Non Searcher). April discusses the importance of a father's role in a child's life. A mother cannot, in her opinion, replace the role a father needs to play.

I grew up without a father, but my mother didn't choose it. To sit there and say fathers don't have an influence, or that there is enough love from me. I think that is a lot of bull. Because, my mother loved me to no end, but it doesn't replace that relationship.
April further discusses that despite the lack of biological connectedness with her brother, that she would do most anything he asked of her due to the power of their relationship.

You know I would always send him money because I was in college, I am sorry I was out of college and all that. And one time he was driving around with his friend and I guess he was telling his friend that I had driven down their and that I used to make him little dinners and all that stuff and his friend said, “I can’t believe she does that, she is not even your sister.” Like, you know. It wasn’t until that day when he regurgitated the story to me that he said, “Now I understand what you mean.” He said, “I never heard anyone say anything like that.” It was stupid, until this guy said it. And he wouldn’t tell me who this guy was because then he knew I would have this bias against him but people say a lot of stupid things when they don’t know. Right, because we weren’t blood related how could I possibly do something so nice (laugh). Well – that makes a lot of sense!

#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy discusses attachment and bonding issues as they relate to her adopted mother. She notes that she became closer to her in school when she struggled with her identity of fitting in with her peers. Lucy indicates that this is the time in her life when she asked for her adoption story which was a way of connecting with her adopted mother.

And then I became very close to my mother as I had difficulties with cliques in school and that kind of thing. And...I didn’t feel part of the in crowd in school in like sixth grade and those kind of ages. I probably became a lot more closer to
my mom for a few years umm and interestingly enough that is when the adoption story – I heard it a lot because I would ask for it.

#10 – Paula (In Process). Paula discusses the relationship she has with her stepmother and how she felt that she helped her to be more human but then was not able to accept her decision to marry her husband and tried to tell that her father would not accept this marriage.

And then when I fell in love with my husband, had had married my step – well, he had married the second housekeeper who came to be with us after one year with the other lady. And he married Marge after she had worked for him, for us, for years and taken care of me. When I fell in love with [my husband], I told Maggie...she was really upset. She said, “This will kill your father.” And I thought, “Oh, what a nice thing to say.” It was so hard – because she loved me. She loved me into being human you know.

Birthday/Celebration

Birthday is defined the date of birth in which the adoptee was born. Celebration is defined as day in which they were brought home by their adopted family and there is a special remembrance of that particular day. This theme emerged for several of the adoptees surrounding their entry into their adoptive families. Several discussed how their families celebrated their “adoption day” because it was the day that they became parents and family.

The theme of birthdays and celebrations were discussed by 4 of the 10 participants. Table 27 depicts the distribution across the three categories.
Table 27

Theme of Birthday/Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Discussed</th>
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<th>In Process</th>
<th>Found</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall Total</td>
<td>4 (10)</td>
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#3 – Karen *(Found).* Karen discusses at multiple occasions during the interview about her process of searching for her birth family. She connected several of the major times when searching was prevalent in her life and they were around her birthday.

I don’t know what it was but I did, maybe it was my 21st birthday and I was legal. I know that it was in the spring and that is when my birthday is, maybe that is why. And then a year later I followed up just because it was like wait a minute it has been a year…right and then I never heard back from them again. And then it was like a year later and it was close to my 22nd birthday. I am thinking in retrospect maybe because I was about to graduate college myself and my that was a milestone, maybe because they were 22 when I was born, maybe it was full-circle kind of thing. The first letter I got from her, she wrote to me on my birthday. So maybe it was like, subconsciously, I was going to be 22 and that is how old they were when.

#5 – April *(Non Searcher).* April references her birthday in relation to wondering whether or not she is her biological family thinks about her on her birthday and hoping that she is content with her decision to give her up for adoption.
I would really need to know more about the circumstances, but I am hoping she was a good person and that she thought about me maybe on my birthday that she – that she is happy and at peace with her decision.

#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). Jill recalls when her brother was brought home and how a family in their neighborhood helped prepare a celebration for when her parents came home with him. She also talks about how happy she was to have a new baby brother and how she even brought him into school for show and tell to share her happiness with her classmates.

I remember the woman across the street. There was this family that used to live across the street from us and they had made this sign for my brother and it said “Welcome Home Brian.” And it had all balloons on it and the girl who lived across the street, and we are still friends with them even though they have moved away and she, the girl who I was friends with, she had a younger sister who I was friends with but she died from cancer when she was young and I just became friends with her older sister and I remember standing their with her and her mother. It is funny to think about it now. Like they just came home with this new baby. Laugh. He just like appeared. So they came home with him and it was exciting. You know it was like this new baby and he was my brother and you know my God, but I guess it was exciting and that is what I remember...I was in first grade and I was so excited that I had a brother. I brought him in for show and tell. I could walk to my elementary school. So one day she came and I remember all the kids they didn’t know if they could touch him. I wanted to show him off. I was really excited that I had a brother.
#7 - Lucy (In Process). Lucy discusses the tradition she developed to celebrate the homecoming of both of her children. She mentions that she felt really special knowing about the specialness surrounding her own entry into her adopted family’s home and how she wanted to instill this special feeling into the celebration of both of her son’s entry into their home.

We have, the day we went to finalize Henry’s adoption for some reason they were selling t-shirts in the lobby of the courthouse so we have a Bucks County t-shirt that we picked up in his size as an infant. Umm, from that particular day and for James it was over in Jersey so we went down to the Liberty Science Center and we got him his adoption t-shirt from the Liberty Science Center for that day. That kind of thing, but I do have a nice story and then every year then after, this is probably another bone of contention with my brother, who was not adopted on any special day in the family history, on my mother’s birthday every year, my dad would get my mother and me a corsage and we would go and have this double celebration and my brother didn’t have anything similar to that.

She also mentions that there was no celebration surrounding her brother’s adoption day and may have internalized a feeling of being different or unwanted enforcing the need she felt to make the celebration of her children’s adoption day special. Lucy stated, “And my brother didn’t happen to get adopted on a similar type of day and he had nothing going on around his adoption making him feel like we are celebrating.”

#9 - Sarah (Found). Sarah discusses how she appreciates knowing that on her birthday that her biological mother is thinking about her and feels that this sense was instilled by her adoptive parents by being so open about her adoption status.
I think growing up and being communicated clearly that I was adopted I would think about, in particular my birth mom for whatever reason around my birthday. I would have this sense that someone was thinking about me. Almost this, every once in a while, this weird thing where I would all of a sudden think about being adopted and someone out there was thinking about me.

**Boundaries**

Boundaries are defined as the setting of limits in a relationship – it was discussed in reference to both adoptive and biological family. Specifically, Karen discusses how she has had to continually assess her relationship with her biological family in order to feel comfortable with her relationship with them. Sarah also discusses the need to set “healthy boundaries” with her biological mother in order to maintain to relationship with her.

The theme of boundaries was presented was discussed by 4 of the 10 participants. Table 28 shows the distribution across the three categories.

**#3 – Karen (Found).** Karen discusses that she has been in contact with her biological family for approximately 9 years and that it has been difficult in terms of setting up boundaries in each other lives.

I am in contact with my birthparents. I contacted them when I was 22, so I have been in contact with them for 9 years almost. And that was very trying. You know...just emotional. Very emotional and a lot of working out of where people in what roles in my life.
Table 28

Theme of Boundaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Discussed</th>
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<tr>
<td>Overall Total</td>
<td>4 (10)</td>
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She talks about how they wanted to take her into their family as if she never left and Karen discusses how she felt that this is when she realized that she needed to set up some rules about expectations. “And then they wanted to like just kind of envelop me in their family. So that is when I said there were things that needed to be worked out.”

Karen then talks about her adoptive mother’s perceptions about her biological mother trying to “adopt her back” and how this has been difficult mainly because she has a family and is not looking to replace them. And in her mind her biological family was seeking to make up for lost time by offering her to move in and live with them.

She said to me at the time, they can’t adopt you back and that it is kind of what they wanted to do. Like they felt that they got all of this off their chest and they were out of the closet with their family and they wanted their daughter. And it was kind of sticky. I have a family. I wasn’t really looking to replace my family and in fact I said that when I searched for them, you know I said that I would be happy to just get like medical information or meet them once, meet her once. I didn’t know about them being married...And then when they were, they came clean with their family they felt everything was off their chest they kind of wanted
that, they wanted me to be their daughter. At the time they said “Oh you can come live with us.” And you know I wasn’t a little kid I was 22 years old.

Karen talks about how she has over time helped set appropriate boundaries with her adopted mother. She talks about the respect she feels for her for not being intrusive in her life and now when her mother offers her advice she feels comfortable accepting it when she agrees and not accepting it when it doesn’t feel right.

She is a great lady. I have really good relationship with her. She is not intrusive. She will give me her opinion but we have the type of relationship that she feels free to give me her opinion and I feel free to tell thanks but no thank or oh, that is a great idea you know and I will run with it.

Karen also acknowledges a similar relationship with her father and feels comfortable hearing his opinions and accepting them when she agrees.

I think that he used to like the fact that I used to argue a lot when I was a teenager and I would assert my opinion and I wanted to be independent and he thought that was neat I guess, so he would try and get me (laugh) arguments with him. To not argue fight, but to debate things. Umm, you know the same thing my dad has really come a long way with keeping his opinions to himself and accepting that I am going to do with my life what I am going to do and that they can give me their opinion when I ask for it, kind of, especially like serious things like religion and I am never going to really ask.

#4 - Judy (Non Searcher). Judy discusses boundaries in reference to her mother moving her and her father away from her father’s family. Judy mentions how a large number of her father’s family reside in an area in which all the houses are next to each
other and how her mother knew that for their successful family development, that they needed to move away from them. "My mother got us the heck out of there (laughing). As soon as she could. It was just one of those things."

#9 -- Sarah (Found). Sarah discusses how her relationship with her adoptive parents are very free and not rigid. She states that they keep in touch but that it doesn't need to follow a set schedule and really it depends on when people have the time to connect they do.

Our relationship is very free flowing. Umm, they call, I might not get back to them for a few days, then we would connect. We just don't have a huge set schedule for calling. We contact each other -- usually on the weekends though.

Sarah compares her relationship with her adoptive parents to her biological parents and notes how different they are in their overall structure. She states that her biological mother seeks a much more rigid relationship with her and that she has been working to put "healthy boundaries" around them.

Now that I think that I have gotten to know her, I think that she is very... Professionally, she achieved her goals, but she is very insecure. Has needed to be married, has needed to have her daughter call her every week and as I said before, my relationship with my parents is very free-flowing. She is much more controlling. Yeah -- like call me every week and umm, in fact I called her out of the blue one time and left a message and then the next time I called her she is like "I fell apart after you called me. I didn't know why you were calling or what did you want." And I am thinking "to say hello." So, I just, you know, because I went
through this, well maybe we shouldn’t talk for...I say, let’s talk every couple of weeks. I feel like I have put healthy boundaries on it.

Sarah talks about how it is necessary to strike a balance between her two sets of parents, “Finding that balance about having two sets of parents.”

Because, that is just a crazy time teaching wise – the first fall semester. And she was okay with that. And then we talked once a week on the phone just getting to know each other. I initiated like let’s maybe go through a book and there are these books about adoption and it brings up all kinds of issues – adopted parents, siblings so you are covering all of these topics.

#10 – Paula (In Process). Paula uses the theme of boundaries to discuss her feelings about closed adoption.

It meant that there was an iron curtain between me and my history. That I never – literally ironed me in the psychological sense because – I honestly didn’t have any concept that I could ever break through and find out anything. It was all the little bit of information that she gave me and how I could extrapolate that – into my own fantasy – mind.

Paula uses strong language of “iron curtain” to express her strong emotions about being denied access to her history – that boundaries, beyond her control, were placed on her without her acceptance of this feat.

_Nature versus Nurture_

Nature versus nurture is defined as the discussion of how biology and environment impact a person’s personality. This theme was brought up in reference to not
knowing whether they would be the “same person” if they were raised by their biological family. They seem to be questioning whether or not their personality is comprised of both biology and environment or whether it is primarily due to one or the other. The theme of nature versus nurture was brought up by 4 of the 10 participants. Table 29 shows the distribution across the three categories.

Table 29

Theme of Nature versus Nurture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non Searcher</th>
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<th>Found</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Total</td>
<td>4 (10)</td>
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#3 - Karen (Found). Karen is trying to figure out how her brother is so different from the rest of her adopted family and states that she feels he is a strong connection for nature.

You know it is just weird...my take on it is that I mean, I don’t, the whole nature versus nurture issue, I think it is both. I don’t think it is one or the other. I think my brother is a very strong case for nature because he is not like the rest of us.

The rest of my extended family is very close.

#5 - April (Non Searcher). April proposes that she is curious about finding out about her biological parents but that her belief is as a strong advocate for nurture — such as the life she was nurtured and given by her adopted family.
I definitely think nurture over nature. I mean...I would like to see my parents just to see if I resemble them, more of a curiosity. It is not like a burning desire...Um, it is curiosity but it is not...my mom is the one who I think who raised the bar for me.

#8 – Cathy (In Process). Cathy emphasizes that both her brother and adoptive father are alcoholics and she questions whether or not alcoholism is more nature than originally presumed.

My brother too, we are very different and my dad was an alcoholic and my brother is an alcoholic, which is interesting because they are not even blood related and its weird. I should do a study on that. See if it is like a modeling behavior or if it is. Maybe it not as much genetic as people think.

Cathy also indicates that she is interested in finding out whether or not she is a product of nature and/or nurture.

I would like to meet them even though we have never met are we really alike. Part of it too is that because I am in psychology and all of this just fascinates me and I am interested in finding out how much of it really is biological, kind of your personality, how much of it is biological.

#10 – Paula (In Process). Paula states that she was concerned that she may develop a mental illness, similar to that of her adopted mother, and is contemplating how much nature and nurture play a role in people's lives.

So, when I went to college, I was really, really depressed. I think I was scared that I would be mentally ill, like her even though I knew that I wasn’t genetically related to her.
Reasons for Volunteering

At the end of each interview, all participants were asked why they volunteered. It seemed that the overriding decision to participate in the research was for the adoptee to have a forum to share their story. Another common theme was the awareness that there is not much research or discussion of adoptees and to be able to not only share their story but to later have access to the stories of others. There answers were as described below.

#1 – Christian (Non Searcher). Christian indicates that his primary reason for volunteering is to help this researcher as well as to try and get some answers to some of his questions concerning adoption.

Probably because I think it is a pretty neat project like I want to know about people’s perceptions about being adopted and other people’s opinions because maybe I am not the only person who has thoughts and concerns about it. So rather than just helping you out Anne, it is always trying to get some answers myself. Just to find out how other people. Do other people have that like little empty feeling that I have about not knowing certain parts or have any funny stories like I have. They are not really funny.

#2 – Matthew (Found). Matthew indicates that his primary reason for volunteering is to help give more information to the adoption community.

Well probably I have told the story so many times to all these people and everything else and figured that I think that it is a...topic is under...under inspected if you will. I don’t think too many people are studying the effects on people and what it is to be an adult adoptee or what is it is to grow up like that. People just like did it. It seemed like a good answer to a problem, kids who didn’t
have home, or parents who wanted kids, and that is far as the thought process went and it is because if they thought way back in the day, take them home, he will be your kid, you don’t have to worry about anything else, make them what you want them to be. Like it is not what is all about. In a sense…kind of like… I don’t perhaps have the time to be active about lobbying for opening of the adoption laws or helping other people and I thought this was a way a doing that in a passive way.

#3 – Karen (Found). Karen describes her primary reasons for participating are to be able to participate in a research study as well as to possibly help others in similar situations have more information about the search process.

In the psychology department and you know that I wasn’t prepared for my reunion and not that I have pearls of wisdom or anything, but I really. I think I never really fit into anything that people are looking to research for. Laugh. I used to sign up for this thing to get like $40.00 or something when I was like 20 or something to do for this research. It wasn’t through a university it was through like a group or something. They would always call me and I would never fit. You know what potato chips do I use or what deodorant do I use. I would never fit the one they needed. I have always volunteered for different research, so I was like, “Oh, wow, I think I fit into that.” But more personal level, I think I was totally unprepared for what I went into and if I can help. I didn’t go into therapy or seek help professional when I was going through all of this and I think it probably would have helped me if I had. Luckily I had very strong friends. I had a lot of people in my life, friends at the time who were extremely strong and they
helped me through it. They took the role of the therapist. You know...if I can help shed light on what happens and help somebody else, they can use all the help they can get.

#4 – Judy (Non Searcher). Judy indicates that her primary reason for volunteering was so that she could share her story and informing others that there are positive aspects to giving up a child for adoption.

It was just interesting. I saw it and I said, “I can tell somebody my story” and even though maybe it is not a typical story or maybe it doesn’t further the study all that much but it is something, but hey, this is a good decision. My birthmother made an excellent decision. For my well being at the time that she made it and also I think that to teach people. Giving up a child for adoption is not that bad. And it can have very good consequences.

#5 – April (Non Searcher). April discusses that the primary reason for her participating in the reason is because it seemed like a natural part of her adoption development in terms of sharing her story in a safe environment as well as also helping out her boyfriend’s alma mater.

Well, I think that part of it is part of my development. I have so many years not talking about it...that I knew in a way it would be a great way to talk about it in a quote unquote safe environment. Umm, not that I am as afraid anymore, but I don’t wanna, I still don’t run around telling everybody. If it comes up in conversation then I am more likely to say, yeah well, Blah, blah, blah. But I think it is more therapeutic for me, but I also like to help people and I felt like if there is someone out there that I can help, well what comes around goes around. I mean,
do unto others so I figured if you needed help and I kind of felt well my boyfriend went there, you know it sounds silly but I just felt like it was a combination of those two things.

#6 - Jill (Non Searcher). Jill indicates that her primary reason for volunteering for this project was to help increase the amount of information out there that exists on adoption.

