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AN ASSESSMENT OF REUNION OUTCOMES  
BETWEEN ADULT ADOPTEEES AND  
BIRTH RELATIVES

by

Shari Wendling Schneider

A Thesis  
submitted to the  
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
through the School of Social Work  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Social Work  
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada  
1990

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## A B S T R A C T

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine reunion outcomes between adult adoptees and birth relatives. Variables selected from the literature were analyzed to determine possible associations with the major outcome variables of satisfaction with the reunion experience and the closeness of subsequent relationships between the adoptees and birth relatives.

Thirteen adoptees, eight birth mothers, and four birth siblings participated in semi-structured interviews which addressed the following areas: relinquishment experiences, adoption experiences, prereunion experiences, reunion outcomes and satisfaction with reunion outcomes.

The majority of the birth mothers reported that they experienced grief and sorrow regarding the relinquishment of the child. Many birth mothers hoped to have a reunion with the child, but fears of intruding prevented them from searching.

Over 80% of the adoptees reported that adoption was seldom discussed in their home. Over 75% of the adoptees considered their adoptions successful.

All of the subjects reported that they did not feel fully prepared for the reunion experience. The subjects had high expectations for the reunion. They hoped to achieve a close, personal relationship with their partner.

Over 90% of the subjects had a positive initial reaction to their reunion partner. Seventy-two percent of the respondents believed they had a close relationship with their partner and were satisfied with the reunion outcome. A majority of the adoptees and birth relatives stated that they felt better about themselves after the reunion. Over 90% of the respondents reported that they had experienced problems with the relationship since the reunion.

There was a positive relationship between satisfaction with the reunion and the development of a relationship between participants. There was no relationship found between satisfaction with the reunion or the development of a relationship and the demographic, relinquishment or adoption variables. The amount of spousal support for the reunion was related to the outcome measures.

It appears that outcomes were dependent on what occurred during the reunion. Those subjects who felt the reunion met their expectations, had an initial positive response to their partner and perceived themselves to be similar to their partner tended to report positive outcomes.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the support and guidance of the chairman of my committee, Dr. Forrest "Bud" Hansen. In addition, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Dr. Kumar Chatterjee and Dr. Robert Whitehurst for their time and effort as members of the thesis committee.

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

Adoption is a legal and social process whereby a new family is found for children who would otherwise have to remain in unsatisfactory homes or become the permanent responsibility of society. The ties between the child and its biological parents are severed and a legal transfer of parental rights, duties and obligations is made to another set of parents (Sachev, 1984).

Since adoption laws were first introduced in Ontario in 1921, there have been over 200,000 adoptions (Garber, 1985). Considering that there are an equal number of birth mothers and fathers, other birth relatives and adoptive parents and their extended families, over one million people in Ontario have had some experience with adoption (Ontario's New Adoption Disclosure Policy, June, 1986).

Adoption as a social process reflects values, attitudes and beliefs of society. The law has served to institutionalize these beliefs and has provided the means for creating and maintaining the various relationships involved. In Ontario this is partly accomplished by "sealing up" the records related to adoption and issuing a new birth

certificate for the child in the adoptive parents' name. These adoption disclosure laws have been at the center of controversy for many years. This controversy affects everyone involved in the adoption process--the adoptive parents, the birth family, the adoptee, and the social agency which placed the child.

Adoptees, for the most part, remained silent. They were afraid to speak out, afraid to hurt their adoptive parents and appear ungrateful, selfish or "disturbed." They were afraid to challenge the existing laws which barred them from seeking information about their biological roots. Gradually adoptees became more vocal and joined together with other adoptees and members of the community who were sympathetic to their dilemma. They began to demand the right to knowledge about their past--knowledge not denied to any other adult in our society. Adoptees believed they were victimized and discriminated against by laws that treated them as children and failed to consider their rights, needs, and dignity as human beings.

