PERSPECTIVES ON THE ADOPTION EXPERIENCE FROM ADULT ADOPTEES IN SEARCH OF THEIR ROOTS

by

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ABSTRACT

The perception of the adoption experience from the perspective of adult adoptees has received some attention in the literature on adoption. The literature suggests there are a number of factors that may either detract from or enhance the adoption experience, both for the adoptees and for the adoptive parents. The literature also addresses the necessity of adequate training for professionals who work with adoptees, adoptive parents, or birth parents.

This study examined the adult adoptees' perception of whether the adoptive mother appeared to believe that there were differences between adoptive and biological parenthood. The responses of the adoptees were then examined in relation to the level of empathy received from the adoptive mother and the satisfaction with the adoption experience.

The results of the pooled variance t-tests were significant for both empathy and satisfaction. Implications for adoption legislation, as well as for practice, are discussed and recommendations for future research are made.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

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To Lisa, Geraldine and George

CHAPTER 1

Statement of the Problem

Today, in North America, many adult adoptees are in search of information about their pre-adoptive past, their birth family, and their roots. In order to understand why adoptees need this information, and why they have to search, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of the history of adoption in the western world, as well as some understanding of the reasons why the laws, policies, and practices surrounding adoption have developed the way they have in the United States and in Canada.

"Adoption is one way a society helps to perpetuate itself" (Cole, 1984, p. 15) by ensuring that its dependant young are protected and cared for. Although the practice of adoption probably predates written history, laws surrounding the practice date back to the times of ancient Greece and Rome (Kirk, 1981). Adoption is also "society's way of arranging for the legal transfer of parenting from one parent to another" and it "confers the legal relationship of parent and child" (Cole, 1984, p. 16). Over time adoption has become "a complex social and legal institution, and reflects many of the prevailing values of any society in which it is practised" (Hepworth, 1980, p. 131).

Under early Roman law "adoption was principally initiated by religious and property interests of kin groups" (Kirk, 1981, p. xiv) and "the adopted child retained important links with the natural family" (MacDonald, 1984, p. 44). For centuries, under the English legal system adoption was virtually unknown, due in part to the indenture system (Cole, 1984), and adoption legislation was not passed

until 1926 in England and Wales and until 1930 in Scotland (Kirk, 1981; MacDonald, 1984).

The first adoption legislation not based on Roman law, enacted in Massachusetts in 1851, formed the basis of modern adoption legislation in North America and in some Western European countries (Kirk, 1981; MacDonald, 1984). In the United States adoption legislation falls under the jurisdiction of each individual state; similarly in Canada, each province is responsible for its own adoption legislation. In Canada, the first adoption legislation was enacted in New Brunswick in 1873. Gradually other provinces enacted their own legislation, with British Columbia's first adoption act being passed in 1920 (MacDonald, 1984).

Laws and policies surrounding adoption practice have developed, and changed, at least partially in response to the prevalent societal attitudes and beliefs of the time. In North America, in the early years of this century, societal attitudes were extremely negative toward both the woman who had a child born out of wedlock, and toward the child (Arms, 1983; Feigelman & Silverman, 1986). As a result of the relinquishing mother's need for secrecy in order to protect her future reputation, adoption agencies developed the policies of concealment, ongoing confidentiality of adoption, and of no contact between the biological parent and the adoptive parents. At that time, the policy of "concealment was perceived as beneficial to all parties of the adoption triangle: adoptive parents, adoptees, and birth parents" (Feigelman & Silverman, 1986, p. 219).

The policy of concealment also involved the development of laws that sealed the original adoption records. In the earlier years of this century adoption of non-relatives was not popular; the stigma of illegitimacy and fears of inherited tendencies toward immoral or criminal behaviour were of great concern to childless couples (Feigelman & Silverman, 1986). In an effort to find homes for relinquished infants, and to make adoption more attractive to wary, prospective adoptive parents (by providing legal safeguards), one jurisdiction after another amended or changed their adoption legislation to incorporate laws that sealed the original birth records. When the adoption was finalized, a new birth certificate was issued in the child's adopted name, as if the child had been born to the adoptive parents (Feigelman & Silverman, 1983).

The sealed record laws were also seen as beneficial to the child. By severing ties with the past, the child would become more attached to "his or her new parents" (Feigelman & Silverman, 1986, p. 219).

The legislation, pertaining to the sealed records, is one of the major barriers for adult adoptees who are in search of information about their biological origins. While early legislation in the United States and in Canada did not contain the sealed record policy, by the 1940s most jurisdictions had incorporated sealed records laws into their legislation (Auth & Zaret, 1986). In Canada the sealed record policy first came into effect under Ontario's 1927 adoption act which, among other provisions, "required that all adoption papers be sealed and

not opened for inspection except on the order of a judge or with the express permission of the Provincial Officer" (MacDonald, 1984, p. 46). Ontario's 1927 adoption legislation set a pattern for Canadian adoption legislation for the next 30 years (MacDonald, 1984), which eventually resulted in the incorporation of the sealed record policy into each province's adoption legislation. The effect of the sealed records laws has been that no one, including the adult adoptee, has had access to the original birth records.

The sealing of the birth records which severed ties with the birth family, the policies of concealment and secrecy surrounding the adoption, and the lack of contact between the biological and adoptive parents, is now called traditional closed adoption (Dukette, 1984). While agencies in a number of jurisdictions in the United Sates have practised various forms of open adoption for a few years now, traditional closed adoption is still practised by agencies in many jurisdictions, including British Columbia (Demick & Wapner, 1988; MacDonald, 1984).

The intent of modern adoption legislation was to place the interests of the child first (Kirk, 1981). However, up until the late 1950s (and some would argue that this is still true), the laws and policies surrounding closed adoption practice have resulted in placing the needs and interest of the adoptive parents first (Aitken, 1987; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Kadushin, 1984; Marcus, 1981; Pannor & Baran, 1984).

The Civil Rights movement and demands for social change in the 1960s began a period in which traditional attitudes and values were being challenged throughout North America (Ensminger, 1984; Kirk, 1981). Among those demanding change were a growing number of adult adoptees who were dissatisfied with the laws and policies surrounding the traditional adoption practice. These adoptees wanted information about their birth parents and their genealogy, and were frustrated in their attempts to obtain information by the sealed record laws and the secrecy maintained by both public and private adoption agencies. Adult adoptees who were in search began to organize, and search groups began to form (Marcus, 1979). Since the mid-seventies the right of adult adoptees to their original birth records, and thus to the identity of their biological parents, has become an increasingly controversial issue (Aitken, 1987; Kadushin, 1984; Kirk, 1981).

As a result of the controversy some changes have been made in adoption legislation and policies. Most provinces in Canada now have some form of Adoption Reunion Registry. In British Columbia, after calling for public input in 1986, a passive adoption reunion registry was established as of January 4, 1988, (Appendix A) and an active registry came into effect on October 4, 1991 (Appendix B). In addition, the written, non-identifying, birth family history provided to adoptive parents for the child is much more comprehensive and detailed than it was previously since many professionals involved in adoption

practice are much more aware of the needs of the adoptee for adequate information about his or her roots (Marcus, 1981). Despite the changes in legislation and the development of the reunion registries, the right of adult adoptees to their own birth records has not been completely resolved in North America. Some countries, such as Scotland, Israel, and Finland provide original birth certificates to adult adoptees upon request (Baran, Sorosky & Pannor, 1975; Triseliotis, 1973). However, in most areas in the United States and Canada, including British Columbia, adult adoptees are still denied access to their original birth records due to the sealed record laws (Feigelman & Silverman, 1986; Melina, 1986).

Despite the sealed records, many adoptees over the years have continued to search for, and find, members of their birth family. Although it appears that those who search are in the minority (Curtis, 1986; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Triseliotis, 1973), a fair amount of attention has focused on the search. Adult adoptees have written books and articles about the search (Andersen, 1989; Marcus, 1981; Maxtone-Graham, 1983; Redmond & Sleightholm, 1982), and a number of writers and researchers have examined the feelings, motives and adoption experiences of the searchers (Arms, 1983; Kowal & Schilling, 1985; Paton, 1954; Triseliotis, 1973). While some studies have included searchers and non-searchers (Marcus, 1981; Paton, 1954), others have researched the reunion experience (Campbell, Silverman & Patti, 1991). Aumend and Barrett (1984)

conducted a comparison study between searchers and non-searchers and found that "they were different from each other on almost every measure that was applied" (p. 258) and concluded that "research on and experience with searching adult adoptees should not be applied to non-searching adult adoptees" (p. 258) and suggested that the reverse was also true.

There have been very few large scale studies done on the adoptive experience from the perspective of the adult adoptee. Some studies that have been done (Baran, Sorosky & Pannor, 1975; Kowal & Schilling, 1985; Paton, 1954; Triseliotis, 1973) have found both similarities and differences between the searchers and have raised some intriguing questions about the adoptive experience as perceived by the adult adoptee and how this may or may not relate to the search.

The purpose of this study is to examine certain aspects of the adoption experience from the perspective of adult adoptees who are searching for information about their birth family. This study first examined whether adult adoptees perceived that their adoptive mothers believed there were any differences between adoptive parenthood and biological parenthood and whether this had any relationship to the empathy rating of the adoptive mother. The study then examined whether the perceived 'differences' had any relationship to the satisfaction with the adoption experience. The purpose, then, is to assess whether empathy or satisfaction are in any way related to perceived 'differences.'

The intent of the study is to add to the research in adoption and to ascertain whether there are implications for legislation, policy, or practice, particularly for those professionals who are involved in working with adoptees at any stage in their ongoing, lifelong experience of adoption.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

The history of adoption is a long one, but the literature regarding adoption is more recent. One of the earliest records of an adoptee goes back to 2800 B.C. (Kadushin, 1967) and one of the first studies of the outcome of adoption was done in 1924 in New York State (Kadushin, 1967). In the last few decades, the effects of adoption on the adoptee, the birth mother, and the adoptive parents, all members of what has been called 'the adoption triangle' (Baran, Sorosky, & Pannor, 1975) have been of continuing and increasing interest to writers and researchers. Those who have written about adoption, and researched the various facets of adoption, have usually done so from the perspective of one or more of the members of the 'adoption triangle.'

Literature on Adoption Relating to Adult Adoptees

One of the first studies in North America that examined the adoption experience from the perspective of the adult adoptee was done by Paton (1954). Paton is viewed as a pioneer in North American adoption research on adult adoptees (Aumend & Barrett, 1984), as well as a pioneer in the movement for change in attitudes toward adoption and toward the search (Marcus, 1979). Historically, the early 1950s was a time when the sealed record laws were in place throughout North America; when the belief that the past was unimportant and

that all ties with natural kin should be completely severed had reached a peak (McDonald, 1984); when the adoption of infants, not related to adopters by blood, had been increasing dramatically, particularly in the previous decade (Paton, 1954) . Also, at that time, much of the adoption legislation varied from state to state, practice varied within states, and there was a lack of common practice, as well as a lack of knowledge regarding differences in practice (Paton, 1954).

Paton took issue with the prevailing professional belief that the adoptive home was a complete substitute for what the child might have had with the natural parent, that as a result of the complete substitution there would be no need for the child to want to know anything about the past, and that the adoptive parents need not fear, "with this modern practice, that the home will be threatened by such a concern on the part of the child nor by the reappearance of a natural parent" (p. 94).

Paton viewed adoption as a life-long experience, as "a process which influences an individual life for many years beyond its initiation" (p. 7) and suggested that the experience of adoption changes with the years, as the adoptee matures. Paton also suggested that adoption could be viewed as "a failure of the resources which surround the child" (p. 17) . Paton's definition of adoption "incorporated the split between natural and adoptive parents" (p. 11) due to the "fact of separation between biological and social-cultural parentage" (p. 11) when

a child was placed for adoption. Paton believed that having two sets of parents would cause ambivalence for the adoptee at some point and "that the adopted have a life problem which can be described as a resolution of this ambivalence, some means of incorporating and managing a synthesis of two sets of parents, one set absent and partly unknown" (p. 11).

The intent of Paton's study was to gather information from adult adoptees, who up to that time had been silent, about their adoption experience. Paton believed the information gathered would be useful in trying to understand what adoption would mean to the thousands of infants that were adopted every year in North America. Paton also hoped to find evidence of cultural changes that might have been taking place during four decades of American life that were examined in the study.

Paton described the study as "a talking report" (p. 10), rather than statistical research. Forty adult adoptees were selected from those who replied to an advertisement placed by Paton. The sample consisted of 15 men and 25 women who had been placed for adoption between 1893 and 1933. The participants in the study completed a mailed questionnaire devised by Paton. Paton stated that the sample contained "much of the variability of adoption. At least it demonstrates the complexity of adoption as a life experience" (p. 10). Paton proposed two general hypotheses based on the data collected. Paton's first hypotheses was that "there are at least two primary factors in the life history of

any adopted individual" which influence "the extent to which he may wish to find his natural parents and acts upon such a wish" (p. 114). One of the factors is the amount of security experienced in the adoptive home during the childhood years, and the other factor is the self development of the adoptee. The second hypotheses was that the amount of involvement of the adoptive parents in the moves the adoptee "makes toward his natural parents is a strong determinant in the success of that contact and in the resolution which the person feels following it" (p. 125).

Paton addressed a number of different aspects of the adoption experience and much of what she found, and suggested, is still relevant today. This study also provides insight into adoption practice at that point in time, and is helpful in understanding what this could mean for infants who were placed for adoption during, and prior to the 1950s. Since there are few large scale studies from the perspective of the adult adoptee, and since this was one of the first, what follows is a summary of some of the findings of the study.

One of the first questions Paton asked in the study was how the adoptees had learned of their adoption and whether the revelation was stressful. Ten of the subjects in the study had been adopted when they were older, so had always been aware of their adoptive status.

Ten of the adoptees could not remember when they had been told they were adopted, but felt they had always known. This group included three subjects

whose parents had been open about the fact of adoption, but often withheld information about the details, in two cases the adoptive parents gave false information; and in one situation the adoptive mother continually emphasised "bad blood" (p. 63). In the other seven cases the adoptive parents were able to convey the fact of adoption to the child in a very natural way, and Paton suggested that they may have been aided by accepting relatives and an accepting community. For this group revelation was not stressful.

There was another group of 20 adoptees, who had all been adopted in infancy, who had found out that they had been adopted at a later age, and in varying ways. The group included five adoptees who were told by parents at a specific time, from age 5 until much later; some learned from outsiders, some overheard, some found adoption papers, and four were told by relatives (three of these four reported a poor relationship with adoptive parents). Paton drew an inference from the last situation that "revelation from a relative tends to indicate poor communication between parent and child" (p. 68). These adoptees did not blame the parents for not telling them, because they did not expect the parents to understand the importance of telling; however, they wished they had been told by their parents when they were young. Paton suggested that the adoptive parents that decided not to tell, or avoided telling, were influenced by the attitudes toward adoption that were prevalent in their culture at that time. For this group of adoptees revelation was stressful.

Paton also examined the relationship between communication about adoption within the adoptive family, and the "amount of adoption that took place among close acquaintances" (p.82). Paton reasoned that as a result of the increase in adoptions there was more access to other families who had also adopted children, and was also aware that there was "talk among adoptive families about adoption" (p. 83). Paton believed this would have some effect, especially among younger adoptees. However, Paton found little reference to talking to others who had been adopted, but did find some beginning evidence to support the relationship suggested by examining participants who had natural relatives living in the community. When the adoptive parents encouraged relations with these relatives the adoptee was able to communicate with ease on the subject of adoption, when the relations were discouraged, the adoptees' ability to discuss adoption was "restricted or self conscious" (p. 81). Paton noted that in the data there were many references to the resistance the adoptees experienced from their parents with regards to any discussion about the natural parents and suggested that communication with adoptive parents about adoption was difficult, especially if there were no other adopted children in the family circle.

The problems of adolescence were also addressed in this study. Paton found that problems experienced by participants in the study, who had been adopted between 1893 and 1933, were still being experienced by adoptees in the 1950s, however, "only eleven people have commented specifically upon this

growth period in their lives as being related to adoption" (p. 84) and suggested that the problems of adolescence "are not necessarily signs of an unfortunate adoption experience" (p. 84). Paton also suggested that adoptees have the same ways available to them as non-adoptees to resolve the problems of adolescence, for example: jobs, marriage, family, friends, etc. Paton analyzed whether there had been a statement of completion, of having outgrown problems related to adolescence, and found three participants who showed the least resolution. These people were still "not too well-adjusted in one or another aspect of life" (p. 86) by their own definition. Paton found that for most of the adoptees, the critical adolescent period was resolved, and did not persist into adulthood.

Paton stated that what adult adoptees who decide to search want to know "is simply a knowledge of background, a knowledge of what, who, how, when and why, to the extent that it is obtainable" (p. 104) in order to incorporate this into their understanding of their own life history as they mature. Paton emphasized the point that "somewhere along the line in every adoptive life, biology must be reckoned with" (p. 104). Many of the participants in the study indicated some internal difficulty, at one time or another, with their "background and adoption status" (p. 99) but, because they cared about their adoptive parents, they felt they could not push too hard for information from them when they sensed resistance to any type of discussion, so they often did not try to question any further. Paton suggested that the adoptee had two alternatives at this point, to decide that

background information was not that important, or to find another way to get background information. Paton also suggested that, in reality, "either under present or old practices" (p. 100) of adoption, the adoptive parents were not the best source of background information "through no fault of their own" (p. 100), since they had often only received minimal information themselves.

Of the 40 subjects in Paton's study, five (three male, two female) rejected the search in favour of the relationship with the adoptive parents. These adoptees felt completely happy and secure with their adoptive parents who provided them with "a complete illusion of parenthood" (p. 96). If a study was done on the adoptive parents in these situations, Paton suggested it would be interesting to find out if the adoptive parents also had the illusion that the children were "their own" and whether in turn "the illusion carries over to the children" (p. 97). There were eight (three male, five female) who were not ready to search but might in the future. Of this group, five had basically negative relationships with adoptive parents, two had fairly positive relationships, and in the other case the adoptive parent was dead.

Paton found three adoptees (one male, two female) who were ready to search. The male had a very negative relationship with his adoptive parents, one female had a fairly positive relationship with her adoptive family, and in the other situation both adoptive parents were dead. There were four adoptees (one male, three females) in search. In one situation the relationship with the adoptive

parents was negative; two had positive relationships with their elderly, widowed adoptive mothers; in the other situation the adoptive parent was dead.