I would like, after you are finished with everything to finish, I would love to read what you compiled. I think what you said. I think when I was an undergraduate here from the first real paper I did a presentation on any topic and I talked about adoption. I think there is not that much information out there. I even had to do some work on my thesis last semester and finding some articles and stuff, I was thinking about doing adopted children and their communication with their siblings. But it was really hard and we had a very limited amount of time to find a couple of articles but their really wasn’t that much but it is a subject that people need to know more about it. I think some people, for some reason, they are not open to adopting kids. I am not sure why.

#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy states that her primary reason for volunteering is that she understands after completing her own doctoral degree how difficult it is to get participants and her desire to help.

Research karma. I mean obviously the topic is near and dear but it really has a lot to do with research karma because we have had people come to us for multi-racial issues and multi-racial marriages. We have done stuff on, it was hard getting subjects. It is not an easy task. I needed for my results to really have been valid, I
needed about 120 people and I got 80 after a year. Pause. A little over a year. I didn’t have scholarship money. I had put ads out nationally. In newspapers and out in San Francisco and in L.A. and cities that have large mixed populations and stuff. And stuff I think with that I had to eliminate about 6 people who didn’t respond. After like a year I have like 80 people and that was just for a very simple quantitative please answer this when I mail it to you kind of thing, right. And I even got the 80 I think because one person in particular knew a lot of people and gave me like a whole list of names and led to a whole another bunch of names.

8 - Cathy (In Process). Cathy notes that her primary reason for volunteering has to be with the fascination with the field of psychology and wanting to have a better understanding of the impact of personality and nature vs. nature. Further, she indicates that she realized that she had important information to share about her own life process.

I am a very fascinated with anything that has to do with adoption – the whole field of psychology. I keep saying fascinated or intrigued. But I really am – by personality and biological stuff and environments. I think it is all very interesting and I think exploring it and learning about it and (pause) doing it is very helpful. Plus, I like to be helpful to people that I know are going through something such as writing a dissertation is not easy and I like to understand. I am empathetic. Even in college when you had undergrad and you always had to do – you always had to help out the graduate students but we had to do like certain amount of hours and I would always do more because I felt so bad and I wanted to be helpful and this is something that I feel like not that that I am an expert on but I am a very
unique person....I think it is my experience and I don’t should not keep that to myself I should share that with people who want to learn more about it and want to know more about it. And plus I want to learn more about it.

#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah indicates that her primary reason for wanting to volunteer is that the decision to search for birthparents is a process and that there is no right way to do it. I think it is an interesting dynamic and it is very tough and there is no one right answer and no one right way to do it. I don’t know – I just wanted – I wanted to help you as a student. And whoever else wants help with this processing something like this or doing something like this. I would be more than willing to talk to a potential person who wants to do a search.

#10 – Paula (In Process). Paula indicates that her primary reason for volunteering is because of her investment to the field of adoption.

Umm, well, when I think about what I have given the world in a sense and I am just about 60 so you start thinking about that at some point – what legacy do I leave. The primary one is my children (crying) and I feel so fortunate to have had children. Even if I had adopted children I would still feel fortunate. I feel like being a parent is a blessing. I am sorry that people, that so many people feel like they have to be parents to validate their existence. I think that is why people make mistakes when people choose to adopt. My parents probably should not have adopted. But my father went along with it because he thought maybe having a baby would straighten out my mother’s brain. Well, no. But I feel like the second most important thing that I will leave behind me is, is having been a significant part of the sea change that has happened in the perception of adoption. My little
part of it here in...just in terms of talking with social workers and adoptive parents. Since 1977, I got involved. And also, I feel like my best place is behind the scenes just kind of networking and connecting and encouraging people. And I think that together we have all made an enormous – whether I ever find my birthmother and twenty thousand, hundred thousand other adoptees don't ever find their birthmothers just by being present in the world and talking about ourselves and our stories, has made an enormous difference for the adoptee...in a way it is a risk for me to tell you my story because since my growing up was so difficult you know I don't think, I don't want people, like Bill Pierce says that only the malcontent search. I don't believe that is true from my own experience. But I also think that the world needs to be aware that not every adoptive family is umm, however they were, Ozzie and Harriet...I think there needs to be a balance of information and while some people who have had experiences like mine might not volunteer for this I wanted to do this just to have this perspective.

Secondary Themes

The following themes emerged in only a few of the interviews but seemed important to mention and to acknowledge their existence for these participants. These themes appear to be relevant on a more individualized basis to those adoptees who may have experienced additional life experiences such as infertility, divorce, secrecy of adoption status. They may be more common in adoptees who have similar life experiences and especially since the purpose of this research is to present commonalities among adult adoptees regarding their search process, these themes appear to be relevant
to the search process for these particular adoptees. Table 30 shows the number of adoptees who endorsed the secondary themes in their interviews.

Table 30

*Secondary Themes*

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Adoptees who Endorsed</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Normal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Idealized</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religion/Faith</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
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<td>Denial</td>
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<td>Fate</td>
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<td>Indebtedness</td>
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<td>Protection</td>
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<td>Repression</td>
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<td>Selflessness</td>
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Infertility

Infertility is defined as a person’s inability to conceive a child. This theme was brought up by three of the participants. Cathy states that she feels her adoptive mother’s issues surrounding her adoption was primarily due to her “issues” regarding her inability to conceive children. Karen notes issues of infertility are significant in her family with both her sister and her adoptive mother and appears to be struggling with and yet she is now pregnant with her second child. Table 31 shows the distribution across the three categories.

#3 – Karen (Found). Karen indicates that infertility has been an issue within her family ranging from her mother to cousins to her sister.

Table 31

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And my sister works part time and she is in school, she wants to be a teacher. She is, she ironically is dealing with her infertility issues of her own. So has been trying to have a baby for 3 ½ years and has not had any success. It’s funny that is like an issue in our family. My mom obviously had infertility and a lot of my cousins have had infertility.
Karen talks about how her relationship with her sister was somewhat strained when she became pregnant again and her sister was continuing to struggle with issues of infertility.

She and her husband were kind of doing their own thing and they were not coming over as much and I wasn’t hearing from her as much and it was when I found out I was pregnant with this baby and she is going through infertility. She is in therapy for herself and she had just started with this therapist who is really good and who she really likes and she is doing really well. But she had just started the therapy and she was kind of at like her worst point. She was like as much as I hate myself for being jealous, I am jealous and it is hard for me.

#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy indicates that her being adopted made the decision of adoption much easier when she realized she was having trouble getting pregnant.

I think it had a big effect in terms of my willingness to adopt. For me it was like whoa no big deal. I much preferred the adoption process than getting the Pergenal shots. And umm, so for me it was like a no brainer. In fact, we went into our marriage with the idea that we would have a child and adopt a child. And when we came around to having difficulty with my getting pregnant it was like let’s just go ahead with the adoption which ever comes first. So it. For me the adoption piece wasn’t let’s adopt because I can’t have children. It changed, my being adopted had a lot to do with why I would adopt a child.
Cathy (In Process). Cathy briefly mentioned that she feels that part of her
mother’s secrecy around adoption was due to her shame of being unable to give birth to
her children. She states, “Medically. They just didn’t. I think my mom saw it as a
shameful thing.”

Normal

Normal is defined as the feeling of being the same as other families. This theme is
discussed by these three adoptees as living a normal life and not feeling different or bad
about their adoption status. Table 32 shows the distribution across the three categories.

Karen (Found). Karen emphasized that she was raised in a normal
household. She states, “They provided such a good home life and they were just so
normal. Normal.”

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April (Non Searcher). April states that adoption wasn’t discussed in the
family often because they didn’t feel that their adoption status made them any different
as a family. “We always felt that we were a normal family, so why would you talk
about adoption. But really wasn’t. I wouldn’t flinch if he brought it up now.”
#6 – Jill (Non Searcher). Jill speaks also about feeling like she was part of a normal family and that adoption didn’t make them different.

It has just always been there. I have always known but like you said, it has always just been a part of life. I mean I can’t remember not knowing that I was, that I was adopted. I can’t remember ever feeling uncomfortable or embarrassed. I was always like, hey, I was adopted. I always thought that it was a neat thing, it was really cool. I mean, I don’t know, there are some people that will wonder why you are adopted, which is not a negative thing. I mean, I can, my mother has had two miscarriages, but she had one and then she adopted me and then she had another one, oh no no no, they adopted me, they adopted my brother, and then she had one and then she had another one. I mean it is not really a bad thing.

Idealized

Idealized is defined as a description of adoptive parents as the exaggeration of positive traits. Judy refers to her adoptive parents as similar to Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn and Karen refers to them as similar to Ozzie and Harriet. These adoptees view their parent’s marriage as “perfect.” Table 33 depicts the distribution across the three categories.

#3 – Karen (Found). Karen spoke about similarities between her adoptive parents and the television family icons “Ozzie and Harriet.”

My parents are like I said, like Ozzie and Harriet. They are just very funny, very loving people. They have a great marriage. We always make fun of them because
they are so lovey and everything. After 40 years they are still affectionate and you know. You know they just make corny jokes with each other.

Table 33

*Theme of Idealized*

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Karen also remembers that as a child she idealized her big brother and was very proud of him. She speaks to how she wanted to follow in his foot steps and that as they got older she became more realistic about their relationship.

I remember as a little kid wanting to have that big brother relationship with him I wanted to idealize him and for him to be my big brother and to have him defend me. I wanted that kind of relationship with him and I would try. I remember when we played little league. He would play baseball and I would play softball and the little sisters and other kids would play in the park and I remember watching the game, like “that’s my brother, he’s the pitcher” or whatever, but he is just not a warm fuzzy kind of person and he has never, ever been a man of many words. Even as little kids, he never really talked a lot.

#4 – Judy (Non Searcher). Judy compares her parents to Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn. My husband describes them as, they kind of look like Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn. It was that kind of chemistry that you sensed between them.
They just were really special people. When I think, that poor woman must have been a saint because when my kids, I have my younger one, he is worse than I ever was. There is just about very few things that he eats even at his day and age.

Religion/Faith

Religion/Faith is defined as the spiritual connectedness both in terms of personal and organized faith and religion shared by a person. This theme was brought up by two adoptees, both who searched and found their biological family. Sarah spoke about her how her faith in God has impacted her life and that she makes her decisions in life based on how she feels that God would want her to act. Karen discusses how she chose to marry a Jewish man and how difficult it was for her parents because of their strong beliefs in religion. She talks about how for her she has been able to separate from her parents in terms of religion and live the type of life that she wants to live. Table 34 shows the distribution across the three categories.

Table 34

Theme of Religion/Faith

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#3 – Karen (Found). Karen speaks about the difficulty she has had in separating her own religious and spiritual faith from her parents because of their expectations that she would believe in what they believe.

She wanted to marry a Catholic [her mother]. That was so important to her, you know. That was hard for her. It was hard for her to realize that I really wasn’t exactly like them in my religious beliefs. That Catholicism wasn’t so important to me as the person’s morals and what they believe in, spiritually or whatever, is more important to me than organized religion. For them, organized religion is what is important. So that was kind of a hard thing for her to get over and now they are like, they are really pretty good about keeping their opinions to themselves. You know. They used to make comments about my brother like they only go to church on Christmas and stuff like that before me.

#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah spoke briefly about the importance of faith in her life.

“I have a faith that is important. I think that I became more aware that – I am thankful that God is in control and I feel that he kind of placed me and protected me.”

Confusing

Confusing was defined as the bewilderment involved in having two sets of parents. Only one adoptee spoke about this theme and she was an adoptee who searched and found her biological parents. Sarah discusses the difficulties she has faced by having found her biological mother and how she finds defining her relationships with her biological and adoptive parents as confusing and difficult. Table 35 depicts the distribution across the three categories.


Table 35

*Theme of Confusing*

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#9 – *Sarah (Found).* Sarah speaks to the confusing nature of having two sets of parents.

I think the worst part now in finding my birthmother now is that I have 2 sets of parents and feelings like I have to manage those feelings. Like, I don’t want to feel like I am rejecting my biological or my adopted parents or favoring this one, I would say that finding my birthmother has caused more angst.

*Story*

Story is defined as the desire an adoptee has to hear their adoption story by the adopted parents about their biological parents. This theme was brought up by two adoptees in the course of their interview. One was a non searching adoptee and the other is an adoptee in the process of searching for her birth family. Both of the adoptees discuss how they felt comfort in hearing their adoption story and how their adoptive parents would share their story with them when they asked. Table 36 shows the distribution across the three categories.
Table 36

Theme of Story

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#4 – Judy (Non Searcher). Judy recalls how she her father was the carrier of her adoption story and that it was his story to tell her.

There was a bedtime story that I was told about how I was chosen and they were always very open about answering questions. I can't prove or disprove the veracity of some of the answers that I received but always felt very, very loved by both of my adopted parents. My father was a very unusual man in that he was a very active father for everything from changing diapers...my mom read to me to, but just as far as the adoption story that would be his to tell.

#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy describes how she was comforted by both her and her brother’s adoption stories and during her pre-adolescent years would often request the story from her mother.

That to me is a comforting story like when I was 11 and feeling left out by some people who had been friends earlier in elementary school and they became part of the popular crowd and I was still like a tomboy and I didn’t want to hear anything. You know. Dances...oh please. So I felt very left out of the loop, very abandoned
by some friends. During that time I will tell you, almost nightly, I asked for either
my story or my brother's story before I went to bed at night.

Tension

Tension is described as the strain felt in a relationship that is difficult to
overcome. Christian discusses tension in relation to his feeling that he needed to “break
the ice” between his mother and sister, primarily because he notes that his sister “causes
trouble in the family.” Sarah discusses tension in relation to the struggle she has with her
biological mother specifically related to having fantasized about her as being different
than she is in reality. Table 37 shows the distribution across the three categories.

Table 37

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<th>Theme Discussed</th>
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#1 – Christian (Non Searcher). Christian described his role in the family when
there was tension between his parents and his sister. He states, “It was my job to go to
the “funny guy” and try and break the tension between them.”

#9 – Sarah (Found). Sarah describes the tension she feels upon meeting her birth
mother and realizing that she is not the person that she expected her to be.
I think I expected someone more independent. Probably because I am more independent. Um, I think my birthfather maybe was the independent one. So that is where I get it. Laugh. Not that I need people – but more of, I am trying to think, I don’t know what I had fantasies about. I had concerns that I would find someone who was unhealthy. And she is to a respect. But maybe I had been destroyed by this and made bad decisions about it along the whole way. And I think she has made good decisions. She is a professional. I think she has had a lot of problems in their marriage but they kept it with it. She has had to seek a lot of counseling. But she chose someone who is committed to her.

*Unconditional Love*

Unconditional love is defined as love that a parent feels toward their child despite their personal beliefs about their child’s actions. Cathy discusses how she does not feel that her parents loved her brother unconditionally and that she was bothered by this because she felt that he could do no wrong. Paula discusses feeling unconditional love by her father, in particular and felt that regardless of whether or not he agreed with her that he always loved and supported her. This theme was brought up in two interviews both by adoptees in the process of searching for their biological family. Table 38 shows the distribution across the three categories.

#8 - *Cathy (In Process).* Cathy speaks to the fact that regardless of what her brother did, her adoptive parents always loved him.

I am mad at him because he got all of dad’s attention and he was the favorite and he totally screwed up his life and they still like him more and here I am trying
really hard and (laugh) they don’t like me. I don’t understand. So, our relationship, we are not real close.

Table 38

Theme of Unconditional Love

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#10 – Paula (In Process). Paula describes how despite her step-mothers concern about her upcoming marriage, her father exhibited total and unconditional love for her.

And, where am I going with this. So, I said to my father: “Will you come to my wedding?” because I really felt from Maggie’s response like they would just desert me. You know and he said, “Are you my daughter?” And I said, “Well, yeah.” And he said, “Well, there is your answer.” And then I said, “Will you give me away?” and he said, fully expecting him to say no because of her reaction and he said, “Are you my daughter?” and I said, “Yes” and he said, “Well there is your answer.” So no matter what I did, my father (crying) was so supportive and umm, part of the reason I came to faith was that I heard a sermon about the prodigal son and about the father who loved his kid no matter what the kid did and the man gave some real contemporary story about a situation like that and I am sitting there thinking, “I get it, I get it.” And I know I got it on the macro level because I had a father who showed it to me on the micro level all the time.
He really loved me unconditionally. And you know I feel like any kid is lucky to have one parent who loves her unconditionally. Especially so when the other parent is so whacked out. Laugh. So, I really was fortunate in the father department.

**Courage**

Courage is defined as the adoptees perception of their valor involved in giving up a child for adoption as well as the bravery it takes for adoptive parents to adopt children. Sarah discusses how she cannot imagine that it would be easy to relinquish a child for adoption as well as to adopt a child with all kinds of "missing information" to their history and to make the decision because that is what is in the best interest of the child. Table 39 depicts the distribution across the three categories.

Table 39

**Theme of Courage**

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#9 – Sarah *(Found)*. Sarah indicates that adoption is an overall courageous act. Some people can’t feel like they can adopt kids because they don’t know if they would be able to love them fully and others problems and things. They hear stories about adopted kids but that could just as easily happen in a biological
family, so I guess maybe courage on both ends. My parents took a risk to adopt kids and really – there has been problems particularly with my sister. I am not saying that I haven’t (laugh) never did anything wrong. But they have just been committed and I think that if someone recognizes that they can’t take of a child and give it up for adoption and a loving thing as well.

Denial

Denial is defined as the lack of acknowledgement of the potential of having been an adoptee. This theme was only discussed by one of the participants – by an adoptee who found out as an adult that he was adopted and since then he searched and found his biological parents. Matthew discusses that despite finding out that his brother was adopted he still felt that he was a biological child until his adopted father told him otherwise. Table 40 shows the distribution across categories.

Table 40

Theme of Denial

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#2 – Matthew (Found). Matthew speaks about how he was in denial about the possibility of being adopted even after finding out that his brother was adopted. He states that when his father offered him the information he was shocked.
She had gone out and my father really didn’t know why we were coming over for and so. Umm so we sat there in the den and my brother said, “I have gotten some information which there is too much information for it to be anything but true and we need to discuss it.” And my father said, “Yes, you’re adopted.” And so I sat there and listened for a half hour, while they went back and forth and sitting there like (sigh) and then my father turned to me and said, “I guess you have some questions” and I like “well it certainly lends open the question to” and he said, “Yes you were adopted too” and so that is how we learned about it.