Social workers, faced with clients whose needs were not being met through existing policies, began to re-evaluate adoption practice principles. They began to develop an awareness of the contradictions between the law and the reality of adoptive kinship. Disclosure laws were enacted in

Ontario in order to protect all the parties concerned. It was believed, at the time, that the stigma of the child's birth was so great that only by severing all ties to the past could the child and birth mother have a chance to start a new life (Sachev, 1984; Small, 1979; Watson, 1979).

Changing social values and attitudes, increased professional awareness and adult adoptee lobbying efforts resulted in new disclosure laws being passed in 1979. This law provided for an Adoption Disclosure Registry through which an adult adoptee and birth parents could register their desire for a reunion. The registry was passive in nature. There would be no searching by the Ministry or Children's Aid Societies, and the adoptive parents were required to give their consent to the reunion. Because of these restrictions and because the Registry was never widely advertised to the public, it has not been effective in promoting registrations. Between June, 1979 and September, 1986 there were only 467 reunions with 6,463 adoptees and 3,296 birth parents registered (Ministry of Community and Social Services, Newsrelease, 1986).

Recently, amendments to The Child and Family Services Act, 1984 have eliminated the above mentioned restrictions and it was expected by Garber (1985) that there would be a two-thirds increase in registrations over the next five years

(Garber, 1985). Because many reunions have been the result of personal initiative and without agency involvement, social workers have very little practice knowledge, theory, or research on which to base present practice. Reunions have the potential for helping the adoptees gain a better understanding of themselves through learning about their past. They also have the potential for causing suffering, pain, and anguish. Unfortunately, reunions have received scant attention beyond emotional media publicity and as a result professionals have little understanding of reunion processes and outcomes.

#### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Reunions are very emotional experiences and there are many personal accounts in the literature describing the frustrations of years of searching as well as the drama and impact of the actual meeting. For those adoptees who seek out a birth relative, the reunion experience may be fraught with potential dangers. The birth relative may reject the child, being unable to face the past and afraid to introduce the child to her present family. The adoptee may find the birth mother has severe emotional, developmental or medical problems. These outcomes have the potential to be traumatic for the adoptee and put the adoptee "at risk" if appropriate counselling is not available prior to and after the reunion (Haines & Timms, 1985). Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1974)

estimate that 50% of the reunions have positive outcomes as judged by the quality of the relationship that develops between the adoptee and birth parent. However, there is little discussion in the literature about variables which may contribute to positive and negative reunion outcomes. It is possible that there may be additional variables which are related to positive outcomes, in addition to the development of a relationship.

The purpose of this study is to assess the outcomes of reunions between adult adoptees and birth relatives. Adoptees and birth relatives who have participated in a reunion were interviewed in order to explore some of the variables that may be related to the outcome of the reunion. This study will specifically focus on the following areas: relinquishment experiences, adoption experiences, prereunion experiences, reunion outcomes and satisfaction with reunion outcomes.

#### **RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

There is very little information available about reunion outcomes. Much of the research deals with the issue of why adoptees search for their biological roots, but there is a distinct void when it comes to assessing and understanding the factors related to reunion outcomes. At the present time



most of the literature on reunion experiences are personal accounts of meetings between adoptees and birth relatives.

Reunions are an extremely timely topic. Over the past year new disclosure laws have been introduced in the legislature and have only recently been proclaimed. These new laws will permit birth history information to be more readily available for adoptees and sanction the Ministry to search for birth relatives at the adoptee's request. The Ministry is expecting that the number of adoptees and birth relatives requesting assistance with searching and reunions will rise dramatically over the next one to five years.

This issue has important social work implications as social workers will be the intermediaries in planning reunions under the recent legislation. Policies and procedures regarding reunion planning are in the process of being developed. Practitioners must rely on their best judgement in determining reunion procedure. As more information becomes available about potential reunion outcomes and the factors involved, social workers will be better able to counsel clients in preparation for the reunion and after the reunion.