Nine of the 40 adoptees (five male, four female) had completed their search. Six of this group had a fairly negative relationship with their adoptive parents, in two situations the adoptive parents were dead, and one was not classified. Six adoptees (female) were in contact with the natural families as they had been adopted when they were older; four (one male, two female, one unclassified) were aware of various members of their natural family and felt no need to search because it was their choice whether to contact them or not. One of the subjects was not classified out of the total group of 40.

Paton found that few adoptive parents encouraged the adoptees to search for their natural parents, but she also suggested that those who seek their natural parents on their own, without the involvement of the adoptive parents, were the ones that were more likely to remain with a problem, the same one they had felt when the search was started. Paton also suggested that many adopted people never had a secure relationship with their adoptive parents, and that it was this group of people who were most highly motivated to search. However, according to Paton's hypothesis "these are the people who are least likely to achieve synthesis and comfort even if their search is outwardly successful" (p. 126) .

This study found that there was a much more satisfying outcome of search when it was encouraged by the adoptive parents, in comparison to the outcome

when search was pursued without such encouragement. Paton suggested that search made after the death of adoptive parents had limits and conditions of another type and suggested that it would be better to search while the adoptive parents were still alive, and while there was still time for changes to be made in "attitudes and expectations" (p.163) between the adoptee and the adoptive parents. Paton found only two situations of people having a positive association with both sets of parents, both of these were older children when they were adopted, and contacts with natural families had not been discouraged. Paton asked "isn't it more possible to synthesize four parents, than two parents and two progenitors who never became parents?" (p.135).

A number of adoptees in this study expressed feelings of loneliness, no matter what their age or marital status. Feelings of resentment were also expressed by some of the adoptees toward their natural parents. Paton suggested that even those who showed no interest in natural parents might feel resentment toward the natural parents; however, some adopted people still tried to find their parents, despite these feelings of resentment. A number of adoptees said they had fantasized about their birth parents during childhood. Paton suggested that those adoptees who fantasized about their biological parents used it as a buffer against the pains of existence, but lost that security once they had to deal with their natural parents in realistic terms.

Paton also analyzed the subjects in terms of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their adoption experience by analyzing how many parents they seemed to have. There were 16 who were mainly two parent people; 12 who had a second set of parents whom they were frequently aware of; and 12 who either had two sets of parents (but neither set was sufficient) or else they had no parents. Paton suggested that the last group of people were those who felt their adoption did not work, or were ambivalent. Paton also suggested that this group contained most of the questioners, who would probably question any institution or life situation within which they had grown up, and that possibly it was in their nature to question no matter what kind of adoption situation they had been in. Paton found that the last group were the adoptions that were the least successful, and that this was the group that had experienced the most serious personality difficulties. Paton stated that on the whole the group was rather young so may not have reached the level of maturity that the older subjects in the study had.

In looking at the motives for the search, Paton suggested that at certain life crisis points adoptees may wish to make contact with their natural parents, and they either let the feeling evaporate and become philosophical about it, or they take action and initiate a search. Paton found that a number of the searchers were those who had begun the search at a time when it looked like they might become parents themselves. Some searched in secrecy, others did not search until their adoptive parents were dead, very few received support for the

search from the adoptive parents, even when the relationship was basically positive.

In the evaluation of the adoption experience, and of the institution of adoption, Paton stated that it was difficult for people who had not been adopted to understand "the curiosity and the special problems of the adopted child and growing young person" (p. 157) unless they could draw on some experience of their own that had caused similar feelings for themselves. Paton suggested that if the institution of adoption is to succeed, one of the requirements for those who adopt might be that they have some such experience which would enable them to more fully understand their developing child. Paton also suggested that matching the child and the adoptive parents on physical characteristics might be less important that matching on some similarity of background experiences in order that there be some "common ground with the adopted child"(p. 158).

Paton emphasized the importance of conducting a study on the adoptive parents, prior to adoption, in order to examine their values, their experience, and their ability to understand their growing child's needs and curiosity about the past, as well as understand other issues that were examined in the study from the perspective of the adult adoptee. Paton also recommended that attention must be given to develop a way for adoptees to satisfy their interest in their heritage and background, especially since they are "a part of a culture which has expressed

racial interest through the institution of the family, emphasis upon generations, and the continuity of same" (p.159).

Another recommendation of the study was that research needed to be done on the adoptive parents, and "an analysis will need to be made of the various attitudes which are had by adoptive parents toward natural parents" (p. 162). From the information gathered in the study, Paton believed that the attitudes of the adoptive parents toward the natural parents, as they were perceived by the adoptee during the developing years, had a strong influence "upon the subjective life of the adopted child" (p. 162). Paton also believed the attitudes could have an effect on the adoptees' ability to synthesize "two sets of parents" (p. 163) as well as be one of the main reasons why adoptees conducted their search in secrecy, or waited to search until the adoptive parents were dead.

Paton believed that the silence of adoptees, and often of adoptive parents, needed to be changed into a sharing of experiences among those involved, or planning to be involved, with the adoption experience. By sharing experiences, individual approaches to try to resolve what is seen as an individual family problem, would be replaced with "a broader cultural knowledge" (p. 163) of the issues involved in the developing, maturing, and ongoing adoption experience.

A study, from the perspective of adult adoptees who were in search, was done in Scotland by Triseliotis (1973). Over a one year period Triseliotis interviewed 70 (29 male, 41 female) adult adoptees who had contacted Register

House in Edinburgh requesting information from their original birth certificate (adult adoptees, in Scotland, have been able to request their original records ever since the first adoption legislation was passed in 1930). The intent of the study was to examine both the past and the present situations of adoptees who were searching for information about their past, and to "examine their motivation for the search, their needs and general outlook" (p. 154).

The information on the birth register included where and when they were born, who the original parents were and where they lived, as well as the occupation of the mother and the father at the time of the birth. However, because most adoptees were illegitimate, the information about the father was often missing (Triseliotis, 1973).

Triseliotis stated that very few adoptees sought information about their genealogical past; in Scotland only about 1.5 per thousand between the years of 1961 to 1970 applied to Register House. Triseliotis stated that most of the adoptees who participated in the study searched as a result of "a deeply felt psychological need" (p. 154). Two groups of searchers were identified early in the study, Group 1 (60% of the sample) were those who wanted to find one or both of their natural parents (three out of five wanted to find their birth mother); and Group 2 (37% of the sample) were those who were searching mainly for sociological and biological background information. Triseliotis found the two groups differed in a number of ways.

In examining issues around adoption revelation Triseliotis found that three out of five of the subjects had learned of their adoption after the age of ten, and many had learned during adolescence or later. Those who found out late, or found out from outside sources, were "the most hurt and upset" (p. 155) and if there were other problems experienced within the adoptive family, the relationship was often damaged beyond repair. Comments made by the adoptees led Triseliotis to the view "that adoption is felt as a form of abandonment or rejection irrespective of the quality of other experiences" (p. 155).

The data from the study also indicated that those who found out late felt more rejected than those who had found out under the age of ten. Those who found out late were initially shocked and stunned, went through a grief period, then became extremely critical and angry at their adoptive parents for not telling and, finally, turned their thoughts and feelings toward their natural parents, particularly their mother. Those who had learned before the age of 11 did not remember being affected so strongly, "except when the revelation took a destructive and vindictive form" (Triseliotis, 1973, p. 156). Triseliotis suggested that when the adoptee learned at a younger age, and when the family relationships were caring and accepting, "there is time for the trauma to heal" (p. 155) but when the adoptee learned during adolescence or in adulthood, "the possibility of a healing process is considerably diminished" (p. 155).

Triseliotis found that many adoptees perceived their adoptive parents unwillingness to discuss, or share, background information with them as "a lack of trust and precariously built relationships" (p. 156) rather than as being "deliberately withheld because of the parents' fear and anxieties" (p. 156). Those adoptees who accepted the possibility that the adoptive parents might have been trying to protect them, by withholding or distorting information, said it would have been better to know the truth, and deal with it, "than to live with lies and have their trust in their parents shaken" (p. 156). Many adoptees developed the feeling that there was something "shameful" about adoption, as a result of their adoptive parents secrecy and evasion, and that feeling was "often reinforced by negative community attitudes" (p. 156). Triseliotis stated that this feeling often "contributed to the development of a poor self-image" (p. 156) in the adopted person.

When adoptees had been given no background information, or when it was given in a hostile way, often with negative comments about the birth parents, the motivation to search was strong, and the goal was to find the birth parents, especially the mother. Those adoptees who had heard something positive about their birth parents from the adoptive parents, and who had some information about their background, were generally searching more for genealogical information, and their motivation to search was not as strong (Triseliotis, 1973).

Triseliotis found that the early teens was the time many adoptees desperately wanted information from their adoptive parents about their birth parents and background, and that this need appeared to peak in the mid-teens. Triseliotis stated that this need "appeared to be closely associated with the adoptees' efforts to establish their identity as individuals, wanting at the same time to integrate their first parents into their system in order to feel more complete" (p. 157). Many of the adoptees in the study said that if this need had been satisfied at the time, it would probably have helped them to understand both themselves and others better, and might have lessened their "preoccupation with their first set of parents" (p. 157). However, the adoptees made it clear "that some preoccupation with one's origins never stops except with death" (p. 157).

Triseliotis found that when there was "little or no communication about the adoption situation, that there was a lack of communication about other things as well" (p. 157). In some families the lack of communication was indicative of a family that did not function well, no matter which social class the family belonged to. Adoptees who experienced this lack of communication about adoption issues "felt deprived of what they saw as their birthright to know" (p. 157).

Many of the adoptees also expressed dissatisfaction with "the quality of their family relationships" (Triseliotis, 1973, p. 158). They saw their life in their family "as unsatisfactory, lacking in feeling and warmth and as having failed to develop in them a sense of attachment, belonging and pride in being adopted" (p.

158). The adoptees did not feel they were treated any differently from the biological children, if there were any, and that the adoptive parents' biological children had been just as unhappy in their life at home as the adoptees had been. A number of the adoptees in the study described situations in their adoptive homes in which they suffered both physical and emotional neglect. What adoptees really wanted in their adoptive parents were qualities such as love, warmth and acceptance. Triseliotis found that the adoptees in his study saw the quality of family relationships to be of prime importance and "were aware that a feeling of belonging and pride in oneself does not come from certain words but from the totality of relationships and the feeling behind what is said" (p. 147).

Adoptees who perceived that their life in their adoption home had been unhappy usually had a poor self-image. Many of these adoptees "had a negative image of themselves and talked of their inner 'void', their desolation and general incapacity to form meaningful relationships with other people" (Triseliotis, 1973, p. 158). Triseliotis found that almost two out of every five adoptees in the sample had either received psychiatric help at some time in their lives, or were still receiving treatment, and further suggested that "others were in obvious need of such help" (p. 158). Triseliotis stated that for some the search was "assuming greater importance than the goal" (p. 158) as it was the only way they were able to keep themselves together. Triseliotis found that the more dissatisfaction the adoptees felt with themselves and their adoptive relationships, the more likely that

they would search for their birth parents, whereas those who were more positive about themselves and their relationship with their adoptive parents would more likely be searching for background information.

The adoptees had often thought about searching in their adolescent years, but often didn't start to search until there was some sort of crisis in their lives. Triseliotis found that the events that initiated the search were usually "the death of one or both parents, illness, expectation of a child, pending marriage or separation or when inner pressures could no longer be contained" (p. 159). When one or both of the adoptive parents died the adoptee often had a strong urge to find the natural parents, usually the mother, but the strength of the urge "varied depending on the quality of the adoptees' earlier home life" (p. 159).

Triseliotis found that the adoptees' expectations of the search were closely related to the amount of information they had received and whether it was positive or negative, with the perceived quality of their life in the adoption home, with their own self-image, and with the type of stress they were under at the time. All the adoptees wanted to know who their natural parents were, why they were given up for adoption, and whether they had been wanted and loved. The adoptees who had been dissatisfied hoped to develop a relationship with their birth family, and the more unhappy adoptees hoped "for nourishment from mainly the mother" (p. 159). The more satisfied adoptees wanted information "that would help them to complete themselves" (p. 159). The adoptees who did

manage a meeting usually experienced "some disillusionment" but after the contact "found it easier to come to terms with their condition and circumstances" (p. 160).

Triseliotis stated that the majority of adoptees who were searching for background information, and most of the adoptees who were searching for their natural parents, "were unhappy and lonely people" (p. 160). Triseliotis concluded from the study that the factors that either separately, or together, influenced those who searched mainly for their birth parents were: the lack of genealogical or background information, or the disclosure of only negative information; unhappy and unsatisfying relationships in the adoptive home; a negative or poor self-image; "and having had psychiatric help" (p. 160).

There were a number of implications for practice identified by Triseliotis in this study. These included "the developing child's need for a warm, caring and secure family life; the adoptees' vulnerability to experiences of loss, rejection or abandonment" (p. 160); and the adoptees' need to know their "genealogical background" and "the circumstances of their adoption" so they can "integrate these facts into their developing personality" (p. 160). Triseliotis recommended that the background information be put in writing so that the facts could not be forgotten or misinterpreted by the adoptive parent in their discussions with the child. Triseliotis also recommended that the adoption agency of the future should provide ongoing services to all of those who are involved in the adoption process,

the adoptive parents, the adoptee, and the natural parents, and that agencies should "see adoption as part of a continuum and give equal emphasis to its different stages" (p. 163).

Baran, Sorosky, and Pannor (1975) studied 50 adult adoptees who had been placed for adoption with non-relatives before they were three years old. The subjects ranged in age from 20 to 77, and most of the subjects were female (41). The study found that the subjects' initial goal of the search was to find their birth mothers and "through their mothers, they hoped to discover their origins" (p. 42).

Many of the subjects had thought about searching for their birth parents during adolescence, but did not begin the actual search until they were adults. Many were afraid of hurting their adoptive parents, they either waited until the adoptive parents had died, or conducted their search in secrecy (Baran et al., 1975).

The reasons given for the initiation of the actual search were "a need for medical information, an interest in genealogy or ethnic derivations, or simply curiosity" (Baran et al., p. 42). The study found that "the search usually coincided with an important change in their lives such as marriage, pregnancy, the birth of a child" and further stated "it was clear that their sense of a lack of generational continuity played an important role" (p. 42) in initiating the search. Baran et al. found that all the adoptees had begun the search with "a sense of guilt, an

awareness that they were different from others and alone in their need to know more about themselves" (p. 42). Although many of the subjects had some fear of what they might find out about their birth parents, or that they might be rejected, they took the risk "because their need to know was so great" (p. 42).

The study also included information from birth parents. Baran et al. suggested that most birth mothers "harbour a desire to reunite with the children they gave up" (p. 42), and even though they may have "fear and anxiety" (p. 42) about the reunion most would be prepared to take the risk. As societal attitudes change toward mothers who have had "children out of wedlock" (p. 42), Baran et al. suggested that more birth mothers would be less concerned "that revealing their past will threaten their futures" (p. 42).

The birth fathers who contributed to the study did not appear to have the same "emotional scars" (Baran et al., 1975, p. 42) as the birth mothers, and appeared to be less concerned about the ongoing lives of their children. However, some of the birth fathers felt they had been "betrayed" by the birth mother when she relinquished the child, and that the laws regarding adoption discriminated against them. Some of the birth fathers had not known of the child, but were happy to be found, others were actively searching, and others hoped to be found someday by their child.

Some adoptive parents also provided input for the study. Baran et al. found that the adoptive parents feared that if the sealed records were opened

that they might lose the love of their adopted child to the birth parents. Baran et al. suggested that adoptive parents were probably more possessive than non-adoptive parents, mainly because of their fear of losing their children to the birth parents. However, Baran et al. stated that the findings from their study clearly indicated that "adoptive parents are the true psychological parents" (p. 43) and that in most cases the reunion with the natural parents "gave new meaning to the adoptive relationship" (p. 43). The study found that almost all the adoptees, after their reunion experience, "felt closer, less confused, and more intimately connected" (p. 43) with their adoptive parents. Baran et al. found that the quality of the relationship between the adoptee and the adoptive parents had little to do with the search. They stated that "the uppermost consideration appears to be the need to establish a clearer self-identity" (p. 43) and that the need to find the birth parents was related more to other factors such as the adoptees' "own personality, the feeling that he may be different from his adoptive family, the way and the time he discovered he was adopted, or his position as an only child of older parents" (p. 43).

Baran et al. (1975) made a number of recommendations, some similar to those of Paton (1954) and Triseliotis (1973). The recommendations made included the need for openness and honesty regarding adoption matters; that adoption should be viewed as a life long process and that counselling should be

available as needed; and that the sealed records should be opened to adult adoptees as they were in Scotland, Finland and Israel.

Triseliotis (1984) reviewed findings from a study he had previously conducted in which he compared 44 adult adoptees and 40 adults who had been in foster care. Triseliotis studied the groups based on three areas which were considered important to identity formation, these included: "(i) a childhood experience of feeling wanted and loved within a secure environment; (ii) knowledge about one's background and personal history; and (iii) the experience as being perceived by others as a worthwhile person" (p. 151).

The study found that most adoptees had felt secure in their home but had sensed the anxiety and discomfort "of their parents in talking to them about their adoption and their original family" (Triseliotis, 1984, p. 156). Triseliotis found that 25% of the adoptees had not found out they were adopted until after the age of 12, and that 75% of the adoptees "said that there was little or no discussion about their families of origin and the circumstances surrounding their adoption" (p. 159). Despite the lack of communication about adoption, Triseliotis found that the adoptees in general had "a strong sense of belonging to their adoptive families" (p. 167). Triseliotis also found that the rate of adoptees who had needed psychiatric help in their childhood, or in the year preceding the interview, was the same as that in the rest of the population. The study also found that community attitudes were less negative, as experienced by the adoptees, than they

had been in his earlier study (Triseliotis, 1973); that the adoptees were less bothered by the fact that their birth parents had not been married; Triseliotis (1984) suggested that "perhaps this is an indication of changing community perceptions and more enlightened attitudes" (p. 162). The importance of "being honest and truthful with children", as well as "the importance of the past in contributing to the formation of a whole self" (p. 158) were clearly stated in this study as they had been in his earlier study (Triseliotis, 1973). Triseliotis also stated that "negative childhood, emotional, social and learning experiences, such as discontinuity of care, emotional neglect and anxious parenting, and a lack of security can contribute to undermine the development of a secure sense of identity" (Triseliotis, 1984, p. 152). Triseliotis did not believe that the adoptive parents inability or unwillingness to discuss adoption issues would be enough to destroy the relationship with the adopted child, providing it was basically a good relationship, however, he stated that it could "cause distress and generate increased curiosity, threatening the strength of the relationship" (p. 160).