Matthew also talks about how his mother continued to live in denial regarding her sons being adopted even after she became aware the both of her sons knew they were adopted.

No and she...there is a lot of denial going on in the family. My mother is the type of person that like this is her world kind of a tunnel vision thing. What she just doesn’t want to exist just doesn’t exist. So she never even really. That weekend. Umm...It was a Thursday morning that I found out and spoke to my father and the following Monday or Tuesday was my father’s birthday and she although we went home that night and she called me, no she didn’t call me, that night she called me the next night, and didn’t even mention it. How are you doing? What is going on with work? And that kind of thing. And not a word and I got off the phone like in disbelief that she wouldn’t say anything...And that there was nothing really to discuss. Nothing had changed in her world.
Fate

Fate was only discussed as a theme by one adoptee and he has searched and found his biological family. Matthew discusses how fate has impacted his life and that if he did not find out he was adopted when he found that he may not have ever found his biological father before he died. Table 41 shows the distribution across the three categories. Fate is defined as the realization that certain things happen at a particular time for a reason.

#2 – Matthew (Found). Matthew speaks about how fate impacted his ability to meet his father. He notes that if he didn’t find out when he did that he was adopted and decided to search for his family, that he may have not had the opportunity to meet his biological father before he died.

Table 41

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Yes. He unfortunately died umm, last year, a little more than a year already. Well this whole thing by the way has made me a very strong believer in fate because my brother. Perhaps we would have not known for years and years. And my brother’s mother died about a year after they met. And she didn’t know that she was sick. It was not as a result of that. She later found out she had cancer and
died. It thus caused me to go on my search and I found her and him and he died shortly after that, about a year after. Had it been, even a year longer, umm, I would have never had the opportunity to meet him.

**Indebtedness**

Indebtedness is defined as the desire to pay someone back for their good will. Lucy discusses that for her she always knew that she wanted to adopt a child and stated that she felt that this was due to her own adoption status and feeling that she wanted to give back what she had been given. This theme was brought up by one adoptee in the process of searching for her birth family. Table 42 shows distribution across the three categories.

Table 42

**Theme of Indebtedness**

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#7 – Lucy (In Process). Lucy below is speaking about her openness to adopt her children and how she feels it is connected to her sense of indebtedness because of her positive adoption experience.

Notwithstanding any questions an adopted child might have about their biological background. But, you know that we as humans can do that. I think is amazing.
And umm, Pause. I guess – I have heard this from other adopted kids too, I think it is a certain sense of indebtedness. To what I don’t know...But it is a certain sense of because this was done for me.

*Intimacy*

This theme was brought up in one interview by a non searching adoptee. Christian talks about how he feels that because his family did not express emotions that it impacted his ability to develop intimate feelings for others – because he did not have any role-models. Table 43 depicts distribution across the three categories. Intimacy is defined as the feeling of closeness to a non-family member.

Table 43

*Theme of Intimacy*

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#1 – *Christian (Non Searcher)*. Christian talks about how the lack of expression of emotions in his family has affected his ability to be intimate and express his feelings to other people in his life.

So it is like a work, definitely not emotions. It is always work, weather, or small talk. That is how it has always been. Like I accept that but, you know...just because I am the only one he shows his love in other ways...it is just kind of
weird like I think the effect that had on me is that I have a hard time with like intimacy and things like that. Because you know in a lot of families you see them kiss and hug all the time and that is totally not my family.

Protection

Protection is defined as the denial of information to a person in order to shield them from information. Matthew discusses how not only did his adoptive parents try and protect him from finding out about his adoption status but that his adoptive father has been trying to also protect his mother from finding out that the truth about her medical illness. Table 44 shows the distribution across the three categories.

Table 44

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Discussed</th>
<th>Non Searcher</th>
<th>In Process</th>
<th>Found</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall Total</td>
<td>1 (10)</td>
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#2 - Matthew *(Found)*. Matthew speaks to how his adopted father will do whatever necessary to protect his wife including hiding the fact that she is suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

He has actually as he has gotten older he has gotten much more of an affectionate person. Hugging when we see each other. They live down in Florida now, so we don’t see each other that much. Very much in love with my mother. Very much
devoted to her. When I mentioned to you a little a bit about the denial kind of thing. He is very protective of her and like he has never discussed with her that we all believe that she is suffering from Alzheimer’s. He kind of come up with this cockamamie story to get her to go to the doctor and get to take medication and what not. And that is the way they live their life.

Regrets

Regret is defined as the feeling of wishing that you had not done a particular thing. Specifically, Karen talks in detail about how if she had to do it all over again, in terms of deciding to search for her biological parents, that she would have opted to not find them. Table 45 shows the distribution across the three categories.

Table 45

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Discussed</th>
<th>Non Searcher</th>
<th>In Process</th>
<th>Found</th>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall Total</td>
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#3 – Karen (Found). Karen indicates that she is not a person who regrets decisions after she has made them, but she talks about how she was not fully aware of the consequences of her actions of searching.

I just feel really lucky you know and I used to say when I first when - Thanks (gave tissue) and then the sticky part of the reunion, I use to say “God what did I
do.” Had I known this was going to happen, I would have never searched for them. I really, I really don’t like to have regrets in my life, so I would never say I totally regret doing this, like I think there has got to be something good out of this. It is going to work out. But really the best part is that I appreciate my parents so much more. Now I see my sister starting to go through the whole thing and it is like. And any kid that they adopt or have would be so lucky because they have waited so long to have them.

Replacement

Replacement is defined as the feeling that a person is “returnable.” Cathy talks about how she always felt that her adoptive parents could “return her” and that she felt she needed to make sure they were proud of her so she would not be replaced by another child. Table 46 shows the distribution across the three categories.

Table 46

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Discussed</th>
<th>Search Category</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Overall Total</td>
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#8 – Cathy (In Process). Cathy mentions that her adopted parents were concerned that her brother would leave their family and replace them with his biological parents.
My mom and dad were absolutely devastated. My mom more so than my dad. She used to cry and she didn’t understand it. She blamed herself and thought she wasn’t a good mom and all this and my brother was going to replace her or something like that. She didn’t understand that it was about my brother finding himself and trying to understand. She didn’t, she took it very personally.

Cathy also indicated that she felt like she could be replaced by another child, as if she was returnable.

So I had a lot of different adjustments and I used to cry all the time. My mom said the doctor said that it was probably I started crying and then my mom said to my cousin she is like well you know but Cathy cried but what were we going to do, send her back? And I was like “Oh, my God.” So then I of course, because my only way of dealing with this stuff is through humor and I made a joke and I said “Like I am shirt that doesn’t fit or something” you know like in that statement she acted like they bought me at the store or something.

_Repression_

Repression is defined as the lack of remembering particular painful events. Cathy discloses an incident in which she does not recall what happened to her because it was so difficult for her. She talks about it wasn’t until a friend reminded her that her parents had “embarrassed” her in front other others that she was able to recall and acknowledge what had actually happened. Table 47 shows the distribution across the three categories.
Table 47

Theme of Repression

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Discussed</th>
<th>Search Category</th>
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<td>Non Searcher</td>
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<td>Overall Total</td>
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#8 – Cathy (In Process). Cathy recalls that she has been embarrassed on several occasions by her father in front of her friends and admits that she didn’t recall the occurrence until her friend reminded her of the one time she witnessed his rampage.

I remember. I’m sorry, but there is probably a lot I don’t remember but my best friend Kelly told me. This is when I was 23, I am 27 now. So when I was an adult and my parents were mad at me for something and it was Christmas Eve and my friend Kelly had come over and we were exchanging gifts. And he called me a “fucking asshole” in front of her and I don’t know why. I don’t remember it at all and she was like. She told me this like last year. She said, “I will never forget the time that your dad called you.” And I was like “what.” And she was like, “Don’t you remember” and I was like “No,” like what...And then I remembered everything about the situation.

Selflessness

Selflessness is defined as a biological mother’s ability to give up her child in order to do what is in the best interest of the child, despite the pain it causes to oneself.
Matthew discusses this in reference to his biological mother's ability to not raise him when she knew that he would be able to have a better life by allowing a family who was waiting for a child to raise him. Table 48 shows the distribution across the three categories.

#2 – Matthew (Found). Matthew speaks about the fact that he views his birthmother as very selfless because of her willingness to go through 9 months of pregnancy and give birth to him.

Table 48

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Discussed</th>
<th>Non Searcher</th>
<th>In Process</th>
<th>Found</th>
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I always really felt and I think this is different for people who know they are adopted early that...that whatever for the adoption was...it was a good reason...even if it is the most selfish reason in the world, even if she is a hooker on the street...and she is just like I don't want a kid, she had enough sense or circumstances required or whatever it was maybe she was too poor to have an abortion, I still got a better life from it.

These themes, both primary and secondary, emerged as a direct result of the participant's interview with the primary researcher. These themes are all relevant to the
decision to search for birthparents and arose in relation to the questions which were asked in order to ascertain more information regarding the search process.

Attachment Classifications

Since attachment theory was one of the theoretical underpinnings of this research, each participant's interview was reviewed in order to see which category each participant fell. Ainsworth's 4-category attachment model was utilized as the basis for this determination. For detailed descriptions of each category please see Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978). In short, the first category is secure attachment where the infant is viewed as securely attached to the caregiver. They tend to be more readily socialized, cooperative, and willing to comply with the mother's requests and commands. In the long-term these infants are enthusiastic, positive, persistent, and less easily frustrated.

The second category is anxious (insecure) attachment which is characterized by frequent distress at separation. The infant does not use the mother as a secure base when they are presented with new people or situations. Long-term consequences are deficiencies in exploratory behavior, difficulties with aggression and establishment of empathetic interaction, and lack of cooperativeness. The third category is avoidant (insecure) attachment in which the infants demonstrate ambivalence toward physical contact, they are slower to be soothed, and become sensitive to separations from their mother. Long-term consequences are they are easily frustrated, over reliant on their mothers, and less competent at problem solving. The fourth category is disorganized (insecure) attachment. These infants are shown to respond by seeking proximity to their
mothers in an ineffective way or at times they no not make any effort to reunite with their mother upon her return.

Since Object-Relations and Attachment Theory paradigms were used as theoretical rationale's for the study, it was felt that an additional analysis of the data would involve examining the attachment patterns of each of the 10 participants. This was done by having both the primary researcher and Ms. Valle independently review the transcripts in order to see which attachment classification would best describe each of the participants. This was done only after a thorough review of the attachment literature was accomplished by each of the researcher as well as an extensive review of Ainsworth's classification model (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Prior to completing this aspect of the research both Ms. Valle and this researcher met and reviewed the knowledge gained by reviewing the material. At this time then each of the researchers independently read the transcript and then gave an attachment classification. After this was completed for all 10 of the transcripts, then Ms. Valle and Ms. Farrar met and reviewed their classification system. There was 100% agreement on the classification for each of the 10 participants; specifically that both Ms. Farrar and Ms. Valle independently agreed on all of the classifications. An important note is that this researcher did not complete a structured attachment instrument and therefore this data is only based on extensive review of the literature as well as clinical experience and a comprehensive review of each transcript. These results were only determined as important and analyzed after the interview was completed and all codes had been assigned.

It was felt that this information would be more helpful not as much in terms of specific attachment classification but whether or not an adult adoptee tended to have
more of an insecure or secure attachment pattern. Below a brief description of the relevant issues which played a role in the decision to place each of them in a particular attachment classification is described.

#1 – Christian (Non Searcher)

Upon further review of Christian’s interview, it was felt that he met criteria for an anxious attachment classification. Christian verbalized his anxiety toward romantic relationships and discussed how he often changed his ethnic identity depending on the female he was dating at the time.

#2 – Matthew (Found)

Upon further review of Matthew’s interview, it was felt that he met criteria for an avoidant attachment classification. Matthew discussed how eager he was to meet his biological family after he found out that he was adopted but then discusses how he avoids discussing the truth. He gave several examples. Matthew spoke about how he will stay at his birthmother’s home when he is in Florida but that he will not tell his adoptive parents where he is staying. Another example is that he talked about how for a very long time Matthew kept his sexual identity a secret because he felt that he would not be accepted by his family.

#3 – Karen (Found)

Upon review of Karen’s interview, it was felt that she met criteria for a disorganized attachment classification. Karen’s pattern of relationships appears to be both
enmeshed with some people in her life, such as her sister, and with others appears to be distant, such as her brother. She discussed how she struggled with finding a balance in terms of her relationships with both her adoptive and biological parents.

#4 – Judy (Non Searcher)

Upon review of Judy’s interview, it was felt that she met criteria for a secure attachment classification. Judy discussed her relationship with both of her parents and how she always felt a strong connection to them. She spoke about her marriage to her husband and of the relationships she spoke about with others appeared to be secure and based on truth and honesty.

#5 – April (Non Searcher)

Upon review of April’s interview, it was felt that she met criteria for a secure attachment classification. April discussed how she has struggled with the relationship she has with her adoptive father but how she feels sad about her inability to maintain a constant relationship with him but is aware that she has tried and that building this relationship requires more than only her working to maintain it. April discusses her friendship with her friend, Matthew, and is comfortable with her decision to not search, despite his pushing her to decide to search. April presented as struggling with some personal issues connected to her adoption and her father’s sporadic involvement in her life, but focuses on the secure relationship she has with her adoptive mother and her friends.
#6 – Jill (Non Searcher)

Upon review of Jill’s interview, it was felt that she met criteria for a secure attachment classification. Jill discusses how she was able to separate from her parents and feel comfortable when she left for college and how she has been able to maintain a relationship with them in which she is able to come in and out of her family home now as a graduate student, with little stress. She discussed how she has always felt comfortable with her adoption status and her relationship with her adoptive parents and her brother.

#7 – Lucy (In Process)

Upon further review of Lucy’s interview, it was felt that she met criteria for an avoidant attachment classification. Lucy discussed how in several of her relationships she is aware of tension, for example with her brother, and how she is fine with leaving the relationship in the condition in which it is in and avoids working on it to make it stronger. Lucy seems to use the “craziness” of life as a method of avoiding her desire to know more about her biological parents. She also tends to avoid addressing the apparent discrepancy in the way in which her parents presented her adoption to her and the way her brother’s adoption was presented to him.

#8 – Cathy (In Process)

Upon review of Cathy’s interview, it was felt that she met criteria for a disorganized attachment classification. Cathy discussed her tumultuous relationship with her adoptive parents along with her brother and feels that as much as she tried to please them that she was not able to meet their expectations of her. She did not appear to meet
any of the other attachment criteria and her pattern of connecting with others tends to be more confused.

#9 – Sarah (Found)

Upon review of Sarah’s interview, it was felt that she met criteria for a disorganized attachment classification. Sarah focused very little on her adoptive family, as compared to the other participants, and tended to focus on feeling that she was different from them. She discussed how she has struggled with finding a good balance in terms of her relationship with her biological mother, but that she tries to balance it. Sarah spoke very little about her connections or attachments in people in her life.

#10 – Paula (In Process)

Upon further review of Paula’s interview, it was felt that she met criteria for an anxious attachment classification. Paula spoke about how she had to “dance” around her adoptive mother because she was never quite sure how she was going to treat her. Paula also discussed in detail about her “need” to find her biological parents, particularly her biological mother, and how she will basically not stop until she finds her.

Therefore, three participants were found to have a secure attachment pattern. All three of them were classified as non-searchers. There were two participants who were found to have an anxious attachment. One of them was a non-searcher and the second one was a participants who has been involved in the search process for some time. There were two participants who were classified as avoidant attachment. One was in the process of searching for birth parents and the second was a person who had searched and
found her birth parents. The fourth classification of disorganized, was deemed appropriate for three of the participants. Two participants had searched and found their birth parents while one was in the process of searching.

Overall, secure attachment was seen in three participants, all who had opted to not search for their birth family at the time of the interview. All remaining seven participants were felt to qualify for a category of insecure attachment. As with the other data presented earlier in the chapter, the purpose of this research is to not generalize to the general adult adoptee community but to be able to better understand this group of participants and to be able to begin to develop theory. Theory will allow for researchers to be able to begin to ask more informed research questions in order for future investigations to take place.

Attachment Classifications – Examination of the Themes

All of the primary and secondary themes have been presented in detail earlier in this chapter. After the classification of attachment categories of the participants, it was felt that an exploration of the themes across attachment classifications should be conducted. Since the sample across the four groups are small, the themes were explored comparing secure versus insecure attachment (avoidant, anxious, and disorganized).

The first four themes were seen across all four attachment categories (Biology - Medical and Cultural Ethnicity, Differences versus Similarities, Fantasy, and Identity) and therefore does not appear to be related to attachment. In terms of Abandonment and Loss, this theme did not emerge for only one participant and it was a participant in the insecure (disorganized) category. In terms of Acceptance versus Rejection this theme did
not emerge for only one participant and this was in the insecure (avoidant) category. Knowledge versus Lack of Knowledge did not emerge in only one category and that was secure. In terms of Secrets, this theme did not emerge for one participant in the secure category. For the above themes that did not emerge in only one category, it also does not appear that attachment classification is relevant to the theme.

Control was a theme that emerged in 8 of the 10 interviews. One person in the secure category as well as one in the insecure (disorganized) category did not have this theme emerge in their interview. In terms of Conflict with Siblings this theme did not emerge with two of the participants in the secure attachment category and one participant in the insecure (anxious) category. Neither Control nor Conflict with Siblings appears to be connected with the attachment classification.

Adoption as Good versus Bad was not discussed in three interviews all in the insecure classification (2 avoidant, 1 anxious). This theme appears to be more relevant for adoptees in the insecure attachment classification. Connection with Biological Family and “Adoption” was not noted in four interviews. None of the three secure participants had this theme emerge and only one participant in the insecure (disorganized) category was noted. Therefore, it seems that this theme is the most relevant for the adoptees in this study in the insecure classification category.

The theme of Existence did not emerge in three interviews – two secure and one insecure (disorganized). The theme of Separation versus Individuation did not emerge in three interviews: 1 secure and 2 insecure (1 avoidant, 1 disorganized). The theme of Specialness did not emerge in three of the interviews: 1 secure and 2 insecure (anxious, disorganized). The theme of Appearances was not discussed in four interviews: 1 secure
and three insecure (2 avoidant, 1 anxious). It appears that for the theme of Existence, Separation versus Individuation, Specialness, and Appearances are not connected to attachment classifications.

The theme of Chosen was discussed in 6 of the 10 interviews. It emerged in the three interviews of the secure attachment and in two of the seven insecure attachment classifications (1 avoidant, 1 disorganized). The theme did not emerge in either of the two anxious classification interviews. It appears that this theme is relevant for those in the secure attachment along with a few of the insecure participants.

The theme of Curiosity was noted in 6 of the 10 interviews. Two of the three insecure participants brought up this theme in their interview along with four of the seven insecure (1 avoidant, 3 disorganized). It did not emerge in either of the two anxious participant’s interviews.

In terms of Expression of Emotions all three of the secure participants discussed this theme along with three of the insecure (1 anxious, 2 disorganized). Neither of the two anxious participants discussed this theme. It appears that for secure attachment, the expression of emotion was relevant.

Expectations/Rigidity was noted in 6 of the 10 interviews. It was seen across all four categories (2 secure, 4 insecure: 1 avoidant, 1 anxious, 2 disorganized). Fear was noted across all attachment categories (1 secure, 4 insecure: 1 avoidant, 2 anxious, 1 disorganized). Attachment classifications do not appear to be connected with either Expectations/Rigidity and Fear. Loyalty emerged in all three of the secure participant’s interviews and in three of the insecure interviews (1 avoidant, 1 anxious, 1 disorganized). It appears that Loyalty is an important theme for those in the secure attachment category.
The theme of Process did not emerge in any of the three secure classification interviews. It emerged in five of the seven insecure (1 avoidant, 1 anxious, 3 disorganized). It appears that the process of searching was more relevant in the insecure interviews. The theme of Anger emerged in four of the ten interviews. It emerged in each category once (secure, avoidant, anxious, disorganized). It appears that this theme is not specific to any one category. The theme of Bonding and Attachment also emerged once in each category and therefore this theme does not appear to be specifically related to the attachment categories.

Birthdays/Celebration emerged as a theme in 3 of the 4 attachment classifications (2 secure, 2 insecure – 1 avoidant, 1 disorganized). It did not emerge in the anxious category. The theme of Boundaries emerged in four of the ten interviews – 1 secure and three insecure (1 anxious, 2 disorganized). It did not emerge in either of the two avoidant classification interviews. The theme of Nature vs. Nurture emerged in four of the ten interviews – 1 secure, 3 insecure (1 anxious, 2 disorganized). It did not emerge in either of the two avoidant classification interviews. Birthdays/Celebration, Boundaries, and Nature versus Nurture do not appear to be related to attachment classifications.

The theme of Infertility emerged in 3 interviews all were in the insecure classification (1 avoidant, 2 disorganized). This theme did not appear in any of the three secure attachment interviews. The theme of normalcy emerged in three interviews (2 secure, 1 insecure: disorganized). It did not emerge in either the avoidant or anxious categories. The theme of Idealized appeared in two of the ten interviews. One was in the secure attachment classification and one was insecure (disorganized). It was also not noted in either the avoidant or anxious classification.
The theme of Religion emerged in two of the interviews. Both were in the insecure: disorganized category. The theme of Story emerged in two interviews (1 secure, 1 insecure: avoidant). The theme of Tension emerged in two interviews, both were in the insecure classification (1 anxious, 1 disorganized). The theme of Unconditional Love emerged in two of the ten interviews, both were in the insecure classification category (1 anxious, 1 disorganized). The theme of Courage emerged in one interview (insecure: disorganized). The theme of Denial emerged in one interview (insecure: avoidant). The theme of Fate emerged in one interview (insecure: avoidant). The theme of Fate emerged in one interview (insecure: avoidant). The theme of Indebtedness emerged in one interview (insecure: avoidant). The theme of Intimacy emerged in one interview (insecure: anxious). The theme of Protection emerged in one interview (insecure: avoidant). The theme of Regrets emerged in one interview (insecure: disorganized). The theme of Replacement emerged in one interview (insecure: disorganized). The theme of Repression emerged in one interview (insecure: disorganized). The theme of Selflessness emerged in one interview (insecure: avoidant).

The secondary themes have between one to three participants in which the theme emerged; therefore it is too small a category to see trends. It is apparent that though specific trends cannot be discussed in terms of secondary themes, it is important to note that the secondary theme were almost all involving participants in the insecure category.
CHAPTER V
Discussion and Conclusions

This study was an in-depth ethnographic interview of 10 adult adoptees who were adopted within the first year of life. Four of the participants classified themselves at the time of the interview as not planning to search for the biological family. The ages were 24, 27 (Male), 34, and 54. Existing research indicates that 25 to 35 year olds are the most common age group to search (Muller & Perry, 2001). There were three participants who considered themselves to be in the process of searching for their birth family. Their ages were 27, 53, and 59 and were all female. There were three participants who had searched and found their biological families. There ages were 31, 32, and 38 (Male).

This study examined specifically the decision an adult adoptee has to externally decided whether or not to search for their birthparents. As noted earlier, as a natural consequence of the interview process, themes emerged that were relevant to searching as an overall concept including both the decision to actually physically search for birthparents as well as the internal search. As the results have been presented it is not always possible to determine at what point an adult adoptee decides to actualize their search. The word non searcher has been referred to throughout the dissertation in reference to a person who has decided to not externally search for their birthparents at this time.
The concept of search as a process has been explored in Chapter I as a lifelong task of adoptees. Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig (1992) indicate that Erikson's model of psychosocial development is applicable and relevant to adoptees. Questions about birthparents arise early in an adoptee's mind and some will actually ask their questions while others may tend to keep them to themselves. Therefore, the internal process of searching begins at a relatively young age.

Conclusions – Primary Themes

This qualitative study examined the theme which arose from a personal interview with the primary researcher. Each of the 10 interviews needed to be examined individually as they are the narrative of the participant. Themes developed within individual interviews as well as across individual interviews.

Twenty-seven primary themes were noted in the interviews in which a minimum of four participants discussed the theme in their interview. Each of the primary themes and their implication to the search process will be reviewed below.

Biology - Medical and Cultural/Ethnicity

This theme was one of the most prevalent themes and all 10 adoptees addressed this area in this interview. Overall, it appears that this theme was the most relevant to the decision to search. All of them discussed their desire to know about their genetic and biological history. Several of the non searchers indicated that if they were to ever search for information that they would primarily be searching for non-identifying information which would give them information such as the age of their biological parents at the time
of their birth, their ethnicity, religion, and the medical history of the parents and the maternal and paternal extended family members (primarily grandparents). Therefore, in terms of weighing the decision to externally search, it appears that this theme is the most prominent theme that alone can impact an adoptee’s decision to search for birthparents.

Overall, it seems that there is a curiousness that is present across all adoptees interviewed regarding their desire to know more biological family and that those non-searchers discuss how they are interested in finding out more but that they, at this point in their life, don’t need to know more.

*Differences versus Similarities*

This theme was addressed in all 10 of the interviews and was noted to be an extremely embedded theme across the context of the interviews. Similar to the previous theme, it would get ranked second in terms of whether or not an adoptee would or would not search for their biological parents. Overall, it seems that those adoptees who view themselves as similar to their adopted family do not feel as much of a need to search for their biological parents, whereas those who feel different from their adoptive family may be more likely to try and search and find their biological family in order to find people who are “more similar.”

*Fantasy*

This theme was prevalent in all 10 of the interviews. All of the adoptees were able to discuss their fantasies that they have had over the course of their life in relation to the biological family despite their searching status. Some participants tended to have
more detailed fantasies but this did not seem relevant to their search status. Therefore, this theme is important because just because a person decides to not externally search for their parent’s at this time in their life, they still have thoughts and feelings associated with their view of their biological family. They still think about who their biological family is and what kind of life they lead. Typically, it appears that most adoptees tended to place their fantasies in the best possible light.

For those adoptees who had met their biological family, they appeared to have more difficulty focusing on the fantasy question and tended to rely more on the reality of who they are as people. This may be that since they are in contact with them and the actual fantasy has ended that it is more difficult to recall their thoughts and feelings prior to when they met them.

Identity

This theme arose in all 10 interviews. It was ubiquitous throughout all of the interviews. It appears that adoption for all of the participants is a major part of their identity. It is not alone who they are, but it appears that it cannot be separated from other aspects of their life. Each of the 10 participants is aware that their life could be completely different if they had been raised by their biological families and that their adoptive families played an integral role in their identity development. As with most adolescents and adults, a person’s identity is the core component of their values, morals, life expectations, and view of self. It appears that how an adult adoptee conceptualizes their identity into their self can actually impact whether or not an adoptee decides to search for their birthparents. Overall, it seems that identity is a theme across all
interviews. It appears that those adoptees who felt that their adoptive parents gave them a more secure sense of self discussed feeling less impact of being adopted on their identity.

Abandonment and Loss

This theme was prevalent in 9 of the 10 interviews. Only one participant who searched and found her biological family did not discuss this theme. It is apparent that this is a central issue in relation to the tone of the adoptee’s attitude toward their birth family. It seems that this theme is reliant upon the adoptee’s perspective of how their adoptive family viewed and presented to them their biological family. The loss of that primary relationship with their biological mother specifically was acknowledged and though other types of losses were discussed, this was the most relevant in terms of their view an object loss.

Abandonment and Loss appears to be a theme that is diverse in how it is perceived by the adoptee. It is discussed in relationship to both the biological and/or adopted families, and it is prevalent across searching categories.

Acceptance versus Rejection

This theme was discussed in nine of the ten interviews. This theme was not noted in a participant who searched and found his biological family. Acceptance versus Rejection appears to be a theme in which, regardless of search status, and is relevant for the majority of the participants. A common thread was feeling accepted by the adopted parents and feeling fearful of rejection from the biological family. It appears that those adoptees who felt that they might be rejected by their adoptive parents if they searched
for their biological parents tended to not search or they might struggle more with the
decision to search, whereas an adoptee who feels accepted by their adoptive parent and
does not feel that there decision to search will be greeted with rejection may be more
likely to externalize their search.

Knowledge versus Lack of Knowledge

This theme was noted in 9 of the 10 interviews. It was only not discussed in the
interview of one non searcher. Overall, it appears that the desire for knowledge is very
powerful and that some of the adoptees who did not have much knowledge sought out
more and this could be done through the actual search for their biological parents. The
amount of information available that adoptee’s had was usually a varying level of
information given from the adoption agency to their adoptive parents at the time of their
adoption regarding their adoption. Since all the participants in this study were involved
in the traditional model of “closed adoptions” where there was no contact with the
biological family as they were growing up, this information for all of them was typically
limited. Several of the participants did have more information than others and it seemed
those adoptees who did not have as much information about their biological parents may
be more likely to externalize their search with the goal of finding out at least some more
non-identifying information such as their ethnicity.

Secrets

The theme of secrets was discussed by 9 of the 10 participants, only one non
searcher did not discuss this theme. Overall, it appears that secrecy tends to impact an
adoptive's view of themselves as people of worth. It seems that this theme may be connected to attachment in that those who felt that there were less secrets surrounding their life were able to develop better attachments and bonding to their adoptive parents. This theme appears to be personal in the manner in which it is conceptualized, specifically that those adoptees who felt that their adoption status was a secret may internalize that this should not be brought out into the open or that the adoptee has the right to "break the secret" because of a desire to not keep their biological history a secret.

Control

This theme emerged in eight of the ten interviews. It was not addressed by one non searcher and one adoptee in the process of searching. Overall, it seems that consistently the adoptees report a desire to have some control over their adoption status. They all reported a personal right that they should be able to have more information about their history, particularly non-identifying information that they have been denied access to. Several of them acknowledge how would be able to gain control by searching for their history but this does not appear to be directly connected to whether or not an adoptee decides to search for their birth family. It appears that several of the adoptees are able to live without seeking control, whereas Judy and Jill (both non searchers) and Sarah (found) speak about how they have worked to maintain control.

Adoption as Good versus Bad

This theme was addressed in 7 of the 10 interviews. All four non searchers, one adoptee in the process of the search, and two participants who searched and found their
biological family discussed this theme. Those who did not address this theme were two adoptees in the process of the search and one adoptee who searched and found their biological parents. Overall, three of the four non.searchers reported “good” elements of being adopted, while April tends to have a more negative view of adoption. It appears that those adoptees who tend to not search for their birthparents may have a more positive outlook on adoption and don’t necessarily view their adoption status as a loss but as a positive. Karen, a participant in reunion with her biological family discusses the more positive elements of adoption and Sarah who is also in reunion discusses how it has been positive for her being adopted, but a negative experience for her mother. Cathy, who is the in process of searching discusses how being adopted had been a negative experience for most of her life, but as she becomes more comfortable with her adoption status, her views have begun to change.

Conflict with Siblings

This theme was prevalent with seven of the ten participants. This implies that all but one adoptee who had a sibling had this theme emerge in their interview. Overall, the conflict in sibling appears to be prevalent across categories and seems to be related to the feeling of being different from their siblings. It seems that both internal and external searches are more prominent in adoptees where they view their relationship with their sibling as “bad” or as “different.” None of the participants verbalized a desire to know whether or not they would get along better with biological siblings, but it appeared to be a nonverbal theme. Several of the participants commented on how they were very different from their biological sibling and how they were more similar to their adoptive
parents than their sibling and how this had a positive impact on their relationship with the adoptive family. An exception to this is Cathy who talks about how she always felt that her brother could do not harm in the family whereas she did not feel similarly about herself.

*Connections to Biological Family and “Adoption”*

This theme was prevalent in 7 of the 10 interviews. It was noted by two of the non searchers, two of the adoptees in the process of the search, and all three of the adoptees who searched and found their biological family. Overall, it seems that the adoptees who searched and found their biological family are able to verbalize a connection that they share with their biological family but their conceptualization of what this means to them is different. In terms of two of the adoptees in the process of searching, one felt that biological connections are very powerful, while the other indicated that too much emphasis was placed on biology. A similar theme was noted with the non searchers where one indicated that he felt that he was connected to his biological family despite not knowing them, while another non searcher stated that she felt no connection to them.

*Existence*

This theme emerged in 7 of the 10 interviews. It was addressed by the three adoptees who are in the process of searching for their biological family, two adoptees who have decided not to search, and two adoptees who have searched and found their biological family. Six of the seven participants who discussed the theme of existence
placed the focus on abortion and they each recognized that it could have been an option their birthmother chose. Lucy discusses the theme of existence in reference to denial of access to her birth certificate, even the amended one. This theme appears to be connected to the internal search and conceptualization of biological parents but not as related to the external search as many of the themes noted above.

*Separation versus Individuation*

This theme was noted in 7 of the 10 interviews. Three of the non searchers, all three of the adoptees in the process of searching, and one of the adoptees who searched and found her birth family discussed this topic. It seems that separation and individuation also impacts an adoptee's view of themselves as a separate identity from their adoptive family and this may impact their attachment to their adoptive families. Those families with less secrets and more openness surrounding their adoption tend to have more confidence in their relationship not only with their primary caretakers but also with others in their lives. It seems that those adoptees who were able to separate from their adoptive families at an earlier age may be more likely to search for their biological parents whereas those adoptees who felt that there were not allowed to individuate or needed more time to complete the process were less likely to search for their biological parents.

*Special/Unique*

This theme was addressed by 7 of the 10 participants. Three of the non searchers, one of the adoptees in the process of their search, and all three of the adoptees who
searched and found their biological parents brought up this theme. This theme seems to be one of most well-connected to the adoptive parents. The adopted parents appear to have the ability to help their child feel special and wanted, in specific relationship to their adoption. This theme appears to be conceptualized differently by the searchers and non searchers. It appears that the non searchers view themselves as having a very specific and special bond with their adoptive parents that they don’t want to hurt and they may not feel that they can achieve that bond with the biological parents and therefore they don’t search; on the other hand, the searchers tend to view this aspect about their adoptive parents as one of the reasons why they were able to search and find their biological parents.

Appearances

Six of the 10 participants brought up this theme in there interviews. Three of them were non searchers, one was in the process of searching, and two were adoptees who searched and found their biological parents. Two of the three non searchers discuss their similarities in appearances to their adoptive family. One adoptee who searched and found discussed how she was different than her adoptive family in terms of appearance and then the other one indicated how she looked similar to her adoptive family. The one adoptee in the process of searching notes that she looks different than her adopted family. Overall, searching status appears of these adoptees tend to be somewhat connected with appearances in that perceiving oneself as different than their adopted family can be connected to the decision to search for their biological family. It seems that those adoptees who believe that there appearance is different from their adoptive family may be
more likely to search for the adoptees who believe they look similar to their adoptive parents.

*Chosen/Wanted*

This theme emerged in 6 of the 10 interviews. It was addressed by three of the non searchers, one of the adoptees in the process of searching, and two of the adoptees who searched and found their biological family. Overall, 6 of the 10 adoptees talk about how their parents discussed how they chose them and the specialness surrounded by their adoption status. This theme tends to cut across searching categories. This theme does not appear to be directly related to the external search process and more to the relationship an adoptee has with their adoptive family and to the process of internal searching.

*Curious*

This theme was prevalent for 6 of the 10 interviews. Two of the non searchers, two of the participants in the process of the search, and two adoptees who searched and found their biological family discussed this topic. Jill is the only one of the six adoptees who note that they are not curious regarding her biological family. The others indicate that curiosity is present and for those who are in the process of searching or have found their biological family that their search process started with curiosity. Curiosity seems to be directly connected to the internal search process which may for some adoptees lead to the decision to search for birthparents whereas for others may stick with curiosity.
Expression of Emotion in Family

This theme arose in 6 of the 10 interviews. The four non searchers discussed this theme along with one of the adoptees in the search process, as well as one adoptee who searched for and found her family. Overall, it appears that a withholding of emotion may lead for these participants to the decision to not search for biological parents because they may feel that these feelings of curiosity and desire to know are not to be expressed and need to be internalized.