Aumend and Barrett (1984) compared 66 adult adoptees who identified themselves as searchers, and 47 adult adoptees who identified themselves as non-searchers, on a number of different variables. The study found a number of significant differences between the two groups. Their data indicated that non-searchers had a more positive self image; were more positive both toward the adoptive mother and toward the adoptive father; were more positive regarding

their feelings about being adopted while they were growing up; had less concern about background information and also knew less about their background information; had been placed in their adoption home at an earlier age; and reported a greater degree of happiness. There were also differences between the two groups as to when they had learned about their adoption, 49% of non-searchers and 33.8% of the searchers had learned by age 3, and 73.6% of the non-searchers and 60.6% of the searchers had learned of their adoption by age six. Of all the subjects, in both groups, 60.3% had been told of their adoption by their adoptive parents, but more of the non-searchers had learned of their adoption from their parents, rather than from other sources. Aumend and Barrett also found that non-searchers were more positive about the initial revelation of adoption than searchers had been.

Aumend and Barrett examined searchers and non-searchers opinions toward the sealed records. For the whole sample, 51% supported open records and 14% favoured keeping the records closed, however, 77% of the searchers supported open adoption records whereas only 12% of the non-searchers favoured open records; none of the searchers favoured closed records but 26% of non-searchers did. None of the adoptees believed that the records should be open to biological parents and none of the respondents believed that the records should be open to minor adoptees.

Aumend and Barrett compared 19 searchers who had not yet had a reunion, and 14 searchers who had had a reunion, to see what effect the reunion experience had on resolving identity conflicts. They found that the scores for the post-reunion searchers were more positive but there was nothing statistically significant, on any sub scale of the instrument they used, between the two groups.

Aumend and Barrett found that searchers and non-searchers were "different from each other on almost every measure that was applied" (p. 258) and recommended that research on searching adult adoptees should not be generalized to non-searching adoptees and that the reverse was also true. Aumend and Barrett concluded by stating that "adult adoptees in this study do not have negative self-concepts, did not experience poor adopter-adoptee relationships, and the majority did not experience revelation of adoption status as disruptive or late" (p. 258). Aumend and Barrett found that the majority of adoptees were happy during their growing up years, with only 12% of the sample reporting that they had been unhappy in their adoption home.

Kowal and Schilling (1985) surveyed 110 adult adoptees who had contacted a placement agency or a search group over a one year period from 1982-83. The subjects ranged in age from 17 to 77, 75% of the subjects were female, and all but two of the subjects were Caucasian.

Kowal and Schilling found that although most of the subjects had been told early of their adoption, very few had received much information about their

biological parents, or "their own pre-adoption history" (p. 356). Kowal and Schilling stated that it was not clear whether the adoption agencies did not provide the information to the adoptive parents, whether the adoptive parents had withheld or distorted information, or whether the adoptees had forgotten "or minimized the information actually given" (p. 357).

Kowal and Schilling also examined fantasies about biological parents. They found that the subjects who were searching for biological relatives "were significantly more likely to recall a high degree of involvement in fantasies about their biological parents during both childhood and adolescence" (p. 357) than the adoptees who were searching mainly for background information. They also found that there was an increase in fantasy about the biological parents during adolescence, as well as a deterioration in the relationship with the adoptive parents.

The study also looked at how adoptees themselves felt about being adopted and found "a very wide spread of attitudes with approximately equal endorsement of positive, neutral, and negative feelings about being adopted" (Kowal & Schilling, 1985, p.358). About 33% of the sample reported that they had felt chosen, or special; 21% reported feeling different; approximately 25% "reported feeling worried or insecure about being adopted; 17.27% reported feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable with the fact of their adoption" (p. 358).

The reasons for actually beginning the search were also addressed by Kowal and Schilling. The most common "precipitants" appeared to be related to "the anticipation or arrival of their own child" (p. 359) as 24% of the subjects mentioned pregnancy, birth or adoption of a child as the reason they began the search. Kowal and Schilling suggested that concerns about heredity, as well as questions about their birth mother (such as why they had been given up, and whether they had been loved) would probably surface at these times. Other reasons for beginning the search included the encouragement of a significant other, medical conditions, and "some disruptive change in the relationship with or between the adoptive parents -- their death, divorce, or estrangement from the adoptee" (p. 359). Kowal and Schilling also noted that Triseliotis (1973) and other researchers had found "the strong association between searching for biological parents and the arrival of one's own child" (p. 359). Kowal and Schilling found that most subjects need to search fell into one of the following categories: "to fill a void; to understand themselves better; to obtain medical history; to obtain a sense of belonging" (p. 360). The subjects in the last group tended to be more critical about their adoptive families and "tended to rate their relationship with parents (especially their mothers during adolescence) as much poorer" (p. 361).

In conclusion, Kowal and Schilling stated that their survey suggested "that frequent fantasies about biological parents are common in a non clinical sample"

(p. 361) and not necessarily a sign of mental health problems as some previous studies had suggested, but also suggested that more research was needed. Kowal and Schilling found, as had many other studies, that females tend to search more often than males, and suggested that more research was needed on the differences between males and females in their perception of the adoption experience. This study found that approximately 15% of the sample were looking for their birth family in order to develop a sense of belonging, and that this group also had very little information about their birth family or their own pre-adoptive history. Kowal and Schilling also suggested that with the "increasing recognition that adoption is a life-long process" (p. 361), services should be provided on an ongoing basis to adoptees and their families, and that the results from their study indicated that the provision of services during the adoptees' adolescence, as well as at the time of pregnancy or after the birth of a child, could be optimal times for offering counselling services.

Auth and Zaret (1986) viewed the search as "a developmental task in the quest for identity for the adoptee" (p. 560) and stated that the search had its origins in the sealed record laws that had been designed to protect the privacy of the birth family, as well as to provide confidentiality for the adoptive family. They also suggested that with the advent of older children being placed for adoption it was no longer expected that privacy and confidentiality be maintained, and that this had helped to create a new openness in adoption.

The fact that the environment of the adoptive home, as well as "genetic influences" (Auth & Zaret, 1986, p. 561) have an effect on the adoptee's personality is the reason that adolescent adoptees "feel the need to reconcile both influences into their total being" (p. 561). Auth and Zaret viewed the search process of the adult adoptee as "unique in each situation" (p. 562) as well as "a process with many stages. It often serves as a developmental task that must be worked on over a long period" (p. 568). Auth and Zaret suggested that the search can enhance the adoptee/adoptive parent relationship in that the adoptees often come to "realize that their adoptive parents are their nurturers and are able to complement this relationship with the knowledge of their biological heritage" (p. 562). Auth and Zaret also suggested that just as the adoptee has to "learn to see him- or herself as an independent adult" so must both sets of parents, the birth parents and the adoptive parents, "learn to see the child as both part of and apart from themselves" (p. 562).

Rosenzweig-Smith (1988) studied 31 adult adoptees who had begun to search for their biological parents during the previous three years. The respondents (26 female, 5 male) ranged in age from 19 to 42, 78% of the subjects had at least some college and 20% had graduate degrees. The study found the two main reasons for the search were for information and "to fill a void" (p. 417) and that only 13% gave their motivation for the search as being a poor relationship with adoptive parents. The study found that 84% of the subjects

reported that they had fantasized about their biological parents, and that they had tended to fantasize more about their birth mother than their birth father. Rosenzweig-Smith also examined the impact of the search on the relationship with the adoptive parents and found "that 67.7% (n=21) of the subjects reported that their search and reunion activities had no effect on their relationship with their adoptive parents; 22.6% (n=7) reported the relationship improved, and one subject reported that the relationship became worse" (p.421).

Schoborg-Winterberg and Shannon (1988) conducted a study on 94 adult adoptees in search of background information and compared them with a group of 82 adult non-adoptees to see if there were differences in psychosocial adjustment. Schoborg-Winterberg and Shannon stated that the adoption experience brings "many issues to the surface that may affect an adoptee's adjustment" (p. 66) but the fact that these issues surface does not mean that the adoptee is, or will be, maladjusted. The study "found no difference between adjustment of adopted and non-adopted adults" (p. 66).

Andersen (1989) suggested searchers could be classified as belonging to one of three different groups based on their views "as to the strategic nature and function of search" (p. 624). Andersen also suggested that all adoptees "probably subscribe, knowingly or not, to all of these views simultaneously, although usually with different emphases -- sometimes markedly so" (p. 624).

The three different groups suggested by Andersen are: those who view the search as adventure; those who see the search as a cure; and those who search in order to grow. Those who view the search as adventure are seeking, "to get together with his or her biological family for the purpose of being together and of sharing future experience" (p. 624). While this may be a somewhat simplistic view, Andersen suggested that there is an element of this in all searchers.

Andersen stated that one of the reasons that adoptees often give for the search is that "they hope for a change in the way they experience themselves as people. Adoptees often experience a vague dissatisfaction with their lives ... as though they never quite belong, or that they are not complete people" (p. 623) and, that they hope the search will somehow "fill in the hole" and increase their "cohesiveness and identity" (p. 623). Andersen stated that adoptees search for many things on many difference conceptual levels including the "search for roots, for connection, for identity" (p.625). When adoptees search because they are feeling incomplete as persons, it was Andersen's contention that the intent of the search becomes "more complex than mere adventure .... Search has taken on the purpose of personal change" (p. 626).

According to Andersen there are "two general models of the therapeutic nature of search" (p. 626), the "Medical (Deficiency) Model" (p. 626) and the "Psychological (Trauma) Model" (p. 629). In the medical model the adoptee is seen as deficient in something "that exists outside themselves" (p. 626) which can

be remedied only by search, and reunion. Once they receive the information they need, and have the experience of the reunion, there can be closure. The psychological model "views the etiology of the adoptee problem to be a psychological trauma" (p. 629) and the problem is internal -- the adoptee needs "to get something out" (p. 630). In this model the search is based on taking control and taking action, and "one is not fighting for specific information, but rather for the generic right to be treated in relation to such information in the same manner as everyone else in society, not protected like a child, not lied to like a fool, and not restricted like a second-class citizen" (p. 631). Andersen stated that "the goal in the medical model is cure, the goal in the psychological model is growth" (p. 631).

Sachdev (1991) conducted a study in Canada during the period 1983-84 on the attitudes of the three members of the 'adoption triangle' toward the degree of openness there should be in the adoption information that is released to each of them. The study used a "time series" (p. 243) method to study the 76 adoptive couples over three different periods and used the same method for the 78 birth mothers over two different periods in order to compare, over time, the adoptive parents on changes in attitudes and the birth mothers on changes in marital status. The 53 adult adoptees who took part in the study were contacted through their adoptive parents and were then interviewed. The method used was an in-depth interview, using a semi-structured questionnaire.

The study found that there appeared to be "broad areas of agreement among the three groups represented in this study" (Sachdev, 1991, p. 248). The three groups basically agreed, with a number of qualifications, that "the adoption information should be made available to the parties involved in the adoption" (p. 248). There was apparent concern, in all three groups, regarding the motives of the others involved in the adoption. Sachdev suggested that "as long as these fears persist, there is little hope of effective reform" (p. 248) but that, over time, as more reunions prove successful, and that as a result the adoptive parents find the relationship between themselves and the adoptee is enhanced more often than threatened, there will be less "resistance to change in each of these three groups, especially that of the adoptive parents" (p. 249) and the result will be more "acceptance of openness in adoption" (p. 249).

This study also found that all members of the three groups exhibited "considerable concern for the other parties' interests and feelings" (Sachdev, 1991, p. 248). The data showed that adoptees were not searching in order to substitute the birth parents for the adoptive parents; that most birth mothers wanted a reunion with the child they had relinquished, but often did not take the initiative as they were fearful of intruding on the lives of either the adoptive parents or the child; and the adoptees felt that the birth mothers right to privacy was more important than "their own need to know" (p. 249).

Sachdev stated that adoption had undergone significant changes in the last few years, particularly with the development of the "search movement" (p. 241) and that this had put agencies "under pressure ... to revise their traditional adoption policies on sharing of information" (p. 241). While there have been some changes in legislation in various areas in Canada and the United States, other areas still practice the "traditional policy favouring closed records" (p. 241). The problems inherent in legislative change include addressing the issue of the right to privacy of the various members of the adoption triad, and the ongoing controversy between the professionals on how open adoption should be (Sachdev, 1991).

Campbell, Silverman and Patti (1991) used a mail-out questionnaire to examine the reunion experience of 114 adult adoptees "who actually had a face-to-face meeting with one or both of their birth parents" (p. 329). Some of the subjects (11.4%) had been found by the birth parents, the rest (88.6%) had searched for their birth parents and also tended to be older than those who were found by birth parents. Ages of the subjects ranged from 18 to 58; 103 were female and 11 were male; most (74.6%) were adopted prior to six months of age and were placed through agencies rather than privately; and the subjects had "an average of 2.6 years of schooling after high school" (p. 330).

The findings of the study included: the majority of the subjects (70%) had "always known of their adoption" (Campbell et al., 1991, p. 331) although some

were not told until adolescence; and that most adoptees saw their families as "communicative, loving and supportive" (p. 331) although some reported that their families "were secretive, judgemental, distant, cold, or abusive" (Campbell et al., 1991, p. 331).

The study also addressed whether discussion about adoption changed over time. Most of the subjects indicated that there was no change "in the way the fact of the adoption was treated over the years" (p. 331) but the data appeared to indicate that if any change did occur "the family members of those who did not search became more closed, whereas those who were searching experienced more openness" (p. 331). Campbell et al. suggested that it might have been easier to begin the search in situations where the adoptive family was "more open and able to modify the way they talk about adoption as the child matures" (p. 331).

A number of adoptees (45%) received background information from their adoptive parents. However, 32% of the subjects were told by their adoptive parents that they had no background information, but 23% of the subjects "said that their adoptive parents had identifying information" (Campbell et al., 1991, p.331) which had not been given to them. Most of the searchers found their background information during the process of the search.

Some of the subjects indicated that their adoptive parents "openly acknowledged the birth parents" (p. 331), others were more closed and secretive, and some parents used the fact of adoption in a "punitive" (p. 331) way.

Campbell et al. suggested that "some families could not acknowledge their difference from others (Kirk, 1964, 1985) and felt that their child's adoption was something to be denied" (Campbell et al., 1991, p. 331).

Campbell et al. found that the motive for the search, and what the adoptees hoped to gain from the reunion "seemed intertwined" (p. 332). The data indicated four different motives: "life-cycle transition, desire for information, hope for a relationship with the birth parent, and wish for self-understanding" (p. 332). Most of the adoptees (65%) wanted various types of information, including both medical information and the reason for relinquishment. Sixteen percent hoped to develop a relationship with their birth parents and six percent "wanted to understand themselves better" as well as wished for a "historical sense of themselves" (p. 332). Campbell et al. stated that the adoptees "need to know seemed to be tied to a sense of loss the adoptees experienced, which they felt would be healed by making a connection with their origins" (p. 332).

The findings of the study, regarding the outcome of the reunion experience, were that almost all the adoptees indicated that there had been no negative effects on themselves or on their own family, and also felt their "self-esteem was greatly improved" (Campbell et al., 1991, p. 333). The 53 subjects who responded to the question, as to the effect of the reunion on the adoptive parents, indicated that in 42% of the situations the effect had been positive, 30%

reported that there had been no effect, and 28% indicated that there had been negative effects, which most hoped would only be temporary.

Campbell et al. concluded that their study did not support previous findings that adoptees who searched did so because they had been dissatisfied with their adoptive family. Their data also indicated "that it may be easier to search when the adoptive family is supportive" (p. 334). The respondents in the study also suggested that adoptive parents should be better prepared to meet the needs of their adopted children for information about their origins, and also be prepared for the possibility that their adopted son or daughter may seek a reunion with birth family members in order to "bring the two parts of themselves together so that they can build a sense of self that feels complete to them" (p. 334). The adoptees in the study indicated that 'openness' about adoption would strengthen the adoptive family rather than disrupt it. Campbell et al. (1991) also suggested that their data seemed "to indicate that adoptees have room for several parental images that frame who they are" and that the "relationships do not compete, but together make up the adopted person's identity" (p. 334).

Literature on Adoption in Relation to the Adoptive Family

Feigleman and Silverman (1983) began a study in 1973 on 737 adoptive families and conducted a follow-up study in 1980-1981 on 372 of these adoptive families who responded to their questionnaire. The study compared preferential adopters (couples who were fertile and who had biological children before

adopting) with infertile adopting couples. The study examined the motives for adoption and defined preferential adopters as being those couples who "are often inspired by religious, social, or humanitarian motives to seek adoption of a child in addition to their biological offspring" (p.60).

Feigleman and Silverman examined the adjustment of adopted children in the adoptive home and stated that their "most critical finding was that when all of the other variables in the equation were held constant, preferential adoption was positively associated with children's adjustments" (p.72). The variables included the age of child at adoption and the response of family, friends and neighbours to the adoption. The most influential variable in predicting children's adjustments was mother's stress. Feigleman and Silverman stated that their data suggested that over time "the fertility status of adoptive parents becomes inconsequential in influencing adjustment outcomes" (p.76). In a follow-up study of trans-racial adoption and the effect of previously significant variables on children's adjustment, Feigleman and Silverman found that the responses of friends and neighbours was the only variable to achieve statistical significance.

Feigleman and Silverman also addressed the issue of the search controversy and adoptive parents' attitude toward the search. They found that more adoptive parents were supportive of the search than earlier studies, such as Triseliotis (1973), had suggested. Feigleman and Silverman (1983) found that 68% of preferential adopters "showed varying degrees of approval of the trend

to help adoptees learn about their birth parents and make contact with them, compared with 56% among infertile adoptive parents" (p.203). Many of the preferential adopters expected that their eldest adopted child would search for birth parents. Feigleman and Silverman also found that 73% of the preferential adoptive fathers had given their children all the information they had about birth parents in comparison to 64% of the infertile adoptive fathers. The adoptive mothers in the two groups showed similar trends to the fathers. The study also found that mothers tended to be more supportive of the search than fathers, and that certain social and political characteristics of mothers in particular, tended to correlate with support of the search; these included four or more years of college, political liberalism, lack of religious affiliation, and membership in adoptive parents groups. Feigleman and Silverman found support for their hypothesis that membership in adoptive parents groups "would help to promote more empathetic behavior and more understanding and appreciation of the wants and needs of adopted children" (p.204).