Regimented/Expectations

This was discussed by six of the ten participants: three of the four non searchers, one adoptee in the process of searching, and two adoptees who searched and found their birth families. Overall, it seems that across searching status, that the adoptive parents of these six participants had certain expectations of how they should present themselves to society. This theme appears to be more relevant to the adoptive parents model of parenting as opposed to the external decision to search. It appears that from this data that regimentation of schedules and high expectations can impact the adoptee’s identity which may then indirectly relate their decision to search for birthparents.

Loyalty

This theme was examined in 6 of the 10 interviews. The four non searchers, one of the adoptees in the process of the search, and one adoptee who searched and found his birth family discussed this theme. Overall, it seems that loyalty can be interpreted by the adoptee as a strong indicator as to why they would not search and if they did search, how
they are fearful of how their adoptive parents would handle their decision to search for their biological birthparents. This may be based on a gratefulness for being given the life that they had instead of an alternative of potentially being raised by unprepared parents.

Fear

This arose as a theme in 5 of the 10 interviews: two of them were non-searchers, two were in the process of searching, and one adoptee had searched and found her biological family. Overall, fear appears to have a variety of possible reasons for its existence with the adoptees, but at the core seems to be a fear of rejection by a parent, whether it be a biological or adoptive parent. It seems that a fear of being rejected by the biological parent is an important reason why some adoptees opt to not search for their biological parents, though a fear of being rejected by those adoptees who are in the process of searching is a known possibility, as for those who searched and found their biological parents.

Process

This theme was discussed by the three adoptees who are searching for their biological roots and two of the three adoptees who searched and found their biological parents. Overall, the theme of process is extremely prevalent for the adoptees who are in the process of searching as well as those who completed the search and not as powerful for adoptees who are non-searchers. This process, though based on the literature should exist in all of the adoptees interviewed, it was formally addressed by these participants. Those adoptees who are in the process of searching for their birthparents and those who
have searched and found their biological family are aware that searching is a process. The adoptees can recall times early in their lives when they thought about searching and the desire for more knowledge.

Anger

This theme emerged in 4 of the 10 interviews. It was prevalent in interviews of two of the non searchers as well as two of the searchers. Overall, two of the non searchers and two of the adoptees in reunion with their biological family discuss their anger toward "adoption" but each vent their anger in a different manner. For the non searchers this anger appears to be focused on the lack of involvement by the adoptive father for one participant and for the other it was the expression of emotion (hugging and kissing) in relation to meeting a biological parent on a television show. For the searchers the anger appeared to be focused on the decision to search for birthparents ("What kind of Pandora's box did I open?") and anger for not being told that he was adopted. Therefore, it seems that anger is an emotion expressed that may not directly impact an adoptee's decision to search for their birthparent but that it may be an element which is factored into the final decision.

Attachment/Bonding

This theme was specifically brought up in 4 of the 10 interviews, two by adoptees in the process of searching and one adoptee identified as a non searcher and another adoptee who searched and found her biological family. Each of the four of these adoptees bring up different elements of their relationship to their family, whether it was their
adoptive or biological family in terms of the struggle in how to conceptualize and understand the relationship. This theme appears to be less relevant than would be expected based on the developmental model of individuals needing to attach and bond early in their life with their primary caretakers. It would make sense that much of the experiencing of bonding and attachment occurs at a nonverbal level and this need not be discussed as a specific topic. Therefore, it is believed that this theme is more prevalent than the numbers indicate. It seems to be addressed more in terms of how an adoptee struggles with and conceptualizes their relationships with caretakers.

Birthday/Celebration

This theme was addressed by 4 of the 10 participants. Two of them were nonsearchers, one was in the process of a search, and one was an adoptee who had searched and found her biological family. Overall, two of the adoptees report that the day they were adopted was a day that was celebrated, while two other adoptees note the wonderment surrounding whether or not their biological parents thought about them on their birthday: Sarah was able to get the answer to that question while April is still unsure. This theme appears to be related to an internal search process more than an external process. Specifically, it is a question that can be asked by an adoptee who searches and find their biological parent but it is not necessarily a question that requires an answer. Therefore, the adoptee who decides to not search for their birth family may still think about their biological family on their birthday and wonder if they are thinking about them on that special day.
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as noted in 4 of the 10 interviews: one non searcher, two adoptees in ing for their birthparents, and one adoptee who searched and found overall, it seems that the question of nature vs. nurture comes up in 
; similar or different from the adoptive family. This theme appears search categories and seems to be directly related to how biology ract and how it affects an adoptee’s identity and “personhood.” This connected to an adoptee’s quest for more information about their ether it be an external or internal search process.

ring

10 adoptees were asked to share there reasons for volunteering, noted in all interviews. Overall, it seems that the adoptees thatudy were eager to get more information about the field of adoption
out into the community as well as to assist their own life process by sharing their stories with others.

Conclusions - Secondary Themes

Nineteen secondary themes were noted and they ranged from only one to three participants discussing. They are as follows: Confusing, Courage, Denial, Fate, Idealized, Infertility, Indebtedness, Intimacy, Normal, Protection, Regrets, Relationships with Adoptive Family, Religion/Faith, Replacement, Repression, Selflessness, Story, Tension, Unconditional Love.

Infertility

This theme arose in 3 of the 10 interviews. One in an interview with an adoptee who searched and found her birth family and in two interviews with adoptees who are in the process of searching. This theme appears to be primarily relevant with the adoptive mother and father and how they deal with their inability to conceive a child and how this is interpreted by the adoptee. Overall, the theme of infertility is a part of the process of search. For some adoptees there is an awareness that issues of infertility may be extremely prevalent with the adoptive parents and not as relevant for the biological parents.

Normal

This theme emerged in 3 of the 10 interviews. One was an adoptee who searched and found her birth family and two adoptees who are non searchers. Overall, it seems that
“healthier” adoptive families may have worked through their reasons to adopt children and that they may demonstrate a more healthier living environment due to their not viewing adoption as a bad or shameful thing and that the family just be a regular family. This theme, as similar to many others, can be viewed on a continuum for adoptees in terms of the decision to search for birthparents. Some who view their life as normal may not want to search in order to keep their life typical, while others may view their adoption status as part of everyday life and that searching would be a natural consequence.

_Idealized_

This theme emerged in 2 of the 10 interviews. The first by an adoptee who searched and found her birth family and one non searcher. Overall, this theme seems to be manifested by the positive relationship that these two adoptees have with their adoptive families.

_Religion/Faith_

This theme emerged in 2 of the 10 interviews. Both of them adoptees had searched and found their birth family. This appeared to be more connected to a personal dogma as opposed to an adoption theme but it may be that if more adoptees spoke of their religious and spiritual beliefs that more information would have emerged.

_Confusing_

This theme was noted in one interview by an adoptee who searched and found her birth family. Sarah spoke about her confusion in terms of having two sets of parents and
determining what are the appropriate boundaries and how does one take care of her own needs as well be engaged in healthy relationships. This theme for her was relevant as an outcome theme of searching for origins.

**Story**

This theme was in two of the interviews. It was noted in an interview with a non searcher and with an adoptee in the process of searching for birthparents. It seems important to further understand what type of adoptee is comforted by this story and what connection does the adoptive family have in this being a safe story.

**Tension**

This theme was noted by two of the participants: one adoptee who was a non searcher and one adoptee who had searched and found her biological parents. This theme is important to further understand in how the adoptee conceptualizes their roles within their family as well as how they deal with being “let down” by their expectations.

**Unconditional Love**

This theme emerged in two of the interviews with two adoptees who were in the process of searching for birthparents. A brief review of the participants’ responses to this theme are noted below. Cathy discusses this theme in relation to her adoptive parents’ relationship with her adopted brother and despite any negative actions he took in the family, they never gave up on him or stopped loving him. Paula also talks about how her father always showed support in her decisions and demonstrated unconditional love.
Though both of the examples are different interpretations of unconditional love, it appears that feeling supported by an adoptee's adoptive family is an important indicator for self. Cathy has made the decision to search, privately, despite not being aware of whether or not she will get the same type of unconditional love as her brother. Paula, despite feeling that her adoptive father would accept and love her unconditionally, she made the choice to wait until after his death to begin her search for biological birthparents.

_Courage_

This theme emerged in one adoptee who searched and found her birth family. Sarah discusses how she feels that adoption requires courageous people: both biological parents to know what is in the best interest of their child and to make the right decision and the adopted parents to take a risk and adopt a child.

_Denial_

This theme arose in the interview of one adoptee who searched and found his birth family. Matthew spoke about how when he found out that his brother was adopted that he had no thought that he might also be adopted and was shocked when his father reported that he too had been adopted. Overall, this theme would be relevant to consider in terms of other adoptees who found out about their adoption status during the adulthood.
Fate

This theme was noted in one adoptee who searched and found his birth family. Matthew spoke about how fate was what allowed the events to take place in which he met his biological father before he died. That if the sequence of events had not taken place beginning with his brother’s biological mother seeking him out then he would not have know potentially about his adoption until after his own biological father died. Overall, it would seem that the concept of fate could be relevant to other adoptees who realize that their timing of their search was appropriate or inappropriate.

Indebtedness

This theme emerged in one adoptee who was in the process of searching for birth parents. Lucy discusses how she feels indebted to society for being given the life that she had and that it is one of the reasons why she felt that she owed society by adopting her children. She comments on having discussed with her husband and interest in adopting a child prior to realizing their infertility difficulties.

Intimacy

This theme arose in one adoptee who is non searcher. Christian discusses how the lack of expression of emotion has impacted his ability to be intimate with people. This theme despite being only with the one adoptee needs to explored in terms of whether or not families that tend to withheld their emotions can impact their ability to be intimate due to lack of role modeling.
Protection

The theme arose in one interview of an adoptee who searched and found his biological parents. Protection was brought up by Matthew who indicated that his adoptive father felt that he was protecting his wife by not talking to her about her development of Alzheimer’s disease. Overall, it seems that protection may be a version of secrets in order to protect someone for their “best interests” and not to have been feel different and aware. Matthew was “protected” as well from his adoption status across his childhood and early adulthood by not being told that he was adopted.

Regrets

This theme was in only 1 of the 10 interviews. The person was an adoptee who searched and found her birth family. Karen discusses how finding her birth family has been an extremely difficult process for her and that she is not a person who wants to feel regrets but that she does indicate that if she had to do this over again she might not have searched. This theme seems to be relevant potentially to adoptees who search and find their biological family, therefore it seems that this needs to be explored further in more adoptees who search and find their biological parents.

Replacement

This theme arose in one interview of an adoptee who was in the process of searching for birthparents. Cathy notes that she was concerned at times across her childhood that she may be “returned” if she wasn’t good enough. This theme seems to possibly be connected with a fear of rejection and may be more prevalent across
interviews if the topic was brought up. Further areas of inquiry are noted to be important with regard to this topic.

*Repression*

This theme was in one interview of an adoptee who was in the process of searching for her birth family. Cathy talks about an incident in which she was reminded by a friend of hers that her father had embarrassed her in public and how she had not recalled that event. This theme may be a more common theme across adoptees or it could be seen as more of an individual defense mechanism.

*Selflessness*

This theme emerged in one of the interviews of an adoptee who searched and found his biological parents. Matthew refers to his biological mother as a selfless person for being able to make a decision in his best interest which was difficult for her. This theme should be further explored as a potential form of fantasy or perception of the biological parents based on what is known about them. It may be that more adoptees view their biological parents this way, potentially.

*Summary of Themes*

Three theoretical models were presented in the first chapter as the reason why this research was conducted, in order to examine in further detail the accuracy of these models by allowing the participants to share their narratives. Again, this research was designed to gather information from adoptees in order to begin the process of
understanding the complexities involved in the decision to search for origins. The first model, the psychopathological model, explains that adoptees may search for biological roots due to some personal deficiency to because of the inadequacies of the adoptive family. The second model discusses the search process as a normal part of adoptee development. The third model examines the desire of the adoptee to search for birthparents within a socio-cultural world and may feel that they are expected to search.

This researcher is advocating that the decision to search for biological parents is a culmination of these three models. Search, internally and externally, is a normal part of development and as discussed in the literature on developmental issues, people move through the process in a similar fashion but individual factors can impact this. Adoptees may search because they feel that there is something wrong with them or that they don’t quite fit in with their adoptive family and they are seeking a connection with their biological parents. Others will search because they have a strong belief in the human continuum and knowing where they came from in the world and where they fit in.

As these 10 participants shared their narratives, it became clear that adoption is a complex set of factors and that none of the models that emerged to date fully grasp this complexity. Therefore, it is felt that at this time it is best to understand the adoptee from a perspective that incorporates the three models into one and consider this model an individualist adoption model.

The most noteworthy themes which emerged in this research was the theme of biology in terms of both seeking information on culture and ethnic identity as well as genetic medical history. Following were themes of identity, fantasy, and differences versus similarities. These themes were noted by all adoptees regardless of their search
status. Identity was address in terms of who they saw themselves as in terms of adults in this society with an adoptee's worldview and how in their opinion adoption has impacted their sense of self. Further, all of the adoptees brought up feelings of being similar and/or different from their adoptive and biological families and how this impacts their outlook on adoption. The level of fantasy varied across individuals yet all were able to at least briefly discuss their known truths about their biological family as well as their fantasies about who they are.

Themes that were acknowledged by 9 of the 10 participants included loss and abandonment issues, questions of acceptance versus rejection, knowledge versus lack of knowledge, and secrets. Eight of the 10 adoptees brought up the theme of control. Overall it appears that adoptees who feel that adoption was not a secret in their household felt more accepted and a part of their adoptive family. The theme of acceptance versus rejection was noted in reference to both the biological and adoptive parents. Several adoptees spoke about the fear of being “a bad child” or “rejected” if they didn’t follow their parents in terms of expectations even though they might have had a sibling who did not follow the rules.

Themes that were present in 7 of the 10 interviews were the themes of adoption as good vs. bad, conflict they have with their siblings, connections they have with their biological family and adoption, issues of separation versus individuation, and feeling special and unique. These themes were prevalent yet seemed to be different depending on the adoptee’s individual personality. A common theme of feeling that adoption did impact their ability to separate from their adoptive family was noted. Further, it seems that several of the adoptees felt that they went through their “identity crisis” later than
most people (non adoptees) and felt this was related to their adoption status and the "not knowing" their full self.

Other common themes (brought up in 6 of the 10 interviews) were of appearances (physical), feeling chosen/wanted, curiosity, expression of emotion, loyalty to their families, and the regiments and expectations which were placed upon them by their adoptive families. Themes brought up by five of the adoptees were of fear and about the process of adoption. It seems that those in the process of searching and those who searched and found their biological family spoke in detail about the time and energy that it has taken them to get to the point at which they are at now.

Themes noted in 4 of the 10 interviews were of anger, attachment and bonding, birthdays and celebrations, boundaries, and the concept of nature versus nurture.

Though not as common, it is important to realize that the secondary themes were important within an interview and though may be mainly themes relevant to that particular adoptee, they require further inquiry to determine whether or not it is a common theme in particular groups of adoptees. These themes were of infertility, normalcy, idealization, religion/faith, story, tension, unconditional love, confusion, courage, fate, indebtedness, intimacy, protection, regrets, replacement, repression, and selflessness.

As noted previously, Schechter and Bertocci (1990) present eight psychological issues which they believe are core issues underlying the need an adoptee has to search for biological history. They are as follows: (a) loss and mourning, (b) envy and jealousy, (c) sexual identity, (d) identity, (e) internal locus of control, (f) body image, (g) attachment, and (h) human connectedness. It appears that there is significant agreement in terms of
the themes of loss and mourning, identity, and control. Body image was brought up in terms of appearances. Connectedness and attachment were also common themes. The theme of intimacy was brought up by one adoptee which may be related to the theme of sexual identity. The definition of envy and jealousy seems to be connected to the theme of similarities and differences which emerged in all of the interviews.

Therefore, this research examining the decision of whether or not adoptees search for their birth families appears to be consistent with the clinical themes which have emerged in previous areas of inquiry. Therefore, it seems that this research is congruent with the minimal yet existing database of literature which does exist and therefore these themes, though not generalizable to the general population of adult adoptees may be considered a valid manner in which to begin to develop grounded theory.

New Theory of External Search Behavior – Identity Model

The purpose of this research was to develop theory. As noted throughout this paper, three previous models have been utilized by clinicians to explain search behavior: normal development, social/community elements, as well as a psychopathology. After all the themes (both primary and secondary) have been examined throughout this study, an adoption identity model has emerged and appears to be the most relevant to explain why some adoptees externally search for birthparents whereas some do not. Those adoptees who feel that they “belong” with the adoptive families may feel less likely to search for their biological family than those who feel that they do not belong or are different from them. It appears that those adoptees who feel secure in their attachment to their adoptive family as well as others in their life appear to feel more comfortable deciding to not
search for their birthparents. Adoptees who have decided at this point in their development to not search for their biological parent acknowledge that they are interested in knowing more of their biological information such as medical and ethnicity information. Adoptees who do not report a desire to externally search for their biological parents seem to report more acceptance by their adoptive families.

Adoptees who have decided to begin the process of searching for their biological family or who searched and found them seem to report that search has played a greater "process" in their life and may seek or have a greater connection with their biological roots.

Limitations of the Study

Although this was an in-depth ethnographic interview that resulted in grounded theory, there are limitations to the study. Of the 10 participants, there were also only two men who volunteered for the study (one searcher and one non-searcher), though a review of their themes did not appear to have any overall difference as compared to the females.

Another limitation to the study is that the participants self-recruited. They were sent an initial contact but it was up to them to contact the researcher. All interviews took place in the northeast part of the United States and all participants were Caucasian. Another limitation is that this group was highly educated with all participants having a minimum of a college education with several in graduate programs and a couple with completed professional degrees.

The three adoptees who searched and found their biological parents all have remained in contact with them despite having their reported difficulty balancing their
relationships and setting boundaries. There were no participants who search and found and no longer have contact with their biological families.

This study was an interview which took place at one time. If the theme of process as noted by the adoptees in the process of searching and those who have searched and found their biological family is accurate, it is not possible then to say that the non searchers will not search at a later point in time. Therefore, a study that follows a non searcher over their adulthood would be the most productive form of research in determining those who remain as non searchers and those who may begin or complete the process of searching for their origins.

Implications for Psychotherapy

The purpose of this study was to further the understanding of the psychological processes involved in the decision to search for birthparents. It is the researcher's hope that this inquiry will provide therapists with some tools. It is apparent that the decision of whether or not to search for birthparents is a lifelong process and that the process of searching for birthparents consists of both internal and external modes of searching. First and foremost, it is important to distinguish the difference between an internal and external searcher. It appears that for those adoptees who are aware that they are adopted that the search process should be viewed as a continuum. An adoptee who is defined as a non searcher may decide tomorrow to actualize a search for their birthparent and that he/she may decide to search one day and then the next month stop the search process and then a few months later again decide to search. Deciding to search for their birthparents is no small feat and many cannot verbalize how they got to their decision to search for
birthparents, but the themes presented here appear to play some role in this process. Those who decide they are going to search report having concerns and fears. Those who do search and find their biological families have to find a balance between their adoptive and biological parents. Also, those adoptees that decide not to search have questions and may or may not pursue seeking answers to their questions.

When adoptees present to therapy they may or may not initially present with concerns regarding adoption issues. It is essential for therapists to find out if they have any adoptees in their practice and if so where are they along the search continuum. Many of these themes are commonly addressed in psychotherapy and are often seen in non adoptees and it is important to better conceptualize and understand how adoption may be a factor in some of these themes. Issues of abandonment and loss as well as fears of rejections and need to be best understood of how they potentially are connected with adoption.

Therapists need to be aware of the impact of the themes presented in this research and understand the complexities of the decision to search for birthparents, albeit an internal or external search. As an adoptee develops across the lifespan there is a constant reassessment of who the person is and where they belong and fit in the world. For adoptees there is another layer to their identity which is their adoption status. How is adoption defined in their life? Do they view adoption as a good or bad thing? How have they conceptualized not being raised by their biological parents and being raised by individuals who are seeking a family through alternative means? Do they feel that they are accepted by their adoptive parents? Do they feel that they have been rejected by their biological parents because they “weren’t good enough” or because there parents were too
focused on their own life? Do they feel like they fit into their adoptive family, in terms of both personality and appearances? It may be that they actually look like their adoptive parents and therefore they are not constantly reminded of their adoption? Do they feel anger toward their biological or adoptive parents for not being “good enough?”

What about their relationship with siblings? Are there children in the home who are the biological children of their adoptive parents? Do they feel accepted for who they are as individuals or do they feel that they have to be someone they are not so that they are not rejected by them and “given back.” Do their biological parents think about them on their birthday? Are their adoptive parents celebrate the day they came to live with them as a family or are they ashamed that they did not give birth to their children and need to avoid any conversation regarding adoption. How much control does an adoptee have over their life. They are not able to change the fact that they were adopted? They are not able to change the fact that they grew up in a family of a different culture, ethnicity, and/or religion. An adoptee may think about the fact that their biological mother had to make a choice about whether or not to terminate their pregnancy, relinquish them for adoption, or opt to raise them. Expression of emotion in a family tends to be a family culture – how is their family culture different in their adoptive family than with their biological family?

What are the adoptee’s fantasies about who their biological family is: are they rich, poor, nice, mean...? How much information does the adoptee have about their biological parents and is the information accurate? What are the personalities like and “who are” their biological parents as people? Does the adoptee feel that by actualizing a search for their birthparents that they are going to hurt their adoptive family who has
loved them and raised them? How does a person react when they meet someone for the first time knowing that all you really know about them is that you are biologically connected to them and without them you would not exist? What are the expectations of the adoptive family and are they similar to the biological parents? Was adoption talked about in the family or was it considered a “family secret?” How do the adoptive parents present their adoption status: that they are special and unique?

These are just some of the questions that the participants shared during their interview about what goes on for them regarding who they are as adoptees and how this impacts their decision to externally search for their origins. Clinicians need to be aware and explore how their clients, who are a part of the constellation of adoption conceptualize these themes in their own lives. Biological and adoptive parents may have similar questions based on their adoption perspective and this needs to be further explored.

The primary aspect for therapists to address is that there is no right answer about whether their decision to search for birthparents is “right or wrong.” Searching, both internally and externally, are individual processes and need to be understood and accepted as such. Adoptees may feel that they need to make a decision and an important message is that their decision to search may change over time and that they need to do what feels right for them.

Implications for Future Research

There are two specific general groups that were not purposefully examined in this study. Those are the international and the transracial adoptees. Since the themes of
appearances and differences versus similarities seem to be common and are noted as primary themes it is not possible to determine what impact this may have on the decision to search for birthparents by an international or transracial adoptee, particularly those who look significantly different than their adoptive family and parents. It is therefore recommended that future research examine the theoretical underpinnings of these two groups to determine whether or not similar themes are noted via a similar qualitative methodological design.

Further, many themes (both primary and secondary) were discussed as relevant to the field of adoptees. It would be important to determine how these themes are best measured in a quantitative format with instruments that are both valid and reliable measures of these themes for further information. Further, it is important to ascertain if adoptees from different socioeconomic status, levels of education, and race/ethnicity would report similar themes.

Summary

It is apparent that the decision of when an adult adoptee decides to search for their birthparents is a decision that is part of an internal process that for some can turn into an external search of actually going out and finding their birthparent(s). This qualitative dissertation aimed to develop grounded theory in order to better understand the psychological processes involved in the decision of whether or not an adoptee searches for birthparents.

The following were seen as primary themes reported in 4 or more of the 10 interviews: Abandonment and Loss, Acceptance versus Rejection, Adoption as Good

It appears that adoptee’s primary reason to search for birthparents is based on their desire to know their biological parents in order to understand how they are similar and different from their adoptive and biological parents, to better understand how their identity has been impacted by their adoption status, and to learn about their biological connection to the world. Many adoptees never see a biological relative until they have given birth to a child and as one of the adoptees so eloquently stated, they are not sure of where they belong on the “human continuum.” For some adoptees, this process of searching for their identity exists at the internal level and they made a choice (which can change) that they have no desire to complete an external search. It is imagined that the themes that emerged as part of this interview are only some of overall “topics” which are relevant to the search process.

Though each of the themes are not relevant as the pivotal reason why someone actually decides to search, it is realized that this is not only a process but it is a complex
set of factors which become intertwined for each adoptee and some will play a larger component than others. For some adoptees knowing that they are different from their adoptive family may be enough push to feel that they “need” to meet their biological family. This process may be an individual journey and the adoptee’s stories are all unique to their life circumstances, but there are similarities in how adoptees conceptualize their biological origins. As previously noted, these themes are not specific to the field of adoption and need to be understood from the perspective of the individual adoptee, but this allows us to begin to understand the multi-faceted set of elements involved in an adoptee’s decision to externally search or not search for biological parents.
CHAPTER IV

Personal Narrative

As I stated, earlier in terms of my worldview, I am a 29-year old Caucasian female who was adopted at a few weeks of age by my parents. I grew up with my parents and my younger brother, who is also adopted. We grew up in the Midwest, in the suburbs, outside of a major city. My father is a podiatrist and my mother is a housewife who helps my father with his billing. I lived at home throughout college and moved out and to New Jersey to complete my graduate studies with my boyfriend who had just completed law school and was originally from New Jersey.

My brother was married last summer and we maintain a relationship that can be described as emotionally close but to outsiders may be viewed as a distant relationship since we can not talk for months at a time and when we do talk not have much to discuss, yet there is an emotional bond which is beyond words. He is now a stepfather to his wife’s 8-year-old son.

I completed my undergraduate degree with a double major in psychology and sociology and a minor in political science. I have a master’s degree in counseling and am currently completing the final requirements in pursuit of my doctoral degree in counseling psychology. I am getting married in October to my fiancé with whom I have been in a relationship with for the past 11 years.
I completed this interview, which was conducted by my primary research assistant, Douglas Beckworth, at the end of my data collection process of this dissertation. At this time in my adoption process, I searched for information on my biological family at 19 years of age. I learned that my adoption records are closed and was given some non-identifying information. At this time in my life, I consider myself a non-searcher because at this point I have no plan regarding further search efforts. Since I have searched for information about my birth family in the past I was at one point a searcher. I am a strong believer in the realization that adoption status, in terms of the search process, can and does change. I am aware that at another point in my life, I may pursue further information about my origins, but at this time in my life, I do not plan to do so.

Below are excerpts from my interview, presented in a similar fashion to the participants. The goal of this chapter is to allow the readers to be aware of my personal worldview. It is with the help of my mentor and my research team that these personal beliefs were able to be "kept in check" throughout the dissertation process, but it must be acknowledged that my own life story had some impact of the actual interviews and the relationship and rapport that was developed with each participant.

This interview was transcribed utilizing the same procedure as the ten participants with the primary researcher transcribing the interview and Douglas Beckworth checked the tape and transcript for accuracy. The difference is that this interview was only analyzed by Maria Valle, so that the primary researcher would not look for themes in her own interview. Upon reviewing the transcript for themes, I concur with the themes as identified by the auditor.
Primary Themes

Abandonment and Loss

In terms of loss, in the interview I acknowledge that personally there is a feeling of abandonment and loss but feel that it may be exacerbated due to the limitations in discussing adoption with my adopted family.

I think that adoptive parents have a really important job and that is to not get over their own issues but to deal with their issues and to realize that parents biological, adopted, whatever, biological, parents, parents words that they say or don’t say are very hurtful and painful and I don’t think that they realize that. I think that all kids need to hear that their parents are proud of them and that they have done a good job. I think that we all have that desire. I do feel that I have a greater desire than most. If that comes from my own feeling of being left at birth...I definitely acknowledge that, but I have definitely seen many people who are much healthier that are adopted and it has been because it was allowed to be discussed.

Acceptance versus Rejection

Below is an excerpt which discusses the fear of rejection I felt during and after a phone call I received from my mother expressing her desire for my return to Michigan.

A few years ago my mom, about 2 years ago, my mom and I got into a huge fight on the phone, umm, she said, “you are never coming home are you?” And I said, “Mom, I really, when I got here my intention was never to stay.” This really feels like home, it has nothing to do with my parents, I am not here as a rebelling
teenager. But even then when she said that and hung up on me and after saying that I was a bad daughter, what had she done wrong as a parent and if I was a good daughter, I would move home immediately. And that I put my education, I put Doug before them and that I was wrong. I remember hanging up the phone and just crying and crying and thinking. I had just tried all along to be this good daughter.

I discuss one of my fears of rejection as they relate to not being “good enough” in relation to my mother.

I know that in her mind I know she did things for what she thought was my best interest but I have some…I guess dramatic is the way I can say it of her rejection of me when the best wasn’t achieved.

An example that I give of this feeling of rejection appears connected to a feeling of not being “good enough.”

I think in second or third grade…it was the school spelling bee and my mom would grill me night after night on these spelling words. Went to the spelling bee and I think I was in third grade and there was a first, second, and third grade spelling bee contest and I came down to the top three and they were eliminating people by spelling words wrong and I think the third person got the word spelled wrong and I got the word laryngitis and (laugh) I spelled it wrong and I got second place. I think most parents should be extremely happy that their daughter or child got that far…I think that I did not get congratulated for my success I got chastised for spelling laryngitis wrong, it was a word that we had practiced and that I let a second grader beat me.
I believe that I have a good self-image but when it comes to thinking about being rejected, it seems to be too much to handle. Intellectually, I understand the reasons why a biological parent may not want to meet their biological. Emotionally, I wonder how can person I don’t even know not want to know me or spend time with me and this feels like rejection. I have used loyalty to my adopted parents as the primary reason in which I have not searched for my biological parents. “I think that I am definitely not searching for fear of rejection. I’ll blame my parents and use them as the… scapegoat.”

*Adoption as Good versus Bad*

I discuss how I am proud to be an adoptee and that I would not want to intrude into her life and disrupt it.

I am very proud of this woman who gave me up. Umm, but I would never want to walk into her life and whether I was a secret or not a secret impact that and if only I could get the message to her to say thank you.

*Anger*

I describe the anger toward my brother for being comfortable to “blurt” out his emotions as he sees fit, as well as anger toward myself for not feeling secure enough in my relationship with my parents to express my feelings.

I think that my anger toward my brother many times is that my brother would just say if my mom was getting on his nerves, he would just say, “F...You...Okay nervous, leave me alone.” That was his was famous line. My mom is very anxious and he would say “alright nervous” and I think that listening to him, there
was always this part of me that so wanted to be like him and just be able to say “F...you all.”

Appearances

I describe an incident in which when I was out shopping with my mother and a person approached us regarding our appearances.

I remember one time being in the store with my mom and a woman came up to us. It is so funny, if you look at my family, my mom has got red hair, I have got blond hair, my brother has got brown hair, and my dad’s black hair – Lebanese, you know he is fair skinned so he is pretty light but umm, we look nothing alike, I always kind of look at it and say “the mutts” but I do have a lot of my mom’s fair features and I remember some lady walking up to us in the store and saying “Oh my God, I never remember seeing a mother and daughter look so much alike” and that point I felt, and I think my mom felt it too, that there was kind of like “Oh cool” you know and I remember feeling so happy that I could look similar to them.

Attachment/Bonding

I discuss my desire for closeness with my brother and how I feel that we are close, yet not close enough.

I was of course started crying and in that way we are very close. But then I would like to be closer. We don’t talk about problems. Sometimes our phone conversations are strained. There is really not much to talk about. Maybe that is
part of me. I feel that I am in a very different place like I umm, education has been the most important part of me, umm, or one of the most important parts of my life and to him that has not even been an issue and I think that there is a lot of resentment that is unspoken

I also acknowledge that I have a close relationship with my mother but that my feelings of being different seem to impact “how close.”

I think I was much closer to her when I was younger. I now often view, I view myself as extremely different from her.

**Biology - Medical and Cultural/Ethnicity**

I discuss the feeling of being on the “outskirts” of my ethnicity because of my appearances.

Because I know that I don’t look Lebanese. I think for me I always identified with the Lebanese culture and that was our culture and in a way I always felt that I was on the outside of that.

In terms of medical knowledge, I discuss below the realization I had about the lack of knowledge of have about my biological heritage.

I remember finding a new doctor, I don’t remember why, for an ear, or something and they gave me this new paperwork to fill out. I am writing things down and I get to the biological history and I started filling out heart disease, cancer which is my parents history and then all of a sudden I was like, I think my mom wasn’t there for that, and I remember like erasing and saying like “what the f...”...like this isn’t my history. I erased it and then wrote in big letters, ADOPTED, on it. I
don’t know if my mom was with me or not but I remember her finding out, whether I had told her or she was there I don’t know...she was like, “how could you do that,” very upset, it is no one’s business and getting very upset. And I said, “I am putting down cancer and heart disease and all this stuff and god only knows.” And she said, “Well, most likely they would have that too. You know heart disease and cancer is pretty common, umm and so you mine as well have those things down there because if anything it is a more extreme medical history and they will monitor you closer than whatever.” And it felt really wrong and umm, so I knew, I kind of sat with that for a year. I knew that I had to contact the adoption agency, I needed, I knew nothing from my own adoption story with the exception of umm, that she was 15, 14 or 15 years old and that he was 16, 15 or 16 and I didn’t know anything else.

Birthday/Celebration

I discuss below that my birthday is May 31st, but that a celebration always took place earlier than the date.

My parents never celebrated my birthday on my birthday. They always celebrated it earlier. I always justified that with my mom being very anxious. We would celebrate like a month before sometimes, I mean I would always get a happy birthday, but I never got cake on my birthday. We always did it like a week or two before sometimes up to a month and I have always – families my friends always said, “So bizarre – why are you celebrating your birthday so far away” and I realized that my birthday for them is not, you know, it is not my
birthday and I think for them unconsciously for them not acknowledging that they did not give birth to me and so that my birthday doesn’t mean the same thing that means to a lot of parents...I don’t think I have ever celebrated my birthday after.

Chosen/Wanted

Both of my parents emphasized that both my brother and I were children who were extremely wanted. She always told the story of how she prayed to St. Anne for children and that one of her promises, if she was given the children she wanted, was to go to St. Anne’s church each year for her feast day to give thanks for being given the opportunity to be a parent.

I think my mom told me everything that I remember I think she then went through that book. And basically the meaning of the book or how she portrayed it was that I was chosen and special.

When asked what is the best thing about being adopted, I replied, “being wanted and being chosen.”

And I think that my parents were not able to have children...that they wanted me so much that they would wait, it took them 3 years. They got married and then applied [to be adoptive parents], at that point my mom had already had a hysterectomy...actually, my dad knew this going into the marriage that my mom was having some problems and was probably going to have to have a hysterectomy. So I think right after they got married, she had to have it and right away they both said, “Let’s apply for adoption,” so it took them about 3 years to get me. Definitely being chosen. You know I see all these pregnant people and
they are like, "Oh, I hate being pregnant or something like this" and just to be
wanted so much so to wait not 9 months but 3 years to get you.

Conflict with Siblings

Conflict is discussed with the additional layer of feeling different. I saw the
negative way that my brother was being treated by my parents for "being bad" and felt
that I need to ensure that I was "good."

He and I think have had normal sibling rivalry and I think it was pronounced in
that I was, in that my parents...in that I was the good child and he was bad child.
He was diagnosed probably in Kindergarten, first grade with ADHD and even
though I know it is over-diagnosed, he is a true ADHD young man. And he
needed a lot of attention. He got a lot of negative attention and I think this is
where a lot of my fears of watching my mother yell at him all the time would be
my goal in life is to not be like him. And I always wanted to be the best that I
could be.