Feigleman and Silverman found that most of the adoptive parents (60%) had told their children that they were adopted before the age of three. Feigleman and Silverman found that their data did not indicate that, for the adoptees, the timing of the revelation was important in "explaining variations in their psychological well-being and their likelihood to engage in reunion-seeking

behavior" (p.225). Feigleman and Silverman suggested that perhaps the manner in which they were told of their adoption was more important than the timing.

The study also found that adoptive parents whose children "engaged in more searching efforts were felt by their adoptive parents to be more poorly adjusted psychologically" (Feigleman & Silverman, 1983, p. 225) than reported by the parents whose children did not attempt to search. Feigleman and Silverman suggested that the reason for this difference could either be the adoptive parents reaction to the prospect of the search, or that "the poorer adjustments among adoptees who search result from problems in the adoptive parent-child relationship" (p. 225). Feigleman and Silverman also stated that "adoptive parents frequently deny the differences between adoption and birth parenthood; this denial can result in problems for both parent and child. In this situation the child's interest in pursuing the search could easily reflect the tensions generated by denial" (p. 226). Feigleman and Silverman suggested that further research was needed in this area.

Kirk (1984) found differences in adoptive parents' ways of coping with adoptive parenthood and developed his theory of adoptive relations from this. Kirk found that adoptive parents who used the coping mechanism "acknowledgement-of-difference" (p. 98) tended to rely more on interpersonal skills than tradition to maintain internal order in their family and that "in the situation of adoption, these skills imply empathic and ideational communication

with the child about his background" (p. 99). The final point in Kirk's theory is that "coping activities of the type of 'acknowledgement-of-difference' are conducive to good communication and thus to order and dynamic stability in adoptive families. Coping activities of the type of 'rejection-of-difference' on the other hand, can be expected to make for poor communication with subsequent disruptive results for the adoptive relationship" (p. 99).

Kirk noted that there was not sufficient data available to state conclusively that good communication between adoptive parents and their children "fosters cohesiveness of the parent-child relationship" (p. 96), but that a clinical report done by Eleanor Lemon (1959) "suggests that the inability of adoptive parents to communicate with their children on the subject of the natural parents, adversely affects the parent-child relationship" (p. 96).

Kirk found that: adoptive parents who had good interpersonal skills and who were able to communicate ideas, and demonstrate empathy for the adopted child in discussions about his or her background, tended to express the greatest satisfaction with the adoptive relationship and tended to 'acknowledge-the-difference' between adoptive and biological parenthood; 'acknowledgment-of-difference' tended to correlate with good communication skills and with the ability to use empathic communication; 'rejection-of-difference' tended to be associated with greater deprivation as measured by longer periods of childlessness; fecund adopters who had a biological child first, and adopted later, tended to be more

willing to 'acknowledge-the-difference'; and that fecund adopters who adopted first, and later had a biological child, tended to 'reject-the-difference' (these fecund adopters were seen as more deprived as they had been childless longer).

Kirk stated that there was an "addition to the theory -- really a limitation" (p. 176) and that the limitation of the theory concerns "the biological-genetic-constitutional heritage" (P. 176) of the adopted child. Kirk suggested that adoptive parents may possibly learn to understand that heritage, but it must be accepted, and it cannot be changed. Kirk stated, "even acknowledging differences, empathizing with our children's condition, and opening ourselves to their communications will at best bring them, with their heritage, into the community of our family" (p.176). Kirk concluded that "by admitting our children's genetic and constitutional heritage we admit also their ancestors. Without doing so we shut off a part of our children's lives, not only against them but against ourselves" (p.184).

Smith and Sherwen (1988) conducted an exploratory study which examined the bonding process between adoptive mothers (n=117) and their adopted children (n=193). Smith and Sherwen stated that bonding theories suggest many factors affect the bonding process. The factors that affect the maternal bonding process include the adoptive mother's personality and the motives for adoption, environmental factors including "the presence or absence of support systems and environmental stressors" (p. 69), as well as certain activities carried out in

"preparation for the maternal role" (p. 71). Factors influential in the bonding process for the child include "life history, background, culture, and past attachments" (p. 71). The bonding process is influenced by the "interactions between mother and child" (p. 71) and these, in turn, "are greatly affected by support systems or lack of them, and by environmental stressors, such as change, loss or conflict" (p. 71).

Smith and Sherwen found that the presence or absence of a variety of support systems was "probably the environmental influence which most affects bond formation between mother and child -- in both biological and adoptive situations" (p. 90). Some adoptive mothers (n=64) in the study reported that they received the most support from their husbands but 16 mothers reported that "the adopted child produced marital stress" (p. 90); some mothers (n=86) mentioned support from extended family and friends while others received none; support from various groups was reported by 58 mothers; the community was seen as supportive by 37 mothers, but 6 mothers felt that the community had been non-supportive. In the majority of cases there was support and acceptance from a variety of sources which made it easier to "parent the child", but for others "rejection of the child and/or the adoption by significant others made mothering much more difficult" (p. 90).

The study also found that some of the mothers had more difficulty in bonding to their child than others and found that age at adoption was an

important variable in the bonding process. The bonding process tended to be more difficult with older children although "most mothers and children seem to be coping well" (p. 113). However, Smith and Sherwen stated that one of the "major implications" (p. 125) of their study was the "need for more and improved post-placement services" (p. 125) and that many of the mothers in their study had also expressed this need.

Smith and Sherwen found that many of the mothers who had adopted infants expressed "the similarity they saw between the biological and adoptive parenting situation" (p. 95) and did not see that they were different from mothers with biological children in their relationship with their child. Mothers who had both biological and adopted infants also felt there was no difference, that "their adopted children were as much 'theirs' as their biological children" (p. 95).

Smith and Sherwen found that their data indicated that "the major physical and emotional demands of child-rearing were met by the mother, whether or not she was also employed outside the home" (p. 136). Smith and Sherwen also found that adoptive parents had high expectations of themselves. Some of the adoptive mothers in the study "stated that adoptive parents need to relax more, enjoy their children more, and not strive so hard. They felt that excessive demands on themselves and their children, could impede bonding" (p. 183).

DiGiulio (1988) examined the self-acceptance of 80 adoptive couples in relation to their acceptance of their adopted child. The children of these parents

had all been adopted under the age of three years. DiGiulio suggested that "the ability to be self-accepting has important implications for adoptive parents in being able to experience their role as different from that of biological parents, and then facing up to issues in rearing and accepting their adopted child without taking a defensive stance" (p. 424).

DiGiulio suggested that there were three "elements of acceptance" (p. 425) of the child which are especially important in the situation of adoption as "they will influence the parents' response to the child's formulation of identity and concern about biological parents" (p. 425). The study examined the parental acceptance of the child based on these 'three elements' which were: "(1) respect for the child's feelings and right to express them; (2) appreciation of the child's unique make up, and (3) recognition of the child's need for autonomy and independence" (p. 427).

DiGiulio found support for the study hypothesis, that "the higher the self-acceptance scores of adoptive parents, the higher the parental acceptance - of - child scores" (p. 427). DiGiulio suggested that the findings of the study had implications for both pre and post-adoption support programs, that ways might be found to increase the self-acceptance of adoptive parents, and that this could be particularly significant when the adoptive parents had infertility issues to contend with. DiGiulio also suggested that longitudinal studies might examine the

importance of the self-acceptance of adoptive parents in predicting successful outcomes in adoption.

McRoy, Grotevant, Lopez, and Furuta (1990) conducted an exploratory study of adopted adolescents in residential treatment. The study used case examples to examine "adoption revelation and communication issues from a theoretical perspective" (p. 550). The study found that it was "difficult to discern exactly why adoption issues" were problematical in some families and not in others and why some children reacted negatively to adoption revelation while others appeared to accept it without apparent problem. McRoy et al. suggested that some of the reasons for the different reactions in children may include genetic factors, early environmental experiences, as well as personality in influencing the child's perception of "his or her status" (p. 556). For the adoptive parents, their "perceptions of their role as adoptive parents, their level of security as adoptive parents, and their empathic understanding of the ongoing adjustment problems that their children might experience may be related to the outcome" (p. 556).

McRoy et al. also suggested that "family communication patterns and dynamics" appeared to be related to "the extent to which adoption may become a serious issue for a child." From the findings of the study McRoy et al. suggested several ways to minimize communication problems between adoptive parents and their children: the importance of the adoptive parents telling the child the fact

of adoption before others did, and that they be willing "to talk about the adoption long after the initial revelation" (p. 556) at the child's level of understanding and comprehension; adoptive parents be encouraged to practice open communication about adoption and "create an atmosphere in which the child feels free to ask questions" (p. 556); the adoptive parents be encouraged to "express empathy for and understanding of their adopted child's ongoing need to know about his or her background and reasons for adoption placement" (p. 556). McRoy et al. concluded by stating that "adoptive families have issues that are different from birth families' issues, and workers must also be prepared to acknowledge these differences and be trained to understand the concerns, fears, and joys of adopted children and their parents" (p. 556).

Overview of the Literature

The majority of adoptees have had basically a positive adoption experience (Campbell et al., 1991; Kowal & Schilling, 1985; Rosenzwieg-Smith, 1988) and most did not have poor relationships with their adoptive parents (Aumend & Barrett, 1984). Most adoptees regard their adoptive parents as their real or 'true psychological parents' (Baran et al., 1975), and after the search often come to realize that their adoptive parents are also their nurturers (Auth & Zaret, 1986).

The search is regarded more as a quest for self-identity (Auth & Zaret, 1986), or as a search for information (Campbell et al., 1991), than as an indication

of dissatisfaction with the adoption experience (Baran et al., 1975; Campbell et al., 1991).

Adoptive parents have been found to be more supportive of the search than previous studies had indicated (Feigelman & Silverman, 1983) and appear willing to be more open to sharing information with adoptees and birth mothers (Sachdev, 1991). With the new openness in adoption it was found that adoptive parents became empathic toward the birth parents, and toward "the child's feelings about being adopted" (Belbas, 1987, p. 197) when opportunities were made for contact with the birth parents during the pre-adoption process.

Previous research found there was a lack of empathy and a lack of open, on-going communication about adoption concerns in a number of adoptive families. Some of the reasons for this appeared to be a tendency towards over-protectiveness (Triseliotis, 1973), possessiveness and fear of losing the child's love to the birth parents (Baran et al., 1975). Other reasons appeared to be a lack of resolution of their own issues especially of infertility, and a tendency to cope by 'rejection-of-difference' (Kirk, 1984).

An adoptee who has no information about his or her past also has no sense of 'generational continuity' (Baran et al., 1975), and often longs to "encounter the physical image of biological relatives" (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991, p. 187). Without ancestors a part of the adoptees biological heritage is missing, and those who reject or deny that heritage are affected as well as are the

adoptees (Kirk, 1984). Many of the adoptees received little or no information about their background or birth parents (Triseliotis, 1984; Kowal & Shilling, 1985) and for some the fact of their adoption, or their background, was used in a hostile or punitive way (Campbell et al., 1991; Triseliotis, 1973).

Some of the earlier studies found that adoptees who were most strongly motivated to search, mainly for birth parents and particularly the birth mother, were those who had unsatisfactory relationships with their adoptive families (Paton, 1954; Triseliotis, 1973). Those adoptees were also the ones with the most serious personality difficulties (Paton, 1954) and who had either received, or needed, psychiatric help (Triseliotis, 1973). Recent studies have found that some adoptees found their adoptive parents to be "secretive, judgemental, distant, cold, or abusive" (Campbell et al., 1991, p. 331).

The need for information and discussion about adoption issues was found to surface in the early teens and appeared to be related to the development of self identity and efforts to integrate two sets of parents (Triseliotis, 1973). A number of factors appear to have some relation to difficulties experienced by some of the adoptees in developing a positive self-image and a secure sense of identity, these include: the lack of background information or only negative information; the resistance of some adoptive parents to open, empathic communication about adoption issues and questions; and the inability, or unwillingness of some adoptive parents to try to understand the feelings and

needs of their adopted child. It may be that these adoptees, in turn, experienced more deeply the "particular anguish that is unique to persons permanently severed from their family of birth" (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991, p. 190) which was referred to as 'genealogical bewilderment' by Sants in 1964 (in Bertocci & Schechter, 1991).

At times there are additional problems in the adoptive home, the Bertocci & Schechter (1987) study found that 56% of their subjects reported "significant health problems, primarily emotional, in at least one adoptive parent, just under one third appearing to have been of traumatic significance to the adoptee" (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991, p. 182), problems included alcoholism, serious medical problems, and mental illness. Deering and Scahill (1989) also stated that many adopted children have been exposed to "abusive conditions" (p. 80). If these types of problems are present in the adoptive home, and if there are also unresolved issues surrounding the ongoing adoption process, it is reasonable to speculate that these factors may at least partially account for the high reported incidence of adoptees, especially adolescent adoptees, in treatment. Donovan (1990) stated that while adoptees make up "1.5% to 2.0% of the general population, adoptees nonetheless make up 6% to 15% of the psychiatric population and as much as 25% of adolescent in-patients in some series" (p. 830). However, Belbas (1987) concluded that "open adoption has the potential to at least modify some of the factors which account for the etiology of pathology in

adoptive families" (p. 197). Belbas found that adoptive parents demonstrated the ability to become empathic toward birth parents and, in the process, developed a better understanding of what the child's feelings about adoption might be.

Despite the controversy over a number of issues in the adoption literature there appears to be some agreement that there are some differences between adoptive parenthood and biological parenthood, and that the adoptive parents ability to 'acknowledge-the-difference' is an important factor in the on-going adoptee/adoptor relationship (Campbell et al., 1991; Demick & Wapner, 1988; DiGuilio, 1988; Elbow, 1986; Ensminger, 1984; Helwig & Ruthven, 1990; Kirk, 1984; Kowal & Schilling, 1985; Marcus, 1981). There also appear to be a number of references to the importance of empathy and empathic behaviour in the literature on adoption (Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Helwig & Ruthven, 1990; Kirk, 1984; McRoy et al., 1990; Paton, 1954). It also appeared that "the major physical and emotional demands of child rearing were met by the mother" (Smith & Sherwen, 1988, p. 136). Based on the findings from the research, this study was designed to test the following null hypotheses at .05 level of significance.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the mean empathy rating of the adoptive mother by the adult adoptees in Group 1 (who perceived that their adoptive mother believed there were differences between adoptive parenthood

and biological parenthood) and the adult adoptees in Group 2 (who perceived that their adoptive mother believed there were no differences).

2. There is no significant difference in the mean satisfaction rating of the adoption experience between Group 1 and Group 2.

CHAPTER 3

Method

Subjects

The subjects for this study were adult adoptees in search of information about their biological background and/or seeking a reunion with their birth mother and/or birth father. The subjects for this study had all registered at one time or another over the years with Parent Finders of Victoria, B.C. Two hundred subjects were randomly selected from the files of Parent Finders.

Selection criteria was:

a) placed for adoption in Canada

b) placed for adoption prior to one year of age

c) placed for adoption with non-relatives

d) Caucasian

There were 56 subjects in this study, 42 were female and 14 were male. The subjects ranged from 20 to 67 years of age. There were a total of 29 married subjects, six divorced, 18 not married, and three who were separated. Educational background ranged from some high school to graduate degrees. All the subjects had been placed with their adoptive parents at one year of age or less -- 24 were placed directly from hospital, 13 were in another home after their birth, but were placed prior to one month of age; 10 were placed prior to six months of age;

eight were placed between six months and one year of age; and one respondent did not answer the question.

Instruments

A questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on previous findings and theories from the literature on adoption. In order to try to improve the questionnaire six adult adoptees in the local area completed the questionnaire and provided feedback to the researcher regarding the clarity of written instructions, the length of time to complete, and whether the questions were understandable. There were some minor modifications made to the questionnaire prior to the final draft (Appendix C) being printed.

In order to measure the responses from the subjects the questionnaire included the following scales:

Personal Opinion Scale (POS). The POS is a structured four point scale. Question 1 to 10 (used with permission of Dr. M. H. France, University of Victoria) related to the respondents' feelings about themselves at the time. Question 11 to 32 examine the degree to which the respondents agreed or disagreed with statements related to the adoption experience, the motives and support for the search, and the rights of birth parents and adult adoptees.

Empathy Rating Scale (ERS). The ERS measured the adoptees' perception of the level of empathy evidenced by significant others during their

childhood. The ERS is a Likert type scale with four points; the higher the rating, the more empathy was perceived.

Procedure

This study used mail-out questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of the demographic information, structured response questions, a Personal Opinion Scale, an Empathy Rating Scale, and spaces were provided for comments and/or explanations.

Parent Finders of Victoria randomly selected 200 names from their open files of adult adoptees who were registered with them. Parent Finders addressed and mailed 200 envelopes provided by the researcher which contained a covering letter from Parent Finders (Appendix D), a letter from the researcher (Appendix E), and the questionnaire. A stamped envelope, which was addressed to the researcher, was also included in each package. Parent Finders kept a list of the names of the selected respondents and sent a follow-up letter (Appendix F) four weeks later. The completed questionnaires were mailed directly to the researcher by the subjects.

In order to provide confidentiality, Parent Finders maintained the list of subjects selected and provided no names to the researcher. Subjects were asked not to put identifying information on the questionnaires. Respondents were able

to contact the researcher if they wished, but the researcher had no way to contact individual subjects.

Completed questionnaires were selected by the four criteria outlined for the subjects. Questionnaires which did not fit the criteria were eliminated from the study.

Of the 200 questionnaires that were sent out, 77 were returned to Parent Finders in Victoria by the Post Office as there were no forwarding addresses in effect. Of the remaining 123 questionnaires that apparently were delivered, a total of 76 completed questionnaires were received by the researcher. Ten questionnaires that did not fit the selection criteria were eliminated from the study. An additional ten questionnaires were received after the cut-off date and were not used in this study. A total of 56 subjects, who had completed questionnaires, provided the data for this study.