I recall an incident in which I became very angry with my brother and left him to
"Take care of himself," probably as a method of showing him that I was the big sister and
to listen to me. I don't recall what the exact details what the incident itself was about but
I recall the scenario vividly.

I remember one time I was in charge in driving to school once I got my...car and
I would have to drive my brother to school. At this point I was a junior and he
was in 8th grade and I remember driving him to school one day and he was just so
getting in my face and he was just being a real pain...we could really go back
verbally and go back and forth. And I actually dropped him off in the middle of the street and made him get out of the car...He wasn’t far from school. He was maybe 2 or 3 blocks and I dropped him off and I was so mad and I drove away and remember actually a few minutes later of driving up to the school and he was walking up to the door at that point and I waved to him and he waved back and at that point. When people in my family fight there is never apologies. You just kind of move on like it never happened.

In many ways my brother looked up to me as his older sister but it was not until I moved out of our parent’s home that he discussed his true feelings toward me. Prior to this videotape [discussed in the passage] our childhood was spent spending most of our time together but also constantly “bickering.”

He always wanted to play with me. He looked up to me and he is very much like my dad and would do anything for anybody umm. I remember moving here. When I moved out here – 7 years in June that I moved to New Jersey and he wouldn’t give it to me but in my car when I left was this videotape, and it was on my front seat or backseat or whatever and I saw it when I was driving...and just kind of looked over and saw this video tape and I am like “What...is this” and it has my brother’s writing on it and he wrote “Don’t watch me until you get to your apartment.” I moved...Memorial Day weekend of 95. My birthday was May 31st, so I think I left Michigan on the 26th...I couldn’t watch the tape until my birthday. I had no idea what was on it and on there was just my brother telling me how much he loved me. That I was a person he looked up to. He was with my dog (laugh) in the garage, and I have watched it like 2 or 3 times, and he was just
telling me how much he loved and how he was so proud of me for leaving. Not leaving in a bad way but leaving to fulfill my dreams. And then at the end he is like “Doug, I know you are watching this tape” and (laugh) and Doug and I are lying on the bed watching this tape and I am like crying...And he is like “Doug, I know you are watching this tape and I just want you to know that I love my sister very much and I really like you and I think you are a good person. I really thank you for taking care of her all this time and you need to know that this is your job from now on. If you ever hurt my sister (laugh) I am going to come out there and kill you”. And I think that point how much my brother loved me but then he was a big huge pain in the ass. Living at home he always wanted to hang out with me and I wanted nothing to do with him (laugh).

*Connections to Biological Family and “Adoption”*

At the age of 19, I searched and was sent non-identifying information from the adoption agency which gave me some basic medical history as well as information on nationality/ethnicity and the appearances of my biological parents.

I had read the information that my mom had blond hair blue eyes, five foot 2, 105 pounds. I was thinner at the time (laugh). My grandmother was blond hair blue eyes like 110, 5’2” and I am sitting here and then all of a sudden on this piece of paper and it said that she was 14 when she got pregnant and 15 when she had me, he was 15 and 16 when I was born. That...the decision to give me up was in my interest, that she was a young mother and the maternal grandparents had helped her make this decision because it had said “disposition” on the bottom. She was a
sophomore I think in high school, I think, and he was a junior. It was so weird. My adopted parents my parents my dad is 100% Lebanese and my mom is 100% Polish and so I was always told that I was 75% Polish and 25% French. And the French was downplayed because then it was like I was just like my mom type thing. And I got this and the paper said that my father was 100% French and that my mother was like 50% French and 50% Polish.

I therefore at this time realized that biologically I was 75% French and 25% Polish.

*Control*

I discuss my conceptualization of what having a closed adoption means to me and how I felt that the adoption agency knew my history and my actual adoption story but that I did not have access to it. The feeling of the lack of control that I felt about first having to ask someone/agency for my information and second when receiving that letter from them, the fear of not knowing what information about myself was in the letter. The letter also indicated that my biological parents did not want to have the file open and that they wanted to secure their privacy. This took away any control in which I might have and gave it to the agency and also my biological parents.

I knew nothing. I figured it was closed and it was typically closed in that my parents didn’t know any information and they had had no contact with them whatsoever...I did not know if they agreed that at 18 I could meet them. They told me it would take about a month. About 2 weeks after that, I guess the address I gave them was my parent’s address because I did not have another address...and there was this huge fear everyday when the mail came that my mom
would find this letter from the adoption agency and I would run home from school. At that point I was working, I think, I was in college, so I would race home to check the mail and I did get the mail the day it came. Saw the letter from the adoption agency had no idea what was in that information did not open it and put it aside. I knew that I was going to see Doug in a day or two; I don’t think I was going to be able to see him that night and I put the letter away. And I said, I just – I kept looking at the letter and said (laugh) “I am not opening this.” I think there was this huge fear of what was in this letter.

Here I acknowledge that by not having access to my medical history, that I emotionally feel that I don’t have any control over my own destiny, despite the intellectual acknowledgement that no one does have control over this element of life.

But I have had 2 cancer scares and that I think is a little scary, it is the not knowing. I am a person who needs and wants control and I think that is the scariest part of this and not having control and of not knowing. Who knows if these 15, they might have been old, who knows if this story is true.

Curious

My fiancée is a lawyer who admits himself as curious to know more about my biological family. He has been a part of my life for over 11 years now and has seen my curiousness up front. Who are they? Tell me more?

Doug said you know we may want to think about this as our relationship got stronger and we knew we were going to get married. We might want to know some information about them now a days as opposed to then...this line is in my
mind embedded. He said, "We have enough identifying information to identify...and he said, all you have to do is say the word and I can hire a private investigator and we can pretty much know who she is immediately.

Differences versus Similarities

I have always felt like I did not fit into the Lebanese culture mainly because of my appearance. I have felt different in a variety of ways mainly because how many blond hair blue eyed people do you know are Middle Eastern? While participating in the Debutante ball I was always placed in the middle of all pictures to offset all of the females with the blond in the middle.

At 16, Lebanese do a Debutante ball and it is kind of like the coming out [into adulthood]. I actually just wrote an article on this for this New Jersey student newsletter which will be interesting in exposing myself to the whole world, well the state, umm, students. Of being able to see that I never fit in to the Lebanese culture...I identified with that culture and people, like Doug looks, he is half Armenian and half Italian, so when we go to these places, like his parents to this day, they cook a lot of Armenian food which is extremely similar to Lebanese food and it took so long for them to keep – they would always say "Oh, have you ever had grape leaves or hummus” and it is like, “I grew up on the stuff.”

In terms of my personality, I discuss how I have always viewed myself as different from my mother in terms of personality, but yet I hold several of her traits. I viewed myself as similar to my father who as a doctor had spent the early part of his manhood in school.
I view myself as extremely different from her. I can see myself as similar in ways to my dad and very different in my beliefs, I hate to say this but I set timers all the time...I know that I fit in between the two categories that I feel very similar to my adopted family in many ways and in so many more important ways feel very different than them.

Existence

I discuss my political stance while in high school, in which I felt it was my “duty” to inform people of the negative aspects of pro-choice and “make” people to believe in pro-life as their political viewpoint.

I used to hang out in high school at these coffee shops and before Starbucks and they were like the pre-Starbucks kind...we would just hang out and we would end up literally for hours getting into these political debates on pro-life versus pro-choice...I could pretty much at that point convince anybody starting with an intellectual base and then when I realized that I was losing the battle would then resort to, I could have been an aborted baby and then really doing a low blow to people and then really saying at that point someone would have to walk away telling me they were pro-life or that they understood what I was saying and umm, then once I had that down, once I had people just to say, I understand your point I felt like, I felt like I was this martyr.
Expression of Emotion in Family

My family tends to internalize their emotions/feelings and not express them to other family members. An example I give during the interview is that my parents have not told me that they are proud of me but that they show their emotions by using materialistic ways. “I have never have heard either of them say ... they show it.”

Fantasy

I recall the negative feeling I had when I found out that my adoption was closed, from the adoption agency, and that I would not have access to my information or get an opportunity to meet my biological parents, and how I then began to think negative thoughts about her in reaction to finding out the lack of control I had in my life.

I remember and then it said that the file was closed that they had not agreed to me contacting them and that they thought this was in my best interest and seeing that piece of paper and at that point she got a name (laugh) it was slut...my mother’s name...I had this evil... concoction of what she was...I thought that she was a slut, that she got pregnant and it was her own fault, basically I had this fantasy that I was conceived because she was a slut. And this stayed with me for a long time.

In terms of negative fantasies, below I talk about how this “negative image” transformed in a dream about my birthmother as Madonna.

It was pretty soon after that that I had...that (laugh) this is funny, in that I found out who my birthmother was and it was Madonna....who at that point in my mind was going through “Like a Virgin” you know stage and was very “slutty” type
thing and so it kind of fit with this Madonna’s blond, I am I am sure she is not a real blond but never mind that fact, totally ignoring that Madonna is Italian umm that she had blond hair. At that time I had figured out that if I was 15 that at that point my birthmother would be about 40. Madonna was that age. Umm, you know that she had grown up in Michigan; she had spent a lot of time in Detroit, going to bars, and stuff like that...this is actually some of the real stuff that I had heard about Madonna. So I took a lot of that stuff and kind of taking Madonna’s history of being a little “slutty” or just like the public persona, again not knowing the private Madonna and having this dream. And then thinking, “Oh my God.” I remember telling a few select people about this dream and everyone’s response to this was “Oh my God, how negative.” And so again I stopped telling people I remember when Madonna actually had a child...she actually stayed as this “slut” in my mind for a very long time and I just had every connotation about her, I never – I think this was in reaction to at that point saying that this is in the best interest of me and feeling at that point that I had lost all control of what was in the best interest of me and that other people were making this decision for me. And so, to that I had to make her evil...I definitely rejected her, I rejected, he was actually kind of not existent.

I begin to discuss how this fantasy has not been as prominent in my life recently and how after I searched and received non-identifying information only, how I perceived adoption as a “bad thing” for a while. I also briefly mention having a biological brother. I think it was kind of the first vision that I had was what I talked about with her being a slut...and then having this Madonna face connected to it. And then I
think over time, but then again on the other hand I always thought that before that, is if I did not necessarily want a relationship with this person, that I didn’t really have a connection to this person. The one thing would be to say “Thank You”...I think was before the whole Madonna thought...then pretty much it held dormant. It felt that adoption was a bad thing, a secret. Madonna pretty much stayed, I think at that point, I have had this dream, I think twice of my birthfather, and oh not my birthfather, I’m sorry, of a biological brother and the dream of that one would be Kid Rock.

Fear

I mention that my brother’s adoption story is different and that he was not born to a young single mother but actually has full biological brothers and sisters and how this fear of him leaving me to be with his “real siblings.”

I wasn’t young and my brother’s adoption story is very different from mine. From what we know he was adopted – he was born to a couple who was married and several children and for whatever reason were getting divorced and the woman said that she just couldn’t raise – I don’t know how many siblings he had – it sounded like 3 or 4. And they couldn’t raise him. And so I was thinking. I think when I started dealing with this adoption stuff – all of a sudden I realized that he had full brothers and sisters.

Identity

I discuss who I am as a person in terms of professional and personal goals and
how this has impacted my personality.

I think that I have a personality biologically I have no idea of where it came from and it really doesn’t matter, my personality is in many ways like my mom. Definitely there is the career part, which I can identify with my dad. I feel very similar in my career goals, in a way to a point I can see that I can exceed my dad’s own goals for himself. He is fine supporting his family and that is enough. For me, my career, as much as much as my family will be important to me. My career will be equal, never more…it has been more now which is not been fair to my family and friends, in particular Doug in that I have given everything of myself to my education and I think my main reason for that was that I felt that I did have to be a good person and that I needed to make up for, sins isn’t the right word, sin of my own mother, of my biological mother and I think to make sure that people couldn’t reject me. I have seen it in my professional career. That I excel in my field, I have made sure that I was the best, or tried to be the best that I could so that someone couldn’t kind of get rid of me, and I think that has definitely been a self-protection. There has been this huge rejection that I have, whether or not that would be there if I wasn’t adopted, probably not. Probably the reasons behind it wouldn’t be the same but I think that the need to achieve would be there. I think that is embedded in who I am.

I talk about how since I lived at home during college and didn’t “rebel” until my early twenties, how it feels that I didn’t “grow into myself” until I moved out to New Jersey.
It definitely feels like late identity stuff. I didn’t individuate when most people do it right before college, but I said at home and did all of that.

*Knowledge versus Lack of Knowledge*

I answer that one of the worst things about being adopted is the lack of knowledge that I have about my history, my biology.

Not knowing my own history...my fantasy, if I could have my dream of the perfect adoption system would be that it is in the adoptee’s best interest. This open versus closed stuff is full of crap. Open adoption has its pros but I think that in my fantasy about how to make it a better system would be that each, and this is impossible, but each month or twice a year or once a year that the biological parents have to go through a battery of tests including medical and that there was some way of having a bank of getting this information of being able know in terms of maternal and paternal history. What am I at risk for? I have had 2 cancer scares so far and I am 28, both have been absolutely nothing, could be very much my paranoia.

I continue stating that I don’t have knowledge about my medical history but then realize that even non-adopted people don’t know what is going to happen to them; just because it is or is not a part of your biological family, does not mean it won’t happen to you.

I could have a problem with a pregnancy and it could mean that it is a “the unknown.” And I am scared the unknown. I mean 2 cancer scares or whatever I have no idea what the future holds but then the question is “Does any of us
know,” even if we have that history. I have changed and I am in the process. And I think it is going to continue.

*Loyalty*

My adopted parents, particularly my mom, always framed adoption in a positive framework and indicated that she was not able to take care of me and that her giving me up for adoption was in my best interest. Based on this, I talk about how I would not search for them in deference to my adopted family of what I owed to them.

I think my mom always said that she was young and couldn’t take of us, or couldn’t take of me. So what she did was in the best interest of me and put it in a very positive frame and I needed at that point to search and even if I could only get non-identifying information that I could not do this behind my parents back.

I recall a day when I called a family meeting in order to talk to my parents about my desire to search, mainly for information, about my biological history.

And I remember saying, “you know I know that I am adopted. I know that this is hard for you, it is not that I want to meet them necessarily but I need to know more information and I think I am entitled. I love you both very much and I don’t want to do anything to hurt you. I am not doing this to hurt you, umm, but I need to have your permission to do this”. I think at that point both of them were just sitting there in shock. And my dad finally, after a few minutes said, “We always thought that we would have this conversation. Our request to you is that you wait umm.” And I was 8, I was 19 and she said, he said “why don’t you wait until you are done with college, maybe around 23, if you want to search then we will be in
full support of you searching at that point in time. Until then we think you are too young.”

I then continue on to discuss how I felt that this was not a decision in my best interest, but in their best interest and how I then decision to search on my own with only Doug knowing about it.

At that point, I went behind their backs and searched. I knew where I was adopted from, oh actually before this happened later on that day my mom did pull out what information she did have from her strong box, which was basically nothing. It just said that there – she had a handwritten note in her writing and then a typed note, a typed one page letter on her thing it just said that mom was fifteen, 14, um, dad was 15 and they had – it said that my birthmother had blond hair blue eye and fair skin and that my dad had brown hair, brown eyes. And really no description of him and that my grandm, my mom’s, my maternal grandmother had blond hair blue eyes was 5’2” and all of a sudden seeing this piece of paper that I look like the duplicate of them, just from this information and so my mom did try and open up a little bit and she then gave me this type written note and she said that I couldn’t have it but that I could look at it, because we needed to keep all the important papers in the strong box in case something would happen to them. And it basically gave a little more information.
Process

My feelings toward being adopted began the moment that I found out adopted and has continued throughout my life; my expectation is that it will continue throughout my life.

I remember (clear throat) probably around 5 or 6 and learning how to read and looking in my mom’s drawer that I shouldn’t have been looking in and found this book and again I don’t even know if this is accurate but – and it said, from what I remember – How to tell your daughter, your child, they’re and they said this word “adopted” and I got to the part – how to tell your child they are and I couldn’t figure out how to say adopted and what that meant. Umm, so I remember just walking up to my mom with the book and her kind of having this frozen look on her face of “oh my God” and of saying “What is O-dopt-ed.”

I was nominated for a women’s conference scholarship and I was asked to respond to several essay questions.

I have to answer these four questions and one of the questions is “What woman do you admire the most.” I looked at this question and said, “I have no clue,” like I don’t have a woman that I kind of look up to...I am writing the essay and I actually said that the person I admired the most was my birthmother which was, I am writing it and I just like do-to-do-to-do, totally distanced from it and I said that the reason I admired my birthmother the most as a woman was that she was brave enough to give me up and to give me, that she knew that she couldn’t give me the lifestyle that would be best for me and that she had enough courage to lose me and give me in that unselfish way of giving me the life that I could never with her.
And umm, that she allowed me to have parents who loved me. My parents are no saints but they are wonderful people and I love them dearly and if — I had an awesome childhood, with its quirks umm...it came totally out of the blue. After I wrote it, I kind of looked at it and so “so she has come pretty far from a...[slut]...to the woman I admire the most.”

I acknowledge that adoption wasn’t talked about much in my family but that over the years I have asked my mother about different memories I have had about growing up and how she would always answer my questions. But that at this time I still don’t feel comfortable yet to ask particular questions about my adoption.

I would love to ask her the question of “tell me my adoption story — how did I find out?” Even see if my perceptions of what I told you before are even close to accurate. And I can’t do that — not that. Not yet. And I think that it is a process.

_Regimented/Expectations_

I discuss how my mom had particular expectation such as practicing a skill — and would have time expectation such as 30 minutes of practice time on the organ daily.

My mom was very into timers (laugh) and that sounds weird but we had to have...I played the organ and then I was pushing and pushing and pushing to play the piano, I didn’t want to play the organ and so my reward was if I kept playing the organ for a couple more years I would be able to take piano lessons.