CHAPTER 4

Results

This study was designed to examine certain aspects of the adoption experience from the perspective of adult adoptees who were in search of information about their roots. The main focus of the study was whether perceived differences between adoptive parenthood and biological parenthood were related either to empathy or to satisfaction with the adoption experience. In order to assign the subjects to one of two groups the following question was used:

> Do you think your adoptive mother, from either her actions or comments while you were growing up, believed that some of the issues involved in adoptive parenthood were different from those of biological parenthood?
> [ ] YES, some different issues [ ] NO, no different issues

The subjects who answered YES were assigned to Group 1 (21 subjects, 38.9%), and the subjects who answered NO were assigned to Group 2 (33 subjects, 61.1%). The empathy rating from the Empathy Rating Scale (ERS) of the adoptive mother was tabulated, based on the ratings in each group (Table 1).

In order to obtain a score indicating the level of satisfaction with the adoption experience, the ratings for each group were obtained from the following statements on the Personal Opinion Scale (POS):

> I felt that I belonged in my adoptive family.
> I felt close to my adoptive family when I was growing up.
> My growing up years in my adoptive home were good years.
> I am happy that my adoptive parents adopted me.

Table 1
Frequency of ERS Rating of Adoptive Mother by Group 1 and Group 2

	EMPATHY			
	Low <----------			----------> High
Group 1 (n=21)	5	7	4	5
Group 2 (n=33)	2	1	12	18

The frequency of ratings for each group were tabulated (Table 2) and totals for each group were obtained. The mean for each group was then calculated -- Strongly Agree (SA) was rated as four, Agree (A) as three, Disagree (D) as two, and Strongly Disagree (SD) as one -- thus the higher the mean the higher the satisfaction. This study was designed to test two null hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The results are discussed for each of the following null hypotheses:

(1) There is no significant difference in the mean empathy ratings of the adoptive mother between Group 1 and Group 2.

(2) There is no significant difference in the mean satisfaction ratings of the adoption experience between Group 1 and Group 2.

The method of analysis used to test Hypothesis 1 was a pooled variance t-test. Results indicated that Group 2 ($M=3.39$) rated their adoptive mothers significantly higher on empathy than Group 1 ($M=2.43$), $t(54)=3.64$, $p < .001$. As the difference between the means is significant, Hypothesis 1 is rejected (see Table 3).

A pooled variance t-test was also used as the method of analysis to test Hypothesis 2. Results indicated that Group 2 ($M=14.2$) were significantly more satisfied with their adoption experience than Group 1 ($M=12.4$), $t(54)=2.12$, $p < .04$. As the difference between the means is significant, Hypothesis 2 is rejected (see Table 4).

Table 2
Frequency of Satisfaction Ratings of the Adoption Experience by Group 1 and Group 2

Group 1 (n=21)	SA	A	D	SD
I felt that I belonged in my adoptive family	9	7	2	3
I felt close to my adoptive family when I was growing up.	6	10	1	4
My growing up years in my adoptive home were good years.	8	10	2	1
I am happy that my adoptive parents adopted me.	9	10	2	0
TOTALS	32	37	7	8

Group 2 (n=33)	SA	A	D	SD
I felt that I belonged in my adoptive family	23	5	3	2
I felt close to my adoptive family when I was growing up.	22	8	3	1
My growing up years in my adoptive home were good years.	20	10	2	1
I am happy that my adoptive parents adopted me.	27	4	1	1
TOTALS	92	26	9	5

Table 3
ERS Rating of Adoptive Mother by Group 1 and Group 2

	N	Means	SD	SE	t	df	2-tail probability
Group 1	21	2.43	1.12	.25	3.64	52	.001
Group 2	33	3.39	.83	.14			

Table 4
Satisfaction with the Adoption Experience for Group 1 and Group 2

	N	Means	SD	SE	t	df	2-tail probability
Group 1	21	12.4	3.2	.71	2.12	52	.04
Group 2	33	14.2	2.9	.50			

Other Differences Found Between Group 1 and Group 2

There were differences between Group 1 and Group 2 in who had revealed the fact of adoption to them. In Group 1, 32% learned the fact of their adoption from others, but in Group 2 only 6% learned from others. It appears that some adoptive parents had difficulty with adoption revelation and some left it long enough that the adoptee learned from others. The manner in which the adoptee learned of their adoption was relatively pleasant for 79.4% of Group 2 and for 45.5% of Group 1, but there were more in Group 1 who found it was an unpleasant experience. From the data in this study it appears that more parents were telling, and were telling earlier, than either the Paton (1954) or Triseliotis (1973) studies had found, but some adoptive parents still had difficulty with the adoption revelation, and some adoptees perceived the adoption revelation as a negative experience. For all adoptees in the study, both the manner in which they learned the fact of their adoption (whether it was pleasant or unpleasant), and the person who told them of their adoption appeared to reflect both on their satisfaction with the adoption experience and on the empathy rating of the adoptive mother. It appears that the way in which the fact of adoption is revealed to the adoptee is very important, and when it is revealed in a way that is perceived as negative, there can be on-going, long term effects.

There were differences between Group 1 and Group 2 on how they rated themselves on questions 1 to 10 on the Personal Opinion Scale (POS). Those in

Group 1 rated themselves lower than those in Group 2. For all adoptees, in both groups, the level of self-perception was often, but not always, related to the level of satisfaction with the adoption experience. While the ratings may have been influenced by the way they were feeling when they completed the questionnaire, previous studies also found that adoptees who were unhappy with their adoption experience were also unhappy with themselves (Paton, 1954; Triseliotis, 1973), and also often had a more negative self image (Triseliotis, 1973).

Those in Group 1 also felt less accepted by siblings, extended family and friends of the family. They rated their adoptive parents lower in communication skills, and differed from Group 2 in their level of agreement that their adoptive parents were their real parents.

There were differences between Group 1 and Group 2 on almost all the questions relating to the adoptive mother. It was also found that there were differences between the two groups in who they had felt closest to when they were growing up. Almost twice as many of those in Group 1 felt closer to their father (40.9%) than to their mother (22.7%) while they were growing up. In Group 2, 17.6% felt closer to their father, but 52.9% felt closer to their mother (see Table 5). A total of 68.1% of those in Group 1 felt closer to one or both parents, whereas in Group 2, 85.2% felt closer to one or both parents.

The data indicated there was some form of a relationship problem between many of the adoptees in Group 1 and their adoptive mother. Verrier (1987)

Table 5
Person Closest to During Growing-up Years in Adoptive family for Group 1 and Group 2

Closest To:	Group 1 (n=22)	%	Group 2 (n=34)	%
Adoptive Mother	5	22.7	18	51.9
Adoptive Father	9	40.9	6	17.6
Both Parents	1	4.5	5	14.7
Other	7	31.8	5	14.7
TOTALS	22	99.9	34	99.9

suggested that "feelings have memories" (p. 84), that bonding and attachment are different, and that while the child will undoubtedly become attached to the adoptive mother, bonding "may not be so easily achieved" (p.83). Verrier suggested that there may be issues around "basic trust, as described by Erikson (1950)" and that while the infant may be mourning the loss of the first mother, the infant is also having to learn to "attach and bond with the adoptive mother" (p. 83). Verrier also suggested that in some situations the complicated interactional bonding process between mother and child is problematical and bonding is not achieved.

Verrier also found, as have other studies, that "the relationship between adoptees and their mothers was often conflictual" and that "most of the responsibility for the emotional well-being" of the children was placed on the mother as many of the fathers "were either absent or emotionally distant" (p. 80). However, Verrier stated that some adoptees reported that it was easier to bond with their fathers and some reported that their relationships with their fathers "seemed more straight-forward and easier to define than that with the mother" (p. 80).

Another reason for the difference between Group 1 and Group 2 in the relationship with the adoptive mother could be related to the personality of the adoptive mother. Smith and Sherwen (1988) stated that the adoptive mothers' personality is one of the factors that can affect the bonding process. It was not

clear why there were the differences between Group 1 and Group 2 in the relationship with the adoptive mother. It may have been a problem in the mother/child bonding, and it may be that some infants have more perception than we realize. The child may continue to feel the loss of the first mother and refuse to fully trust and accept a 'substitute' mother (Verrier, 1987).

Another finding of this study was that the subjects in both groups who were placed in an adoptive family that already had biological children appeared to be more satisfied with their adoption experience than those whose adoptive parents had not had biological children first. This was particularly true for the subjects in Group 1 (see Table 6). The motive for adopting could be a factor. Fiegelman and Silverman (1983) suggested that 'preferential' adopters often had different motives for adopting than 'non-fecund' adopters. It is also possible that either the previous experience of being parents, or the fact that the adoptive parents did not have to deal with issues concerning infertility may have made some differences in the adoptive family relationships. It is also a fact that most of the adoptees who were placed in families that already had biological children were the youngest child in the family.

Data From Questions Regarding the Search

There were no significant differences between the two groups on the POS regarding statements about the goal of the search. There were, however, some differences between the groups in the strength of the agreement or disagreement

Table 6

Average of Satisfaction Score for Group 1 and Group 2

	N	Group 1	N	Group 2
Satisfaction Average (when biological children born first)	8	13.9	11	14.5
Satisfaction Average (other children born or adopted later or no siblings)	13	11.5	22	14.1

(NOTE: Two subjects did not answer questions)

to the statements. For the adoptees in both groups, 53.7% agreed that they were mainly searching for their roots, 19% of Group 1 strongly agreed and 36.3% of Group 2 strongly agreed. In Group 1, 42.9% strongly agreed that it was very important to them to meet their birth mothers, and 30.3% of those in Group 2 strongly agreed; the overall agreement between the two groups was 75.9%. While there were no significant differences between the two groups of adoptees regarding those seeking a reunion with birth parents, or those who were searching for mainly background information, as measured on the POS, there was an indication that more of those in Group 1 wanted contact with the birth mother. The data in this study did not clearly indicate that the adoptees who were more dissatisfied with their adoption experience were more strongly motivated to seek a reunion with their birth mother as both Paton (1954) and Triseliotis (1973) had found. There was also no clear indication that those who were more satisfied with their adoption experience were searching mainly for background information as Triseliotis (1973) had found. The lack of clear findings regarding the goal of the search may be the result of how the subjects were assigned to the groups, as well as a lack of refinement of the questions pertaining to the goal of search. However, 44.8% of the adoptees in this study indicated that a reunion with their birth mother was the most important goal of the search.

Although no significant differences exist between Group 1 and Group 2 as to why they began the search, there are some differences between Group 1 and

Group 2. More subjects in Group 1 than in Group 2 reported beginning the search as a result of a crisis in their life. More subjects in Group 1 than in Group 2 were hoping to develop a relationship with their birth family. In four situations in Group 1 the adoptive parents had died before the search was started, and in two situations in Group 2 the adoptive parents had died before the search had begun. Paton (1954) found that many of the adoptees in her study had begun the search after the death of their adoptive parents and suggested that this did not make it easy for adoptees to resolve some of the issues they might have had with their adoptive parents.

Andersen (1988) suggested that questions to adoptees concerning the reason for the search often have different underlying meanings and were also somewhat absurd; why wouldn't adoptees want to know about their parents, their grandparents, as well as more about themselves? He also suggested that the search has both an intellectual and an emotional component, and the emotional aspect of the search is the most important one. He stated that "on one level, adoptees search so they might see, touch, and talk to their biological mother -- the search is an effort to make contact with one's biological family" (p. 18). Andersen also suggested that there was another, deeper, level to the emotional aspect of the search; that the underlying wish, or hope, of the search "is most fundamentally an expression of the wish to undo the trauma of separation" (p. 18). Andersen concluded that all the reasons that adoptees give for searching are

valid, "but are not central when compared to the wish for contact and healing" (p. 19).

Data Regarding Background Information, Rights and Open Records

There was a high level of overall agreement (96.5%) by adoptees in both groups that more background information should have been given to them about their birth family. In Group 1, 86.3% strongly agreed and in Group 2, 76.5% strongly agreed. It appears that in many cases, twenty or more years ago, either no written information was given to the adoptive parents to share with the child, or the adoptive parents did not share the written information with the child, and that even when written information was given, it often did not meet the needs of the adoptees.

The data indicated that 90% of Group 1 and 77% of Group 2 had received written background information at varying ages from 8 to 64 years. Most adoptees did not recieve the written background information from their adoptive parents; 90% of those in Group 1 and 67% of those in Group 2 received the written information from other sources. The fact that so few of these adoptees received written information from their adoptive parents is probably a reflection of the practice of the time. Triseliotis (1973) recommended that written background information be given to the adoptive parents for the child. However,

from the Sachdev (1991) study it appears that written background information, given to the adoptive parents when the child is placed, may not yet be common practice in at least some areas in Canada.

There was also agreement between the groups regarding the rights of birth mothers and the rights of adoptees. The opinions about the birth mother's right to privacy and confidentiality were almost equally divided within each group on each of the four points of the POS. The only difference between groups was in the strength of disagreement; 23.8% of Group 1 and 16.1% of Group 2 strongly disagreed with the statement. In both groups there was a much higher level of agreement regarding the right to know who the birth parents were; 92.5% of those in both groups agreed, with 76% of those in Group 1 and 56.2% in Group 2 strongly agreeing with the statement. The opinions about the right of the adult adoptee to have a copy of the original birth certificate showed a similar trend. The overall agreement in both groups was 96.3%, with 76.1% of Group 1 and 60.6% of Group 2 in strong agreement. There is a conflict built into these statements, the right of the birth mother to privacy and the right of the adult adoptee to know and to have a copy of the original birth certificate. Over half (53.8%) of the adoptees in both groups believed the birth mother had a right to privacy, but 92.5% of the adoptees in both groups believed that they had a right to know who their birth parents were, and 96.3% of the adoptees in both groups believed that they had a right to their original birth certificate.

The adoptees who favoured open adoption records included 90.5% of Group 1 and 82.3% of Group 2. A total of 50 of the 56 subjects in both groups believed that adult adoptees should have access to their sealed records and five in Group 1 and three in Group 2 believed that minor adoptees should have access to their records, with the consent of the adoptive parents.

Data From Other Questions Related to the Adoption Experience

Most adoptees (84.3%) from both groups, believed that non-adoptees do not understand how adoptees feel, even though some may try. This response raises some questions about the skills of empathic listening by both professionals and those closely related to the adoption experience. Perhaps Paton's (1954) suggestion that adoptive parents should be drawn from those who have had some kind of an experience similar to adoption, and who in turn can relate this experience to the adoption situation in order to better understand how adoptees feel, had some merit.

Also, although Triseliotis (1973) found that many adoptees were dissatisfied with their adoption experience, the data from this study suggests that most of the adoptees were relatively satisfied with their adoption experience. In this study, 67% of those in Group 1 and 87% of those in Group 2 said they would choose to be adopted by the same parents, and 81% of those in Group 1 and 88% of those in Group 2 either agreed, or strongly agreed, that their adoptive parents were their real parents.

Finally, both groups basically agreed that the three most difficult aspects of adoption for them were the secrecy and sealed records, the lack of relationships with birth parents, and others making decisions that affect one's life. This data indicates that the trend toward open adoption may result in increased satisfaction with the adoption experience for the adult adoptees of the future.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Implications of the Study

Discussion

The review of the adoption literature revealed the complexities of adoption research. Many of the findings are controversial, factors are interrelated, and changing societal attitudes affected every aspect of adoption over time -- from laws governing adoption practice to the self-concept of the members of 'the adoption triangle.'

Although most studies on the adoptive family examined adoption from the perspective of both adoptive parents, some of the findings appeared to focus more on the importance of factors related to the adoptive mother. Kirk (1984) found that "involuntary childlessness represents a serious crisis for women" (p. 2) and that wives had felt much more deprived than their husbands regarding infertility. Smith and Sherwen (1988) found that "the major physical and emotional demands of child rearing were met by the mother, whether or not she was also employed outside the home" (p. 136). It appeared, therefore, that the adoptive mother plays a key role in interactions with the adopted child in the home. Kirk's (1984) theory of adoptive relationships developed from his research regarding 'acknowledgement of difference' and 'rejection of difference' by the adoptive parents also appeared relevant to the quality of the relationship between the adoptee and adoptive mother.

The first question that developed from the literature review was whether adult adoptees perceived that their adoptive mother had 'acknowledged-the-difference' or 'rejected-the-difference' during the adoptees' childhood. It was suggested by Triseliotis (1973) however, that perhaps too much emphasis was placed "on the differences between adoption and biological parenthood" (p. 161) and that the actual parenting of the adopted child was the same as for the biological child "provided the home was a loving one and the child accepted for what it was" (p. 161). Triseliotis stated that "in other words the parents' attitude towards their adopted children was a reflection of their general child rearing practices" (p. 161). However, a number of more recent studies and articles regarding adoption have suggested the importance of not 'denying' the differences (Campbell et al., 1991; Demick & Wapner, 1988; DiGuilio, 1988; Elbow, 1986; Ensminger, 1984; Kirk, 1984; Kowal & Schilling, 1985).

The next question was whether this perception of the adoptive mother had any relationship to the empathy received from the adoptive mother, since Kirk's (1984) theory addressed the importance of empathy in communicating with the adopted child. Other studies in adoption also addressed the importance of empathy in understanding the feelings and needs of the adopted child (Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Helwig & Ruthven, 1990; McRoy et al., 1990; Paton, 1954).

Earlier findings from the research on adult adoptees who were in search (Paton, 1954; Triseliotis, 1973) also indicated that many of the adult adoptees had

been unhappy and dissatisfied with their adoption experience, but usually maintained their loyalty to their adoptive parents and still regarded them as their 'real' parents. The final question was whether there was any relationship between the perceived amount of empathy demonstrated by the adoptive mother and the level of satisfaction with the adoption experience as reported by the adult adoptees.

This study was designed to examine whether the adoptive mother, either verbally, or through behaviour, had indicated to her adopted child that she believed that there were differences between adoptive and biological parenthood. The adoptees who said YES were assigned Group 1 and the adoptees who said NO were assigned to Group 2. The responses from the two groups were then analyzed.

The results indicated that there was a significant difference in the mean empathy rating of the adoptive mother between the two groups. Group 1, those adoptees who thought their adoptive mothers, either in words or through her behavior, had appeared to believe there were differences between adoptive and biological parenthood, rated their adoptive mothers significantly lower in empathy than those in Group 2. According to Kirk's (1984) theory, the adoptive mothers who 'accepted the difference' would be more empathic in their relationship with their adoptive children.