I also mention that I took the expectations seriously, whereas my brother did as he pleased, and that my reasoning behind that was to achieve my parent’s acceptance.
Was very strict, strict isn’t even the word, rigid, that is the world. She had extremely high expectations of us and I think it was more, looking back, it was definitely more me. I think my brother, he could get away with anything. He would speak his mind, I guess I was the good child who did what I was told. It took it to the extreme of trying to be the perfect child.

My father, I felt, held my career aspirations. College and graduate school were both expectations.

He had expectations just like my mom and that I was always told by him that I would be lawyer or doctor – that’s it, that’s all, nothing else. Those were my 2 choices. He would say – you have very – how would he word it – I had very expensive taste and therefore I needed to have a career that was going to give me the lifestyle that I was like daily. Not daily, but he will tell me as often as he can that I am just like my mom…But I think my wanting to be a professional is been kind of modeling after him.

**Secrets**

Adoption was very rarely discussed in the household. I know that I “always knew” that I was adopted and also that it was a private matter not to be discussed outside of the family home.

[Adoption] wasn’t talked about very often at all. I think pretty much I found out that I was adopted and umm, got the message pretty...quickly that we didn't talk about it. I don’t know how that message came across. I think I had gone to school and told a friend or somebody that I was adopted and my mom found out
and my mom, didn’t yell, but she said that was private that we didn’t share that with other people and how our family was designed had nothing to do with anybody else.

After I did search and gain non-identifying information, Doug was the only person that knew I had done this and the expectation was that this was our secret.

I had told Doug and he was never to tell anybody that got this information from the adoption agency. I took the letter and put it in this – not a strong box – but just this nice little folder thing that I had that I put my adoption stuff there and did not look at.

I discuss how the family “motto” was to keep family issues within the home and not to be discussed – even with close friends. “Secrets are pretty powerful, and so I think the adoption stuff has led that kind of process.”

Separation versus Individuation

I lived at home during college and did not leave my family’s house until I was leaving to move to New Jersey in pursuit of my master’s degree at the age of 22.

I lived at home during college and that was pretty much, because it did not feel that I was allowed to leave in that sense. My parents had set up this…Michigan Education Trust and when I was young my dad used to pay however much a month umm and it was go into this trust and…if you went to any state university in Michigan you could go and they would pay your tuition and you didn’t pay…So I was never, I couldn’t even look at an out of state college…because that
was their gift to me that I was going to go to college and that it was paid for but on the other hand it was very restrictive.

I acknowledge that until recently, I felt that I had not actually separated myself from my family and that I was nervous that my “leaving home” would be seen as a rejection from them when to me is just my way of “growing up.”

To this day, it has gotten better and I realized that a long time I never realized that I broken away from them but by just doing the things that I have done in many ways.

Reasons for Performing Research

As the question was asked of the research participants of why they volunteered to participate in the study, it felt important to address why I wanted to conduct the study.

My interest came while in the masters program. I think the reason was really wanting to understand that a lot of the research out there was negative about adoption; specifically that adoptees in childhood are often more likely to be diagnosed with disorders such as ADHD and feeling that I needed to prove to the world when I started and many that adoption is not a bad thing and wanting to promote adoption as the third alternative and I remember finally saying at the beginning of the doctoral program. I said that I wanted to study adoption.

As I come to the conclusion of this study, I am fully aware that I may have wanted to research the positive elements of adoption but that with research there is no way to know prior to the completion of the study how the results will be interpreted to the adoption community, positive or negative. As a researcher, I am fully aware that all
results need to be reported despite their implications because it is not possible, without this knowledge to educate the community. As an adoptee, I would like to be able to present only positive outcomes and I intellectually know that it is not possible. Ethically, morally, and personally, I have learned throughout this process as a person that there are always going to be positive and negative implications in the field of adoption and that this is extremely important to fully understand this phenomena.

I think one of the things that I did get from the research is that it is okay to not search. People have their reasons and they are individual reasons and I am sure that there are themes that I will find as I write this up but that it is okay that you don’t have this hole. Yes there are people who are out there who you are biologically connected with that you don’t know, but it doesn’t make you a bad person for not doing that. And I think I needed to do this research to hear that. I think I needed to know that it was okay to not search...I was actually expecting I think when I started the research to end up wanting to search and umm, so I think that that has been a surprise for me is that I had told myself ...I would not search while I did the dissertation that I would save it till after – one of the main reasons is that I don’t need any thing to stop me from doing this (laugh)...Exactly. But I think that in my mind whether I said it or not I was expecting this research to give me permission to search and I think what this research has done is given me permission to not search.

Below is just a brief synopsis of my feelings on adoption as a choice:

I think that adoption is an amazing alternative and I think that if I could add anything to the field...the one thing would obviously be just to help people realize
that searching is a personal choice...that adoption is a choice. It is a choice of life...There are three choices that a woman has when she gets pregnant. She has the choice of giving birth and keeping the baby, she has the choice of having an abortion, and she has the choice of adoption. And I think that what I would like to do if to be — I guess in the future if anyone could say about what Anne did in her project or in her profession, I would like people to know that there are three choices.

To continue:

I think the most important piece is that this is a process. It is a process I think for all adoptees. The process can have similar components but that it is the individual’s story. It is everyone’s own narrative but it is not that their story is not only their story but it is an amazing story and issues and themes and stuff come with that. I guess in a kind of baggage way that nonadoptees don’t have umm, but I think that all people have their own baggage and history.

Secondary Themes

Five of the secondary themes which were brought up in other interviews were also relevant in mine. There were no new themes that emerged in my interview, indicating my similarity in many ways to the participants in this study.
Idealized

I acknowledge that until recently, I viewed my father as “perfect.” He was a man who would do “anything” to protect his family and he is but he is not perfect (as no one ever is).

But that is, he is just a good person. I’ve always felt protected by him and I think only in recent years realized. I think I had him on this pedestal. Of who I wanted to be like and only in recent years have I realized that he is human and has flaws.

Protection

In reference to my adopted mother, I discuss having a sheltered life, which was perceived by me as a form of protection of the outside world.

Looking back now, she would do anything to protect us…and I think to her point of protecting us kind of sheltering us from the outside world…we weren’t exposed to a lot of different people. We lived 10 minutes, if we kept on the same road, actually the same road would turn into Jefferson Avenue in Detroit and we were very sheltered from anyone that was different from us. In a way it was good but then in a way it was definitely, I think, not harmful, that is not the word I want. I think sheltered. Like when I moved out and kind of experience life and that there was so many other people and these were some great people and my mom (cleared throat) was very strict.
Religion/Faith

Religion is a very important element in my family. We went to Catholic school from Kindergarten through eighth grade and the expectation was that we never missed mass until we were severely ill.

They are very, very Catholic. My dad probably goes to church every day (cleared throat). Sundays he actually goes twice because he has his church that he likes to go to and then my aunt doesn’t drive so he takes her to church but then he will take her to a later mass. Which is very odd that someone goes to church twice on Sunday, but that is okay.

Replacement

I sat down in a restaurant with my brother during the Christmas holiday a few years ago to discuss my personal adoption process and also to gain his feedback. One of my concerns was regarding his having full biological brothers and sisters and how that potentially impacted my relationship with him.

I was crying and he said to me at that point, I don’t know if I am going to search and but what the hell are you talking about that you are not my sister. He said, “Those people you are talking about are not my brothers and sisters or whoever they are, you are the only sister that I have.” And of course that made me cry more.

Reflecting on this interaction with David, I realize that the tears were out of relief that regardless of whether or not he found and developed a relationship with his biological siblings that I would remain his “sister” and hold onto our special connection.
Repression

A part of my personal process has been to “forget” that I was adopted at particular points in my life.

As a child, after it the message came through that adoption was a private topic and not to be discussed, I believe that I repressed my adoption status and it was not a topic that was on my mind. It remained dormant in my psyche until approximately the age of 18 years old. I think at that point kind of repressed any adoption stuff, again knowing that I was adopted. And I think what was interesting is, when I turned 18, it was a big thing. I mean, I knew at that point, one of the thoughts that came up with is that I could contact the adoption agency and that scared me half to death.

I also discuss how my dissertation topic has been difficult for my parents in that my dad, for a long time, would continually ask me what my dissertation topic was on.

When I finally decided on my adoption topic about 3 years ago, basically the decision of whether or not to search for birthparents, neither of my parents could hear that. Up until about 6 months ago, almost every time I talked to my dad on the phone he would ask me what my dissertation was on. Every time I would tell him that it was on this and he would not remember and he would ask me again the next week. And that hurt a lot. Now they have stopped asking but the fact that in this entire process no one has ever asked me, neither of them had asked me why I was doing this and if I had searched or thought about anything. So I think, actually my fear, I think, in doing this interview and actually being the Chapter VI, my fear is not telling my story because I am very proud of my story, I am
proud of who I am. I think my fear is that if my parents ever...read my dissertation that half the things I just said on there would be an absolute, absolute shock.

**Story**

In terms of my adoption story, mom is the person in "charge" of the story:

*My mom is definitely the carrier of the story. My dad sort of shuts down when he gets very overwhelmed and he just can't talk and I think that [at times] my mom gets very frustrated and angry and emotional...but when she needs to be attentive she can. You just have to catch her in the right moment.*

This interview represents the person as I am on the day of the interview. I believe it helps summarize the process as I see it at this time. I am aware the my process is changing and that as I change and grow as a person, the relationships as I have described them above also grow and change.

**Attachment Classification**

Upon further review of this interview and personal narrative, it is felt that this researcher meets criteria for an anxious attachment classification due to her high levels of reported anxiety as well as her desire to please and gain approval from particular people in her life.
References


Psychological Assessment Resources.


Appendix A

Advertisement
Research Call: To All Adults Who Are Adopted

My name is Anne R. Farrar, M.A. and I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Counseling Psychology Ph.D. Program at Seton Hall University in the Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy. I am looking for participants for a research project examining how adult adoptees decide whether or not to search for birthparents. I am under the supervision of my faculty/dissertation mentor, Laura Palmer, Ph.D.

If you or someone you know is over the age of 18 and was officially adopted by one year of age, this may qualify them to participate in this study. The study will contain adoptees who have searched for birthparents, those who are undecided, and those who do not have plans to search for birthparents. Participants will be asked to respond to several questionnaires and an interview with the primary investigator. All answers will remain completely anonymous and confidential. There will be a stipend of $30.00 for participation. If you or someone you know is interested in participating in a study which will take approximately 2.5 hours of your time (1 hour for questionnaires and 1.5 for interview), please contact Anne Farrar at (201) 315-7652 or e-mail at Farraran@shu.edu or Laura Palmer, Ph.D. at (973) 275-2740 or e-mail at Palmerla@shu.edu for more information.

This study has met approval by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB at (973) 275-2974.

Sincerely,

Anne R. Farrar, M.A.

Doctoral Candidate
Appendix B

Screening Information
Screening Information

Date of Screening: __________________________

Name: __________________________________________________________________________

Address: _________________________________________________________________________

City: __________________________ State: __________________________

Home Telephone Number: __________________________________________________________

Work Telephone Number: __________________________________________________________

E-Mail: __________________________________________________________________________

1. What is your current age? ____

2. What is your birth date? __________________________

3. How old were you when you were adopted? _____

4. Was your adoption a trans-racial or international?
   Yes, what type: __________________________________________________________________

   No

5. What is your biological race/ethnicity?
   White
   Spanish/Hispanic/Latino
   Black/African American/Negro
   American Indian/Alaska Native
   Asian Indian
   Chinese
   Filipino
   Japanese
6. What is your adopted parents race/ethnicity?

___ White
___ Spanish/Hispanic/Latino
___ Black/African American/Negro
___ American Indian/Alaska Native
___ Asian Indian
___ Chinese
___ Filipino
___ Japanese
___ Korean
___ Vietnamese
___ Native Hawaiian
___ Guamanian/Chamorro
___ Samoan
___ Other, please state __________________________
Meet requirements of the study?

___ Yes

___ No
Appendix C

Overview of Research – Letter to Potential Participants
Overview of Research – Letter to Potential Participants

Dear Potential Research Participant:

Your time and willingness to consider participating in this research is greatly appreciated. The purpose of this study is to examine the psychological processes involved for adult adoptees in their decision of whether or not to search for their birthparents. This research may contribute to the greater understanding of adult adoptees. The questions which you will be asked are intended to help gain more information about the psychological processes involved in deciding whether or not a person searches for their birthparents. It is hoped that this information will better inform all professionals involved in the field of adoption to more effectively realize the needs of adult adoptees.

You will be asked to participate in an interview with the principal investigator, which may take approximately 2 hours of your time. All interviews will be audio-tape recorded and then transcribed for research purposes. These tapes will be transcribed by the principal investigator with the assistance of a research assistant. Upon transcription of the tape, you will be asked to review the transcript of your interview for your feedback and comments to your interview. You will mainly be asked to discuss your experience of being an adult adoptee and how your “adoption story” has impacted your decision of whether or not to search for your birthparents, at this point in your life.

All identifying information will be removed from the transcript and all names will be changed for confidentiality purposes. Results of this study may be presented at conferences or published at the discretion of the researcher. A stipend of $30.00 will be given to you at the conclusion of the one-to-one interview.
Should you feel undue stress during completion of any of the interview you may
discontinue at any time without any form of penalty. After you complete the interview,
should you experience any grief, stress, or distress, you are encouraged to contact the
investigators or other mental health professionals for assistance. If you are a Seton Hall
University student, you are encouraged to seek assistance from the Health/Counseling
Services in Mooney Hall at (973) 761-9500. If you are not a Seton Hall University
student, please contact the investigator for appropriate community referrals.

Should you have any questions or would like a copy of the results, please feel free
to contact Anne R. Farrar, M.A., Principle Investigator (201) 315-7652 or her doctoral
supervisor/mentor, Laura Palmer, Ph.D. (973) 275-2740. If you should have any
questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact, Seton Hall
University, Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research at (973) 275-2974.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Seton Hall University
Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research. The IRB believes that the
research procedures adequately safeguard the subject’s privacy, welfare, civil liberties,
and rights. The Chairperson on the IRB may be reached through the Office of Grants and
Research Services. The telephone number of the Office is (973) 275-2974.

If you decide to take part in this project, it will be necessary for you to complete a
consent form. If you decide to participate, your participation remains voluntary
throughout the entire project. If you should decide to discontinue, you can simply
discontinue the interview. Your participation in this study will be helpful in better
understanding the processes which are involved in deciding whether or not an adult
adoptee searches for their birthparents.
If you would like to participate in this project, please contact Anne R. Farrar, M.A., Principal Investigator at 201-315-7652 or e-mail at Farraran@shu.edu.

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Anne R. Farrar, M.A.

Doctoral Candidate
Appendix D

Informed Consent
Informed Consent

Dear Potential Research Participant:

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All identifying information will be removed from the transcript and all names will be changed for confidentiality purposes. Results of this study may be presented at conferences or published at the discretion of the researcher. A stipend of $30.00 will be given to you at the conclusion of the one-to-one interview.
Should you feel undue stress during completion of any of the interview you may discontinue at any time without any form of penalty. After you complete the interview, should you experience any grief, stress, or distress, you are encouraged to contact the investigators or other mental health professionals for assistance. If you are a Seton Hall University student, you are encouraged to seek assistance from the Health/Counseling Services in Mooney Hall at (973) 761-9500. If you are not a Seton Hall University student, please contact the investigator for appropriate community referrals.

Should you have any questions or would like a copy of the results, please feel free to contact Anne R. Farrar, M.A., Principle Investigator (201) 315-7652 or her doctoral supervisor/mentor, Laura Palmer, Ph.D. (973) 275-2740. If you should have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact, Seton Hall University, Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research at (973) 275-2974.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research. The IRB believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject’s privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The Chairperson on the IRB may be reached through the Office of Grants and Research Services. The telephone number of the Office is (973) 275-2974.

If you decide to take part in this project, it will be necessary for you to complete this consent form. If you decide to participate, your participation remains voluntary throughout the entire project. If you should decide to discontinue, you can simply discontinue the interview. Your participation in this study will be helpful in better understanding the processes which are involved in deciding whether or not an adult adoptee searches for their birthparents.
Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Anne R. Farrar, M.A.

Doctoral Candidate

I have read the above material and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realizing that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

_________________________________________________________________________

Participant or Authorized Representative                                  Date
Appendix E

Original Semi-Structured Interview Guide
Interview Questions

1. Tell me about you. What are your perceptions of being an adult adoptee and how you feel it has affected your life? Has this changed over the years, if so, please explain?

2. Tell me about your adoptive family (mother, family, siblings, extended family). Describe your relationships and how adoption was addressed in your home.

3. Is your adoption considered open or closed? Please explain what this means to you. How has this affected your life?

4. Tell me the best thing about being adopted. Tell me the worst thing about being adopted.

5. Tell me in detail about the decision to search or not to search? What has influenced your decision? Any people involved in this with you? Has this changed across your lifespan? Do you see it possibly changing in the future?

6. Tell me about your thoughts (fantasies or realities) about your biological family.

7. Is there anything else you would like to share about being an adult adoptee?

8. Why did you volunteer to participate in this research project? Was it what you expected?

9. Are there any questions you have for me?
Appendix F

Revised Semi-Structured Interview Guide
Interview Questions – Revised

1. Tell me about you. What are your perceptions of being an adult adoptee and how you feel it has affected your life? Has this changed over the years, if so, please explain?

2. Tell me about your adoptive family (mother, family, siblings, extended family). Describe your relationships and how adoption was addressed in your home.

3. Is your adoption considered open or closed? Please explain what this means to you. How has this affected your life?

4. Tell me the best thing about being adopted. Tell me the worst thing about being adopted.

5. Tell me in detail about the decision to search or not to search? What has influenced your decision? Any people involved in this with you? Has this changed across your lifespan? Do you see it possibly changing in the future?

6. Tell me about your thoughts (fantasies or realities) about your biological family.

7. Is there anything else you would like to share about being an adult adoptee?

8. Do you feel that being adopted has impacted your worldview in terms of political ideologies, and if so, how?

9. Why did you volunteer to participate in this research project? Was it what you expected?

10. Are there any questions you have for me?