However, from the comments made by the subjects in Group 1 and Group 2 regarding this question (Appendix G), it appeared that the subjects in Group 1 perceived any 'differences' on the part of the adoptive mother as primarily negative. Some of the mothers used the fact of adoption in a negative, or threatening way, and some appeared to have had problems dealing with infertility as well as other issues. It may not be possible to try to examine Kirk's theory from the perspective of the adult adoptee, or else the question may not have adequately addressed the theory. However, some of the adoptive mothers of the subjects in Group 1, who had appeared to 'acknowledge-the-difference', were able to do so without making the 'differences' negative, and also appeared to parent the child in such a way that they were perceived as very empathic. Since some of the adoptees in Group 1 did rate their adoptive mothers very high on empathy, there may be some support for Kirk's theory from the perspective of the adult adoptee.

It may also be true, as suggested by Triseliotis (1973) that parenting the adopted child is no different from parenting the child who is not adopted, providing the relationship is a positive one, and the child is fully accepted. There is also the possibility that some of the subjects in Group 2 had adoptive mothers who had 'acknowledged-the-difference' but who had been so subtle about it that their adopted child did not perceive any 'differences'. However, from the data in this study, most of the perceived 'differences' were negative ones and the

subjects in Group 1 rated their adoptive mothers significantly lower on empathy than those in Group 2.

The results also indicated that the adoptees in Group 2 were significantly more satisfied with their adoption experience that those in Group 1. The subjects in Group 2 had also rated their adoptive mother significantly higher on empathy than those in Group 1. From the data in this study it appeared that when the adoptive mother was rated as high on empathy, there tended to be more satisfaction with the adoption experience. When the adoptive father was also rated as high there tended to be a higher level of satisfaction. However, in most cases the satisfaction rating appeared to be more affected by the rating of the adoptive mother than that of the adoptive father.

This study also found that the majority of the subjects (78.6%) indicated that they believed there were differences between adoptive parenthood and biological parenthood. The comments, from the subjects in both groups who believed there were differences (Appendix H) indicate that some of the differences they perceived were similar to those found by Kirk (1984).

Summary of the Main Findings

Of the 56 subjects in this study, 22 (Group 1) reported that their adoptive mother had indicated either in words or by actions, that adoptive parenthood was different from biological parenthood. The majority of the comments made by this group indicated that the 'differences" were perceived by the subjects as negative.

The subjects in Group 2 (n=34) rated their adoptive mother significantly higher on empathy, and were significantly more satisfied with their adoption experience as measured by questions 19 to 22 on the Personal Opinion Scale (POS).

The findings in this study suggests that the adoptive mother is the central figure in the adoption equation. Other studies have found that the adoptive mother plays a central role in child rearing. Although the data demonstrated the importance of the adoptive father, and many adoptees felt closer to their adoptive father, there were few significant differences between the groups on questions related to the adoptive father. However, times change, and studies done ten or twenty years from now may find the adoptive father will play a much more central role.

The data in this study also suggests that there were some problems in the relationships between the adoptive mother and a number of the subjects in Group 1, as well as some in Group 2. Other studies have also found relationship problems between adoptees and their adoptive mothers (Verrier, 1987). The reasons for these relationship problems are not clear. It may be related to a number of the factors involved in the bonding process as suggested by Smith and Sherwen (1988).

The data in this study did not indicate that adoptees searched because they had been dissatisfied with their adoption experience. It appeared that those who searched did so because of curiosity, a need to know, a right to know, and in

order to complete the picture, for their own sense of identity. Some had not told their adoptive parents of the search because they didn't want to hurt or upset them, some searched after their adoptive parents had died, some searched with the support and assistance of their adoptive parents, some without. It also appeared that some of those who hoped for relationships with birth family members had been very satisfied with their adoption experience.

The most important finding of this study, however, was the importance of empathy in the overall satisfaction with the adoption experience. The ability to demonstrate empathy can be measured, and can also be learned (Egan, 1990). Perhaps if adoptive parents were assessed on their ability to demonstrate empathy, and were in turn encouraged to develop their ability to demonstrate empathy and understanding for their adopted child, this could be one way to enhance the adoption experience, both for the adoptee and for the adoptive parents.

Limitations of the Study

The representativeness of the sample is always a question in adoption research (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991). For this study, 200 subjects were randomly selected from the population of approximately 900 adult adoptees who were registered with Parent Finders. Of the 200 questionnaires that were mailed out 77 were returned by the post office as there was no forwarding address; 76

of the remaining 123 questionnaires were received by the researcher; and 56 subjects were selected for this study as they met the criteria. This sample of adult adoptees may not be a representative sample of all adult adoptees who are in search.

The size of the sample is another limitation of this study. Prior to establishment of adoption registries, searchers often registered with one of the various private and/or voluntary search organizations, or searched on their own. It was not known how many adult adoptees searched. With the development of registries in various areas, adult adoptees who are in search may be more accessible, addresses may be more current, and statistics may be more available.

The method (question) that was used, in an attempt to examine 'acknowledgement-of-difference' and 'rejection-of-difference' from the perspective of adult adoptees based on Kirk's (1984) theory of adoptive relationships, needs further refinement. Most of the subjects reported the perceived difference as negative, when demonstrated by their adoptive parent through either words or actions. A short explanation of Kirk's theory might have helped the subjects to answer the question more thoroughly. Perhaps the perceived level of both empathy and open communication with the child regarding adoption during the developmental years could have formed part of this question.

Finally, the method used to measure satisfaction with the adoption experience (questions 19 to 22 on the POS) may not have been the best or only

way to measure satisfaction with the adoption experience. Research has indicated that a sense of belonging is very important to the adoptee's satisfaction with the adoption experience (Paton, 1954; Triseliotis, 1973, 1984) and for that reason it was included. The other questions were very basic and could possibly have had more depth. The subjects could have been asked to expand on what made them feel either close to, or distant from their adoptive family. They could also have been asked what made their growing up years good ones and why they were happy that they had been adopted by their particular adoptive parents. The subjects could also have been asked to give reasons as to why the adoption experience was problematical for them. The data could then have been analyzed and might have provided more insight into the reasons why some adoptees were significantly more satisfied with their adoption experience than others.

Implications of the Study

Implications for Legislation

In the 1990s it appears that there is discrimination against adult adoptees in Canada. They are denied the right to information about themselves, they are denied the right, as adults, to their original birth records. In Canada, it was estimated that there were at least 500,000 adult adoptees in the early 1980s (Kirk, 1981; Marcus, 1981). If we add the children they have had over the years, and

their lack of knowledge about their ancestors, the numbers of those who are affected by the sealed records would probably be well over one million.

Countries such as Scotland, Israel, and Sweden provide identifying information to adult adoptees upon request, and a number of states in the United States have also opened their records to adult adoptees. Sachdev (1991) found that most birth mothers, adoptees, and many adoptive parents were in favour of opening the records to adult adoptees. This study found that 96.3% of the subjects believed they had a right to their original birth records.

Implications for Practice

One of the important implications of this study is that professionals need to be trained adequately to understand the many facets of adoption. On-the-job training, for those at either the management, or the field level is not sufficient. Kirk (1981) estimated that in the general population, one person in five is closely associated with the institution of adoption -- this includes adoptive parents, extended family, birth parents, their extended family, and the adoptees. Those who work, or plan to work, in any area of human services need to be better prepared to work with this population which, in Canada, could number around five million.

Melina (1991) suggested that teachers need to become more sensitive to issues around adoption. Schoborg-Winterberg and Shannon (1986) stated that "the most important task for social workers may be to recognize and respect that

adoptees need to know about themselves" (p. 66). DiGiulio (1988) suggested that the importance of self-acceptance of adoptive parents should be stressed when training professionals who assess potential adoptive parents or who develop "family life education programs for adoptive families" (p. 428). The literature suggests that it is important that adoptive parents be able to 'acknowledge-the-difference' between adoptive parenthood and biological parenthood, it would then follow that "workers must also be prepared to acknowledge these differences and be trained to understand the concerns, fears, and joys of adopted children and their parents" (McRoy et al., 1990 p. 556).

Most adoptees (84.3%) in this study did not think non-adoptees understand how adoptees feel, even though some may try. Paton (1954) suggested that those who adopt should have had some kind of a similar experience to being adopted in order to understand their adopted child. Perhaps it is more the ability to relate the feelings of the adoptee to a similar feeling the adoptive parents may have had. Kirk (1984) suggested that some adoptive parents could learn to empathize with their adopted child through their own feelings of grief and loss regarding infertility.

However, from the comments of the adoptees in this study, it also appears that many of those who consider themselves to be professionals need to be more aware, more sensitive, and also need to develop their own skills in what Egan (1986) called 'basic empathy'. Perhaps if we can develop our skills in empathy

we will more fully understand the need of some adoptees to see more than one face in their biological mirror.

If professionals at all levels were adequately trained to understand adoption issues, they would be able to offer informed support to adoptive parents, adoptees, and birth parents. Adoption workers in particular need to be very skilled in order to assess, support, and work with adoptive families.

From the data in this study, it appeared that some adoptive parents might have benefitted from on-going, post-adoptive support services, particularly if those who provided the service had been both skilled and knowledgeable. It is also possible that adoptive parents could have been encouraged to examine the various issues involved in adoption more fully, in order to better understand the needs of their adopted child. In the past number of years there has also been more research on bonding, and ways to enhance bonding, the question is, how many adoptive parents have been taught ways to enhance bonding? If adoptive parents belong to an adoptive parents support group they may well learn more than from many 'professionals'. However, adoptive parent support groups are not available in every area. It is therefore incumbent on the agencies to ensure that the workers in the adoption field are skilled and knowledgeable about adoption issues in order to ensure 'the best interest of the child'.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study found a difference between Group 1 and Group 2 in the

relationship with the adoptive mother. Further research might address, in more depth, the reasons for this difference; whether there is an impaired mother/child bond, whether there are personality differences, or whether it is a reflection of the attitude toward child-rearing, or of the skills in child-rearing. A comparison study between adoptees and non-adoptees might be helpful in addressing these issues more fully.

A difference in satisfaction was found between the subjects who reported that there had been serious problems (i.e. alcoholism, physical and sexual abuse, serious illness, divorce) in the adoption home and those who reported there were no such problems. Although there were no significant differences in the self-ratings between those who experienced such problems and those who did not, future research might address the possible effects of these problems in more depth, as well as the frequency of these types of problems in both adoptive and non-adoptive families.

It also appears that future research needs to continue to address issues around bonding. Longitudinal studies might provide further data that would be helpful in examining bonding theories more closely, as well as develop more effective ways to enhance the bonding process.

There are also some indications for future research in examining the adoptive parents empathic skills, with the advantage being that the ability to demonstrate empathy is a skill that can be learned and can be improved on.

(Belbas, 1987; Egan, 1986, 1990). If adoptive parents received training and support to increase their ability to demonstrate empathy and understanding for their adopted child, this could possibly lead to a more satisfying adoption experience both for the adoptee and for the adoptive parent.

There are indications from this study that further research needs to be done in order to examine more fully the way adoptive parents cope with the differences between adoptive and biological parenthood. The important issue is what effect the adoptive parents method of coping has on the child. Both maturity, and the ability to 'acknowledge-the-differences' in a positive, yet caring way, may mean the difference between a highly satisfactory adoption experience and a less than satisfactory experience for the adopted child.

This study focused on traditional, closed adoption practice of twenty and more years ago. In recent years, in British Columbia, an increasing number of infants are placed for adoption privately, rather than through the Ministry. Butler (1986) stated that "the expectation is that private placements of healthy Caucasian infants will soon exceed those arranged through the Ministry" (p. 155). One of the reasons birth mothers are choosing private adoption placement is the hope and expectation that the privately arranged adoption will be more open (Arms, 1983). How successful, and how open, private adoption will be, and how well prepared the adoptive parents are for the issues they will have to work through, will have to be researched in the future.

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Appendix A

Development and Establishment of the Passive Adoption Reunion Registry in British Columbia

Province of
British Columbia

NEWS RELEASE

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING

86: 14
September 19, 1986
For immediate release

TOPIC: Minister Calls for Submissions on Adoption Reunion Registry for Adults

The British Columbia Adoption Act was originally passed in 1920. The Minister of Social Services and Housing, Mr. Claude Richmond, stated that, "To date, adoptions in British Columbia have been regarded, from a legal point of view, as if the adopted child was born to the adoptive parents at the time of adoption. For this reason, information on adoption has been kept in strict confidence."

The minister added that attitudes towards adoption have changed, and that adult adoptees are becoming increasingly interested in their natural parents, not only for genetic or health reasons, but also from a need to establish a more complete sense of personal identity.

Since 1978, the ministry has provided non-identifying information to adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth parents as well as information of a medical or genetic nature.

Increasing numbers of adult adoptees are requesting information to enable them to learn more about their natural parents.

Mr. Richmond said that the question now is, "Should the government move, as other provinces have done, to facilitate reunions of adult adoptees with their natural kin?"

/more

Mr. Richmond suggested that there are several options for the province's adoption laws, including retention of the status quo. These options include a passive adoption disclosure registry, which would release information only when requested by both the adoptee and the birth parent, and an active reunion registry, wherein efforts to find the birth mother are initiated at the request of the adoptee but require the consent of both parties. These would apply only to adult adoptees, as no consideration is being given to any change that would involve adoptees below the age of 19.

"Realizing that the subject of adoption is a sensitive issue which affects many families, the Government of British Columbia intends to release a background paper on adult adoption disclosure. Copies of the background paper may be obtained from the office of the Superintendent of Family and Child Services. Response from adult adoptees, adoptive parents, and interested individuals and associations is invited. Submissions will be considered to assist in the development of the appropriate course of action for British Columbia," the minister announced.

Requests for the background paper and submissions on adult adoption disclosure must be in writing and addressed to:

Superintendent of Family and Child Services
Ministry of Social Services and Housing
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, British Columbia
V8V 1X4.

The deadline for submissions is November 30, 1986.

- 30 -

For further information contact: Art Scott
Public Information Officer
Information Services Division
Phone: 387-4421 (Victoria)

Province of British Columbia

Background Paper on the Establishment of an Adult Adoption Disclosure Registry in British Columbia

September 1986
Ministry of Social Services and Housing

BACKGROUND PAPER ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ADULT ADOPTION DISCLOSURE REGISTRY IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

PREAMBLE

The provincial government is interested in receiving opinions on the possibility of making changes to the Adoption Act of British Columbia that will facilitate the sharing of identifying information between adult adoptees and birth parents.

This background paper outlines the current situation in British Columbia and examines some options for change. It identifies a number of issues that will be raised by making changes to the current legislation.

The purpose of this paper is to generate public discussion of the issues and to invite submissions from interested groups and individuals.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Identifying Information

Factual information that directly or indirectly leads to the identity of any of the parties to an adoption (i.e. names, birthdates, addresses, occupations).

Non-Identifying Information

Factual, personal information not leading to an individual's identity (i.e. racial origin, general age, health, education achieved).

Birth Parent

A birth mother is the woman who gave birth to the child. A birth father may be identified on the birth registration or may be identified by the birth mother as the father.

Adult Adoptee

An adopted person aged 19 years or older.

Passive Adoption Registry

A system that registers requests for information or contact by parties involved in an adoption. If both the adult adoptee and the birth parent make a request, then information is released. If only one party makes a request, then the request is recorded but not acted on. There is no search for the other non-registered party.

Active Registry

A system that records requests for information or contact by either party. An active registry will search for the non-registered birth parent once the adult adoptee has registered. If found, the birth parent will be given the option of contact with the adult adoptee. If only the birth parent registers, the information is recorded but no search will be made for the adoptee.

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S EXISTING LEGISLATION

Adoptions in this province are controlled by the British Columbia Adoption Act which was passed in 1920. Although the original legislation made no mention of access to adoption information, various amendments made since then have restricted the release of information from court records. Currently both the Adoption Act of British Columbia and the Guaranteed Available Income for Need Act prevent the disclosure of identifying information on adoptions. Adoption orders do not contain the name of the child or the birth parent.

Under the Adoption Act, access to adoption records is not available. This is based on the concept that when a child is adopted he is considered legally "as if born to" the adopting parents. This concept is reflected in the British Columbia Adoption Act which states:

> "For all purposes an adopted child becomes on adoption the child of the adopting parent, and the adopting parent becomes the parent of the child, as if the child has been born to that parent in lawful wedlock."

When birth parents sign the adoption consents, they relinquish all parental rights and responsibilities. In addition, birth parents are advised that they will not be identified to the adoptive parents or to the child. There is no provision in the present legislation to allow the Ministry of Social Services and Housing to assist with post-adoption reunions between adult adoptees and their birth parents. The only means of access to adoption records is through an application to the Supreme Court of British Columbia. The Adoption Act requires that the Court be satisified the applicant has shown "good cause."

There has been only one application under this section of the act and that was refused on the grounds that sufficiently "good cause" had not been shown.

CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS RELEASE OF INFORMATION ON ADOPTIONS

Until the 1970s it was believed that the provision of a substitute family through adoption eliminated any need on the part of adoptees to know about their past. But in the past 15 years increasing numbers of adopted individuals have sought information about their birth families arguing that it would help to establish a more complete sense of personal identity. There is a growing contention that the legal adoption process does not take into account the long-term psychological and emotional needs of adoptees.

During the past decade it has become increasingly clear that many persons with strong and loving ties to their adoptive families also want to know about their past. For some, the need is to have a face-to-face encounter with those who share the same biological heritage to realize that they do resemble someone else. For others, the need is to find a sense of continuity in their lives and to complete their sense of personal history.

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING POST-ADOPTION SERVICES

Since 1978 the Ministry of Social Services and Housing has provided non-identifying information to adoptees, adoptive parents and birth parents. In response to a written request, the ministry will give non-identifying

written background information to an adoptee about his or her birth family and will also give non-identifying descriptions to birth parents of their children's adopted home and the child's progress at the time the adoption was completed. Other information given out includes medical and genetic information and confirmation of adoptions to those who require it for legal purposes, as well as an explanation of the law restricting identifying information.

About 1,000 requests a year are received by the ministry. Approximately two-thirds are from adoptees and a large number of these include requests for a reunion. Many birth parents also request reunions with adult adoptees.

EXPERIENCE IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

In many provinces and countries, there has been a growing recognition on the part of the agencies that control adoption information of the needs of adult adoptees to learn about their origins.

Most of the other provinces in Canada have established some type of adoption disclosure or reunion registry. Several states in the U.S.A. have legislative provision for post-adoption reunions. Britain passed the Children's Act in 1975, which gives all adopted persons over the age of 18 the right to their original birth record. Finland, Scotland and Israel also provide adult adoptees with access to their original records.

In Canada passive registries exist in Ontario, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick and Alberta, while Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia have active reunion registries. Only British Columbia and Prince Edward Island do not operate adoption registries in any form.

Experience in Canadian provinces that have introduced adoption registries has shown that while there was initial opposition from some parties to the opening of adoption records, this has largely dissipated. All provinces report positive results with the reunions that they have helped facilitate.

OPTIONS FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

There are three possible options in British Columbia: to establish a passive Adoption Disclosure Registry for adult adoptees; to establish an Active Reunion Registry for adult adoptees; or to make no change, and leave the situation as it currently exists with no identifying information available except through application to the Supreme Court of British Columbia.

OPTION 1 PASSIVE ADOPTION DISCLOSURE REGISTRY

An Adoption Disclosure Registry would facilitate the sharing of identifying information between adult adoptees and birth parents in cases where both parties request it. The registry would be designed to cross-check requests from individuals registering for identifying information. Information on the identity and whereabouts of either the birth parent who gave a child up for adoption or an adopted child who has reached adulthood will be released to the parties involved only if requests are received from both parties.

No attempts to arrange reunions would be made by the registry. It would be up to the individuals who obtain identifying information to make contact if they wish to do so.

ISSUES

Since this type of registry releases information only when both parties request it, there is no possibility that an individual who does not wish contact will be reached. However, this does not take into account the expectations and wishes of the adoptive parents. There are some adoptive parents who resist any movement towards disclosure on the basis that when the adoption papers were signed it was with the understanding that the adoption records would remain sealed.

Some Questions raised by Option 1

1. Should adoptive parents' consent be required once the adoptee is over 19?

2. Should the registry accept inquiries from brothers or sisters of an adoptee?

3. Should the registry accept inquiries from grandparents or grandchildren of an adoptee?

4. Should provision be made for requests from adoptive parents who are concerned about difficulties their adoptive children (under 19) may be having with their identity?

5. Should government provide guidance and counselling to the parties involved?

6. Should the registry accept requests from adoptees who have not yet reached adulthood?

OPTION 2 ACTIVE REUNION REGISTRY

An active adoption reunion registry initiates action on behalf of an adult adoptee who requests it. The registry staff will make efforts to locate the birth mother and initiate discreet contact to determine if she would be interested in a reunion. If the birth mother agrees and the adoptee wishes to proceed, consents are signed for release of confidential information. The registry will disclose the name and whereabouts of each party to the other only if both request it.

Issues

In addition to the issues relative to a passive registry, an active registry raises questions about the birth parent's right to confidentiality. Because

an active reunion registry attempts to initiate contact with the birth mother it can be seen to infringe upon the birth mother's right to privacy and on her implicit understanding that identifying information will never be released. In addition, there are questions about what kinds of pressure might unknowingly be put on a birth mother who is reluctant to make contact with an adult adoptee.

Some Questions raised by Option 2

1. Should adoptive parents' approval be part of the process?

2. Should a reunion registry extend to siblings?

3. What will happen if someone changes his or her mind?

4. How far should registry staff go in facilitating reunions?

5. What about reunions between grandparents and adoptees, aunts and uncles, particularly if the birth parents are no longer living?

6. What kinds of consents should be required?

OPTION 3 MAINTAINING CURRENT LEGISLATION THAT RESTRICTS ACCESS TO RECORDS

GENERAL ISSUES TO CONSIDER

In making any changes to adoption legislation that will allow access in whatever form to adoption records, it is necessary to consider the feelings and understanding of all parties involved: the adoptive parents, the birth parents and the adoptees.

SUBMISSIONS INVITED

The Government of British Columbia invites public responses to the issues raised in this background paper. Submissions from interested individuals and associations concerned with adoption issues will be considered in the planning process for possible changes to the British Columbia Adoption Act and the government policy on confidentiality of adoption records. Government's objective is to develop policy that will meet the needs of the majority of British Columbians who are interested in adoption matters.

Direct written submissions to:

Superintendent of Family and Child Services
Ministry of Social Services and Eousing
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, British Columbia
V8V 1X4.

The deadline for submissions is November 30, 1986.

For further information contact: Art Scott
Public Information Officer
Information Services Division
Phone: 387-4421 (Victoria)

Province of British Columbia

NEWS RELEASE

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING

87: 56
June 18, 1987
For immediate release

TOPIC: Amendments to the British Columbia Adoption Act

The Minister of Social Services and Housing, the Honourable Claude Richmond, announced today that legislation to amend the Adoption Act to permit the establishment of an adoption reunion registry has been introduced in the legislature.

Mr. Richmond said that the establishment of an adoption registry was supported overwhelmingly by individuals and groups who responded to the public discussion paper released in September, 1986. The ministry received over 1,000 submissions and they contained valuable information about factors that should be considered in the development of the registry.

Adoption is a sensitive issue and one that affects many British Columbians. The minister has heard a wide range of views on the topic. "I am concerned that no unwanted intrusion is made into people's lives. Therefore we are introducing a passive adoption disclosure registry which will release information only when requested by both the adoptee and the birth parent. This will allow adopted persons over 19 years of age to establish a link with their biological heritage while preserving the integrity of their relationship with their adopted family," Mr. Richmond said.

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"I very much appreciate the thoughtful responses that the groups and individuals provided to the discussion paper," said Mr. Richmond. He added that further details will be made available soon about how the adoption reunion registry will operate.

- 30 -

For further information contact: Mr. Wayne Ironmonger
Assistant Manager
Family and Children's Services
Phone: 387-7060 (Victoria)

Province of British Columbia

NEWS RELEASE

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

87:75
December 30, 1987
For immediate release

TOPIC: The Establishment of an Adoption Registry

Claude Richmond, Minister of Social Services and Housing and Peter Dueck, Minister of Health, announced today the establishment of a provincial adoption registry.

"The British Columbia Adoption Registry will be administered by the Vital Statistics Division of the Ministry of Health," Richmond said. "The Vital Statistics Division has been responsible for registries for many years and has both the experience and the computer system to successfully handle the new adoption registry."

The registry is being established because an increasing number of adult adoptees are requesting information about their birth parents. Attitudes about adoption have changed and many people who were adopted are now seeking information to establish a sense of their own identity.

In the fall of 1986 Richmond circulated a public discussion paper about the establishment of an adult adoption disclosure registry and invited public response. Over 1,000 individuals and groups responded and they overwhelmingly supported the establishment of a registry. The Adoption Act was amended in the recent session of the legislature to allow the establishment of the registry.

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"The new registry will match adult adoptees and birth parents when both parties have requested it," said Dueck. "It will commence operation on January 4, 1988."

Information on how to register will be published in community newspapers throughout the province, or it can be requested by writing to the Vital Statistics Division, Ministry of Health, 1515 Blanshard Street, Victoria, British Columbia, V8W 3C8.

- 30 -

For further information contact: Division of Vital Statistics
Ministry of Health
387-0041 (Victoria)

Appendix B

Establishment of the Active Adoption Reunion Registry in British Columbia

Province of British Columbia

NEWS RELEASE

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING

CD#: 61 91: 11
June 7, 1991
For immediate release

TOPIC: Adoption Amendment Introduction in Legislature

Legislation to create an active adoption reunion registry was introduced in the Legislature today by Norman Jacobsen, Minister of Social Services and Housing.

"Adoptees and birth parents have been asking for this for a long time," said Jacobsen. "This legislation will be one of the most progressive in Canada, allowing adult adoptees and birth parents to request an active search for each other. Adult adoptees will also be able to search for siblings if the birth parent has died, and for siblings who have been adopted elsewhere."

The legislation allows adoptees and birth relatives to register a veto prohibiting contact if they wish to protect their privacy. Reunions will not be facilitated without consent of both parties.

British Columbia has had a passive reunion registry for the past three years which allowed a reunion only if both parties registered. This registry will be retained and expanded to include other birth relatives of an adoptee such as siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles.

"When the legislation is passed, we will move as quickly as possible to put it into effect," said the Minister.

- 30 -

For further information contact: Delma Hemming
Family and Children's Services
387-7071, Victoria

Province of
British Columbia

NEWS RELEASE

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING

CD#: 83 91: 21
September 12, 1991
For immediate release

TOPIC: Adoption Reunion Registry Announced

Legislation providing for an active adoption reunion registry will become effective this October. The Minister of Social Services and Housing, Norman Jacobsen announced today that, effective immediately, adult adoptees and birth relatives who wish to protect their privacy will be able to register a veto specifying that they not be contacted except if a compelling medical need exists.

"We will have the most progressive adoption reunion legislation in Canada", said Jacobsen. "It allows both adult adoptees and birth parents to request active searches for each other. At the same time, we have ensured, through provision of a veto, that those who wish to preserve their confidentiality may do so." Jacobsen further explained that where no veto exists and a search is conducted, no reunion will occur without the consent of both parties.

To register a veto, adoptees or birth relatives may write, stating their name and address, specifying that they are not to be contacted by the Adoption Reunion Registry. Letters may be sent to Post Adoption Services, Ministry of Social Services and housing, 6th Floor, 614 Humboldt Street, Victoria, B.C., V8W 3A2.

Applications for a reunion through the new registry will be available in Ministry of Social Services and Housing offices later this fall.

- 30 -

For further information contact: Communications Division
387-6485 (Victoria)

Delma Hemming
Family and Children's Services
387-7071, Victoria

Province of British Columbia

NEWS RELEASE

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING

CD#: 102 91: 24
October 4, 1991
For immediate release

TOPIC: Active Adoption Reunion Registry in Operation

Minister of Social Services and Housing Norman Jacobsen today announced the Active Adoption Reunion Registry is now in operation.

Legislation proclaimed October 2 allows adult adoptees and birth parents to request active searches for each other. Adoptees also are able to search for siblings if their birth parent is deceased or if the siblings were adopted by another family. A further provision allows other birth relatives to be registered for contact without a search when both parties register.

Responsibility for the passive reunion registry, formerly operated by the Division of Vital Statistics, will be assumed by the Ministry of Social Services and Housing.

"I am pleased to announce that the ministry has contracted with Family Services of Greater Vancouver to provide this important new service. This agency has over 60 years experience providing social services and is well qualified to handle the sensitive task of conducting searches and facilitating adoption reunions," said Jacobsen. "I want to assure the public that registry services will be provided with sensitivity and understanding."

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No reunion will occur without the written consent of both parties. People wishing to prevent contact can register a veto by writing to the registry stating that they are not to be contacted. They should provide their name, address and particulars regarding the persons who might be seeking to contact them.

Jacobsen advised that people currently registered will be contacted by mail and provided with an application form should they wish to request an active search.

"We anticipate a large number of applications in the first months." said Jacobsen. Active searches will begin January 1, 1992, allowing additional time for registration of vetos. Application forms will be available from the registry or from any Ministry of Social Services and Housing Family and Children's Services office.

The registry, which serves the entire province, is located at #205-3369 Fraser Street in Vancouver.

- 30 -

For further information contact: Delma Hemming
387-7068 (Victoria)

British Columbia Adoption Reunion Registry

FACT SHEET

INTRODUCTION

Since 1988 British Columbia has operated a passive Adoption Reunion Registry which allowed adult adoptees and birth parents to register. Contact was facilitated when both parties registered.

What Is New?

With the introduction in 1991 of British Columbia's new Adoption Reunion Registry, adult adoptees and birth parents will be able to request active searches for each other. Contact will be facilitated only when both parties consent.

Who May Register For An Active Search?

* ADULT ADOPTEES:

  May request a search for their birth parents and siblings who have been adopted. If the search reveals that the birth parent has died, the adoptee may then request a search for other siblings.

* BIRTH PARENTS:

  May request a search for an adult adoptee who the parent placed for adoption as a child.

Will The Passive Registry Continue?

Yes. The passive registry allows for a reunion between adult adoptees and birth relatives to occur when both parties have registered (no search is conducted). Birth siblings, grandparents and aunts and uncles may now register on the passive Registry.

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How Will My Privacy Be Respected?

* You may register a VETO. This means you cannot be contacted by registry staff except in the case of a medical emergency.

* No reunion or sharing of information can occur without your written consent.

* Searches will be conducted with discretion and only by Registry staff.

Will Fees Be Charged?

Yes. A fee will be charged for registration and records search. A separate fee will be charged to locate a person. A fee will be charged for the provision of detailed written non-identifying background information taken from ministry records.

When Will The New Registry Open?

* October 1, 1991.

How May I Register?

Application forms for an active search and instructions on registering a VETO will be available at Ministry of Social Services and Housing offices when the new Registry opens. Further information regarding the VETO process will be made available as soon as that section of the amendment is proclaimed.

July 1991

Appendix C

Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete this questionnaire by following the directions preceding each section. Please try to answer each question. Any comments/explanations you wish to make would be appreciated - if you do not have room in the space provided, please continue on the back of the page. Be sure to number the comments so I will know which question they refer to.

A. ***Please answer by marking an "X" in the appropriate box.***

1. Do you think some of the issues involved in adoptive parenthood are different from those of biological parenthood?
   ☐ YES, some different issues ☐ NO, no different issues
   Please explain, if you can, why? _____
   _____

2. Do you think your adoptive mother, from either her actions or comments while you were growing up, believed that some of the issues involved in adoptive parenthood were different from those of biological parenthood?
   ☐ YES, some different issues ☐ NO, no different issues
   Please, explain, if you can, what was said or done that lead you to think this.
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. Do you think your adoptive father, from either his actions or comments while you were growing up, believed that some of the issues involved in adoptive parenthood were different from those of biological parenthood?
   ☐ YES, some different issues ☐ NO, no different issues
   Please, explain, if you can, what was said or done that lead you to think this.
   _____
   _____

B. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please indicate your answer with an "X" and fill in the blanks were necessary.

1. Sex: ☐ (a) Female ☐ (b) Male

2. Age: ☐ 19 to 29 ☐ 30 to 39 ☐ 40 to 49 ☐ 50 to 59 ☐ over 60

3. Marital Status: ☐ (a) Married ☐ (b) Divorced ☐ (c) Widowed
   ☐ (d) Never Married ☐ (e) Separated

4. Race: ☐ (a) Caucasian ☐ (b) Native Indian
   ☐ (c) Black ☐ (d) Other_____

5. Education:

- ☐ (a) Less than 9 years
- ☐ (b) Some high school
- ☐ (c) High school graduate
- ☐ (d) Vocational/trade school graduate
- ☐ (e) Some college
- ☐ (f) B.A., B.S., R.N. or other professional degree
- ☐ (g) Some graduate school
- ☐ (h) Completion of advanced degree (M.A., M.S., Ph.D., M.D., L.L.D., J.D.)

C. ADOPTION INFORMATION

1. I was placed for adoption in the year _____.

   My adoption took place:
   - ☐ In Canada - *please name the province if you know* _____
   - ☐ In the United States
   - ☐ Other - *please specify* _____

2. I was placed for adoption with: ☐ Relatives ☐ Non-relatives

3. I was placed for adoption:

   ☐ Directly from the hospital before I was one month old.

   or ☐ I was in another home before I was placed for adoption and was then placed with my adoptive parents.
   - ☐ (a) Before I was one month old
   - ☐ (b) Before I was six months old
   - ☐ (c) Between 6 mos. and 1 year
   - ☐ (d) After 1 year

4. I found out that I was adopted when I was:
   - ☐ (a) Under 3 years old
   - ☐ (b) 4-7 years old
   - ☐ (c) 8-12 years old
   - ☐ (d) 13-19 years old
   - ☐ (e) Over 19 years old

5. The way in which I learned that I was adopted was:
   - ☐ (a) A pleasant experience
   - ☐ (b) An unpleasant experience
   - ☐ (c) Other - *please explain:* _____

   _____

6. The person who first told me I was adopted was:
   - ☐ (a) My adoptive mother
   - ☐ (b) My adoptive father
   - ☐ (c) Both adoptive mother and father together
   - ☐ (d) A brother or sister
   - ☐ (e) Other - *please explain who:* _____

   _____

7. Were there other adopted children in the extended family? ☐ Yes ☐ No

8. Did your adoptive parents belong to any kind of support group? ☐ Yes ☐ No

9. How long did it take between the time of applying to adopt a child and the time you were placed?
   _____ years ☐ Not known

10. How old was your adoptive mother at the time of your adoption?
    _____ years ☐ Not known

11. How old was your adoptive father at the time of your adoption?
    _____ years ☐ Not known

12. While you were growing up, were there any serious problems in your adoptive family? (i.e. serious illness, alcoholism, marital breakdown, etc.)
    ☐ Yes ☐ No Comments:_____
    _____

13. What education did your adoptive mother have? _____

14. What education did your adoptive father have? _____

15. Did your adoptive mother work outside the home? ☐ Yes ☐ No

16. In your adoptive family were you:
    ☐ (a) The only child
    ☐ (b) The eldest child in the family -- there were biological children later.
    ☐ (c) The eldest adopted child in the family -- other children were adopted later.
    ☐ (d) A middle child -- were those older than you adopted? ☐ Yes ☐ No
    ☐ (e) The youngest child -- were those older than you adopted? ☐ Yes ☐ No

17. What were your feelings about your position as the eldest/middle/youngest child in your adoptive family?
    ☐ (a) Liked my position in the family
    ☐ (b) Disliked my position
    ☐ (c) Wished my position had been different
    Comments:_____
    _____

18. How many children, including yourself, were there in your adoptive family?
    _____

19. Did your adoptive parents ever have any biological children? ☐ Yes ☐ No
    If YES, please answer the following questions:

    a) How many biological children did your adoptive parents have? _____

    b) Were the children born to your adoptive parents born:
       ☐ Before you were adopted ☐ After you were adopted
       ☐ Other -- *please explain* _____

c) While you were growing up what was your relationship with these siblings:
- ☐ Mostly a good relationship
- ☐ Not a particularly good relationship
- ☐ Poor relationship
- ☐ Other-*please explain* _____

20. Did your adoptive parents ever adopt any other children? ☐ Yes ☐ No
If YES, please answer the following questions:

a) How many children, including yourself did they adopt? _____

b) Were any of these children biologically related to you in any way? ☐ Yes ☐ No

c) Were these children adopted: ☐ Before you were born ☐ After you were born
Other – *please explain:* _____
_____

d) While you were growing up, what was your relationship with these brothers and sisters?
- ☐ Mostly a good relationship
- ☐ Not a particularly good relationship
- ☐ Poor relationship
- ☐ Other--*please explain:* _____
_____

21. While you were growing up who did you feel closest to?
- ☐ Adoptive mother
- ☐ Adoptive father
- ☐ Sibling (brother or sister)
- ☐ Other--*please explain:* _____
_____

NOTE: If you felt closest to a sibling (brother or sister), was this sibling also adopted?

☐ Yes ☐ No Comments: _____
_____

D. PERSONAL OPINION SCALE

Please respond to each statement in the following way:

SA Draw a circle around SA if you **strongly agree** with the statement
A Draw a circle around A if you **agree** with the statement, if it is mostly true
D Draw a circle around D if you **disagree** with the statement, or if it is mostly untrue
SD Draw a circle around SD if you **strongly disagree** with the statement, or if it is very untrue

Please read the following statements and respond to them as to how you usually feel at the present time.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	SA	A	D	SD
2. At times I think I am no good at all	SA	A	D	SD
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities	SA	A	D	SD
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people	SA	A	D	SD
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	SA	A	D	SD
6. I certainly feel useless at times	SA	A	D	SD
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	SA	A	D	SD
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself	SA	A	D	SD
9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	SA	A	D	SD
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself	SA	A	D	SD

Please read the following statements and respond to them from your perception of how things were in your growing up years -- there is no right or wrong answer -- I would like to know how you felt about life in your adoptive family.

11. While I was growing up my adoptive mother was:

a) Very affectionate toward me and really seemed to care about me.	SA	A	D	SD
b) Concerned for my feelings and my welfare.	SA	A	D	SD
c) Talked openly with me whenever I had questions about my birth parents or my adoption	SA	A	D	SD
d) Shared all the information she had about my birth parents and my background	SA	A	D	SD
e) Was honest and fair in her relationship with me	SA	A	D	SD

12. While I was growing up my adoptive father was:

a) Very affectionate toward me and really seemed to care about me.	SA	A	D	SD
b) Concerned for my feelings and my welfare.	SA	A	D	SD

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
c) Talked openly with me whenever I had questions about my birth parents or my adoption	SA	A	D	SD
d) Shared all the information he had about my birth parents and my background	SA	A	D	SD
e) Was honest and fair in his relationship with me	SA	A	D	SD
13. I felt accepted by my siblings in my adopted family	SA	A	D	SD
14. I felt accepted by my adoptive parents' extended family	SA	A	D	SD
15. I felt accepted by friends of my family	SA	A	D	SD
16. I felt accepted by other children of my own age.	SA	A	D	SD
17. My adoptive parents had good communication skills	SA	A	D	SD
18. My adoptive parents were open, empathic and democratic parents	SA	A	D	SD
19. I felt that I belonged in my adoptive family.	SA	A	D	SD
20. I felt close to my adoptive family when I was growing up.	SA	A	D	SD
21. My growing up years in my adoptive home were good years.	SA	A	D	SD
22. I am happy that my adoptive parents adopted me.	SA	A	D	SD
23. I am searching because I want to find out about my roots and it is not so important I meet either of my birth parents	SA	A	D	SD
24. It is very important to me to meet my birth mother.	SA	A	D	SD
25. It is very important to me to meet my birth father.	SA	A	D	SD
26. My adoptive mother has supported me in my search and understands how I feel.	SA	A	D	SD
27. My adoptive father has supported me in my search and understands how I feel.	SA	A	D	SD
28. Birth mothers have a right to privacy and information about them should not be given out without their consent.	SA	A	D	SD

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
29. Adult adoptees have a right to know who their birth parents were.	SA	A	D	SD
30. Adult adoptees should be able to have a copy of their original birth certificate if they request it.	SA	A	D	SD
31. Adult adoptees should be given more information about their birth family.	SA	A	D	SD
32. My adoptive parents are my real parents.	SA	A	D	SD

E. EMPATHY RATING SCALE

Empathy is the ability to listen and then demonstrate understanding of how another person feels. IN other words, you feel listened to and that your feelings are understood and accepted in a non-judgmental manner. ON the following scale please indicate your perception of how you would rate the following people on their empathy regarding your feelings about your adoption when you were growing up in your adoptive home. On the scale, the lower the number, the lower the level of empathy. *Please circle the number that best reflects your rating.*

		EMPATHY			
		Low <----------			> High
1.	Adoptive mother	1	2	3	4
2.	Adoptive father	1	2	3	4
3.	Adopted brothers and sisters, if any	1	2	3	4
4.	Other brothers and sisters, if any	1	2	3	4
5.	Adoptive mother's parents	1	2	3	4
6.	Adoptive father's parents	1	2	3	4
7.	Other relatives	1	2	3	4
8.	Own friends of same age	1	2	3	4
9.	Neighbours	1	2	3	4
10.	Other--*please explain:* _____				

F. SEARCH INFORMATION

1. What made you decide to search? *(Please indicate your answer with an "X" where appropriate).*
   - ☐ (a) Needed medical information
   - ☐ (b) Birth of my own child
   - ☐ (c) Crisis period of my life
   - ☐ (d) Other -- *please explain:* _____

2. How old were you when you first started thinking about searching? _____

3. What was your age when you actually began your search?
   - ☐ (a) Under 19 years
   - ☐ (b) 19 - 24 years
   - ☐ (c) 25 - 34 years
   - ☐ (d) 35-49 years
   - ☐ (e) 50+ years

4. What do you hope to gain from your search?
   - ☐ (a) To complete the picture -- a sense of wholeness.
   - ☐ (b) Relationships
   - ☐ (c) To understand myself
   - ☐ (d) To know the truth
   - ☐ (e) Other -- *please explain:* _____

5. Were your adoptive parents still alive when you began your search? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   If YES, please answer the following questions:

   a) Did your adoptive mother help you to search? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   b) Did your adoptive father help you to search? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   Comments: _____

6. How long have you been searching? _____

7. Are the reasons you are searching now the same reasons you had when you first started to search?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No Comments: _____

8. Have you gained anything from your search to this time? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   If YES, please describe what you have gained. _____

9. Are you in favour of open adoption records? ☐ Yes ☐ No

10. Who should have access to the sealed records?
    - ☐ (a) Adult Adoptees
    - ☐ (b) Birth parents
    - ☐ (c) Adoptive parents
    - ☐ (d) Minor adoptees
    - ☐ (e) Minor adoptees with adoptive parent's consent
    - ☐ (f) Other -- *please explain:* _____

11. Do you believe that non-adoptees understand how adoptees feel? ☐ Yes ☐ No
Comments: _____

12. Looking back on your adoption experience, would you choose:

☐ (a) To be adopted by the same parents
☐ (b) To be placed with different parents
☐ (c) Not to be adopted at all
Comments: _____

13. What is the most difficult aspect of adoption to you?

☐ (a) Relationships with adoptive family.
☐ (b) Lack of relationship with birth parent(s).
☐ (c) Attitudes of non-adoptees.
☐ (d) Secrecy and sealed records
☐ (e) Other people making decisions which affect your life.
☐ (f) Other -- *please explain:* _____
_____

14. What is most important to you in your search? ***Please rank in order of importance from 1 to 7 with 1 as most important, 2 as less important, etc.***

[ ] (a) Reunion with birth mother
[ ] (b) Reunion with birth father
[ ] (c) Reunion with a sibling
[ ] (d) Reunion with other relatives
[ ] (e) Medical information
[ ] (f) Information about my biological family
[ ] (g) Other -- *please explain:* _____
_____

15. Did you ever receive any written background information about your birth family?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If YES, please answer the following questions:
At what age were you given this information? _____
Who gave you the information? _____
Was the information given to you:
- At your request? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- In a positive manner? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- In a negative manner? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- In a neutral manner? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Was the information helpful to you? ☐ Yes ☐ No

16. If you have some suggestions as to what information should be given in a written "Birth Family History" for adoptees, please list them on the back of this sheet, or attach extra pages if necessary.

Please return the completed questionnaire to me, in the enclosed self-addressed, postage paid envelope, as soon as you have finished it.

Thank you so much for your time in completing this questionnaire. If you have any further comments please write them on the reverse side. REMEMBER -- this is confidential, please do not show your name.

Appendix D

Covering Letter from Parent Finders

Parent Finders Of B.C.

Box 7051, Depot 4
Victoria, B. C. V9B 4Z2

September 21, 1991

Dear Member;

We have been approached to assist in an adoption research project being conducted by a University of Victoria graduate student. The student, Carol Anne Philion, will be using the information from this research in her thesis in order to complete her Master of Arts degree in Counselling.

The student has asked us to select, randomly, a sample of Adult Adoptees who are currently searching for information about their biological family and then mail a questionnaire to those whom we have selected. The student will not be given the names of those to whom we send the questionnaires in order to maintain confidentiality. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

We have agreed to assist in this project because we believe that this research can have long term benefits for all of us who have been involved in the adoption process as well as for those who may be involved in the future.

Yours very truly,

W Pillon

Wanda Pillon
President

: Enclosures

WP/pm

Appendix E

Letter from the Researcher

C.A. Philion
Box 16, Saunders Road R.R. #1
Nanoose Bay, B.C. V0R 2R0

September 13, 1991

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I am gathering research information for my thesis in order to complete my M.A. degree at the University of Victoria.

I chose to do my thesis on adoption because, as a practicing social worker for approximately sixteen years, I have been directly involved with many of the various aspects of adoption. I wanted to look at adoption from the adoptees perspective as I believe more current information is needed from adult adoptees in order to try to help update theory and practice as well as policies and laws which affect those who have been, or will be, involved in the adoption process.

I hope you will be interested in contributing to this research. The questionnaire will take some time to complete as there is a considerable amount of information to obtain from you. The data from the questionnaire will be invaluable to me in my research, and hopefully it will be of interest to others who are involved in the adoption process.

I would like to assure you that complete confidentiality will be maintained at all times.

When you have completed the questionnaire, please send it to me as soon as possible in the stamped, self-addressed envelope provided. In order to maintain confidentiality, please do not put your name on the questionnaire or use a return address.

Upon completion of this study the results will be made available to Parent Finders. I would very much appreciate your help in completing this project.

If you require further information or wish to contact me, I can be reached at (604) 468-7993.

Yours very truly,

Carol A. Philion

Carol Anne Philion

Appendix F

Follow-up Letter from Parent Finders

Parent Finders Of B.C.
Box 7051, Depot 4
Victoria, B. C. V9B 4Z2

October 17, 1991

Dear Member:

On September 21 a research questionnaire was mailed to you from this office. The researcher, Carol Anne Philion, a University of Victoria graduate student, has requested this follow-up letter be sent to you.

The researcher would like to thank all of those who have completed the questionnaire and returned it. If you have not returned your questionnaire yet could you please complete and return it as soon as possible. If, by chance, you did not receive the questionnaire, please contact me at 642-6122 evenings as I have some extra ones.

Thank you for assisting in this research.

Yours truly,

Wanda Pillon
President

WP/pm

Appendix G

Comments from Group 1 and Group 2 Regarding Perceived "Differences" by Adoptive Mother

Do you think your adoptive mother, from either her actions or comments while you were growing up, believed that some of the issues involved in adoptive parenthood were different from those of biological parenthood? [✔] YES

GROUP 1 -- COMMENTS:

I believe she tried to be a perfect Mom partly in order to compensate for her personal sense of being an incomplete woman re: by having her child by "natural child birth.

Placed far too much emphasis on adopted child being "Special" overprotective/too critical.

My mother has always said that she wished she could have her own children so I think and issue for her has been to resolve her anxiety and fear that because no one in my immediate family is blood related, that we are somehow more distant. For example, she often says that she never should have adopted my brother because he's nothing like her.

She began to explain to us when we were very young and tried to tell us as much about our real parents. She felt children were important even though she wasn't able to have any.

My mother felt threatened when I asked what time of day I was born. I respected her wishes and did not look into the matter of adoption papers.

I had a very difficult period during my teenage years. I think my mother felt this was because I was adopted. I think it was because I was spoiled and selfish, and there was a real generation gap.

She wanted a child and had to wait. Biological gave no thought before having a child and didn't want it.

Sexual abuse happened with adoptive father. Biological father's actions would have differed. Adoptive mother unresponsive.

I feel she should not have had the opportunity to adopt.

I believe my adoptive mother couldn't bond with me the same as she could her biological children.

You are very fortunate that we took you in remember that!

My mother always told me I was a gift from God and told that to anyone that would listen. Don't get me wrong, I know she loved me very much but she was paranoid about her losing me or my brother and always over did everything in her continual comments on family issues. (very hard question for me to explain my feelings).

She often "explained away" character/behavior traits she could not understand by claiming I "must be like my biological mother." My adoptive mother and I were very different in character.

My parents were divorced when I was 10 years old. This has always bothered my mother where I am concerned because she felt guilty that I was adopted into a dysfunctional family.

Overheard her telling the Minister on telephone when I was 10 that I was adopted.

My adoptive mother had lived in foster homes but had contact with her biological family and felt that it was important to her.

The adoption was kept secret until accidently found out. Biological parents don't have that problem.

It was used as a weapon "behave or we'll send you back to the orphanage" and more subtle innuendos.

Do you think your adoptive mother, from either her actions or comments while you were growing up, believed that some of the issues involved in adoptive parenthood were different from those of biological parenthood? [✔] NO

GROUP 2 -- COMMENTS:

No different treatment from non-adopted brother and sister

As I was adopted when I was two months old I don't believe there were any different issues.

Other than explaining that I was adopted, I feel my mother raised me the same way as her natural children.

She almost tries to forget I was adopted like the issue doesn't exist. I think she is very insecure about our relationship. She says she is willing to give information for me to search for birth parents but doesn't want to know about it.

I was told as early as possible that I was adopted the line being "we love you even more because we picked you" etc. Once that was understood I never felt anything other than these were my parents, I was their son.

Only when brought to the attention of parent did parent understand desire to trace roots.

I was treated exactly the same as their biological children.

At the time of my adoption, several professional couples (medical) also adopted, believing the adopted child would assume most, if not all, of their values, interests, etc. I understand that such was not the case in each instance indicating that the child retains a lot from biological parents.

With one natural child, three adopted and countless foster children, we were <u>all</u> treated the same.

She has never said anything to lead me to believe issues are different. She did worry that someone would "take us away" one day.

My mother always supported myself in being adopted.

She never wanted to talk about it.

I always felt that I was very special and loved and my mother told me so on numerous occasions as I was growing up and now that I am grown up.

Appendix H

Comments from Some of the Subjects Who Believed There Were Some Differences Between Adoptive Parenthood and Biological Parenthood

Do you think some of the issues involved in adoptive parenthood are different from those of biological parenthood? [✔] YES

GROUP 1 -- COMMENTS:

Adoptive parents may worry about the childs' sense of belonging to the family. Medical questions may arise. They may worry that child will find biological family and leave them.

Adoptive parents sometimes try to avoid the subject.

Adoptive parenthood have to be searched and meet requirements -- biological don't have to meet any to have a child and give up.

My adoptive parents are 40 years older than I, making values and beliefs different than biological parents.

Once told you are adopted you suffer a displacement for awhile.

Sensitivity in telling the child they are adopted and at what age.

Even if told early in life that one is adopted there must be open communication all through the child's upbringing.

This entirely depends on the family structure.

No medical history - the perception that there is a difference.

I'm not sure I know what you mean by "issues", but adoptive parenthood can be difficult if adoptees feel bitter or alienated from their adoptive family or if adoptive parents blame the adoptees deviant behavior on the fact that the child is adopted. Adoptive parenthood requires sensitivity and tact when discussing or explaining adoption.

A parent needs to explain carefully to adoptive children why so they'll feel ok. Children will always wonder who their real parents are. Kids feel adopted and need reassurance that they are ok.

Adoptive parents are concerned with making the child feel they are very important and special and no different than any of their own children.

Because of unexpected genetic traits, both physically and in character, and a risk of rejections from child later, the risk of intrusion from biological relatives, etc.

Adoptive parents have to instill a sense of "being wanted" in an adopted child.

Natural parents are better prepared psychologically for a new baby. The gene's (looks, manner etc.) are not known to adoptive parents/children.

My adoptive mother lived with an unfounded fear for years that I would be taken away from her!!

Do you think some of the issues involved in adoptive parenthood are different from those of biological parenthood? [✔] YES

GROUP 2 -- COMMENTS:

Child retains character traits etc. despite accepting much of the adoptive parents influence and upbringing.

The issue of medical history of the adoptee should be known in order that any specific measures, if any, should be taken to ensure the continued health of the adoptee.

I was lucky enough to feel like I was of biological parenthood. I knew differently though, there is only one issue and that is to find my biological parents.

Many unanswered questions for the adopted child i.e. medical history, curiosity about natural parents, etc.

I think it varies from family to family but when family difficulties arise the adoptee feels like "well these aren't my real parents anyway" it was at times like this in my childhood I thought of my birth parents.

Those first six months when the child is (first) adopted -- dealing with the fact child may want to locate biological parents.

Adoptive parents have to deal with their emotions and the childs (or other children) when the child is told of his/her adoption.

Having to explain origins and why biological mother had to give you up, etc. Not knowing medical background otherwise parenting was the same for myself and other siblings.

Some families may have difficulties accepting the adopted child as an equal sibling or relative. Some adopted children may experience a loss of identity once they are aware of the truth. Some children might experience teasing or ridicule from peers.

Medical issues are always a question mark. some other background issues as well.

The biggest difference is there is no such thing as an accidental adoption.

Personality traits, a desire for adoptee to be able to trace his/her origin.

Heritage background (family tree) -- blood is blood.

Yes, for a number of reasons: The adopted child must come to terms with the fact that their mother gave them up. They will always wonder if the person next to them on the bus, or in the grocery line is related. The adoptee usually doesn't resemble anyone in the family. Often family or friends question the motives or wonder if adopting a strange child is wise -- you don't know what you might get.

Sense of belonging, also health issues.

I think it should be talked about. I think kids should know from the beginning.

Just growing up with unanswered questions.

Yes, but only if the child has been told they were adopted.

Hereditary versus environmental influences.

In my case my adoptive mother finds if hard to tell me the truth or give me any information.

VITA

Surname:	Philion	Given Names:	Carol Anne
Place of Birth:	Harrow, England	Date of Birth:	October 19, 1938

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria	1970 to 1973
Okanagan College	1969 to 1970

Degrees Awarded:

B.A. (Honours)	University of Victoria	1973

Honours and Awards:

University of Victoria Fellowship	1985 to 1986

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Title of Thesis: Perspectives on the Adoption Experience from Adult Adoptees in Search of Their Roots.

Author: [redacted]
(Signature)

PHILION, CAROL ANNE

January 30, 1992.
(Date)