This issue is relevant to specialization in the area of services to children and families because adoptive and birth

families require services in preparation for a reunion and post-reunion counselling is also often indicated. The adoptive family must consider the possibility that the adopted child may decide to seek out members of their biological family when they reach adulthood. In counseling adoptive families, one of the goals is to help them accept the reality of the child's birth family and improve communications within the family around adoption related issues. Many adoptive parents find it difficult to talk with their children about their birth family and discourage any attempts by them to make contact with their birth family.

Not understanding the issues involved, they may believe the child is rejecting them and are fearful of the consequences of a reunion between the adoptee and the birth family. If social workers are able to reassure adoptive parents and their child about reunion outcomes and help them prepare for the reunion in a positive way, everyone will be better able to use the reunion experience in a way that promotes growth and understanding. Because there is so little research related to reunion outcomes, this study will provide an additional source of information to aid social workers when counseling adoptive parents, adoptees, and birth relatives in preparations for a reunion.

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF THE ADOPTION LITERATURE

The early adoption statutes in Canada and in other countries were simple, usually requiring only a joint petition by the husband and wife for the adoption of the child in addition to written consents from the child's parents. As adoption laws became more specific and complex, secrecy provisions were built into them. These provisions are now commonly referred to as adoption disclosure laws. These laws, in effect, "sealed" the adoption records so that all parties to the adoption could be assured of confidentiality and anonymity (Anderson, 1977). These laws were extremely compatible with current adoption practice which was based on the assumption that the adopted child would become a part of the adoptive family "as if" the child was born to them and that the past had little relevance to the child and the new family (Thompson, 1979).

It was often assumed that adoptees who desired to know about their biological roots were emotionally disturbed or ungrateful to their adoptive parents. Adoptees learned to keep their questions to themselves and if they sought out their birth families, they often did it on their own with no help from social agencies or their adoptive parents (Lifton,

1975; Toynbee, 1985). Present disclosure laws are more flexible and it is expected that reunions between adoptees and birth relatives will become more frequent. These reunions will be coordinated through the appropriate social service agencies. A review of the relevant literature will explain the evolution of adoption policy from secrecy to openness and relevant research findings. The review of the literature will be organized according to the following issues: adoption disclosure laws, the uniqueness of the adoptive family, adoption outcomes and relationship to searching, adult adoptee perspective, birth relative perspective, and reunion outcomes.

#### ADOPTION DISCLOSURE LAWS

While the first Canadian adoption statute was passed in 1873, The Ontario Adoption Act of 1921 was to lay the groundwork for subsequent adoption legislation in Ontario. This law stated that the adoptive parents assumed all the duties, rights, and responsibilities toward the child as if the child was born to them. It required that the adoption application be sealed up and only opened through a court order.

There were no major changes in the law until 1979, when a provision was made for the establishment of a Voluntary Disclosure Registry. This registry would allow birth parents

and adult adoptees to indicate their desire to meet or exchange identifying information. The registry was passive in nature (the Ministry of Community and Social Services would not attempt to locate either party), was not advertised in the media, and required adoptive parent's consent before the reunion could take place. These restrictions had the effect of severely limiting the role of the registry in effecting contact (Garber, 1985).

Because of these concerns, Dr. R. Garber was appointed a special commissioner to study adoption disclosure. He made a comprehensive review of the adoption process and recommended sweeping revisions in disclosure procedure. As a result of Dr. Garber's report, The Adoption Disclosure Statute Law Amendment Act, Bill 165, received Royal Assent in February, 1987 and was proclaimed in July, 1987. While not incorporating all of Garber's recommendations, the amendments have attempted to protect the rights of those involved, while allowing adults easier access to their records.

The amendment provides for the release of non-identifying information to all parties, including siblings and grandparents, at their request, with counseling available to them. Non-identifying information is defined in the regulations, as well as in the guidelines to prevent such information being put together in such a way as to become

identifying information. Identifying information would be available to adult adoptees, birth parents, adult siblings, and grandparents when parties have registered their consent. The consent of adoptive parents would not be required. The Adoption Disclosure Register would become "semi-active" in that it would search out birth relatives at the request of the adoptee, but not vice versa.

While most laws in Canadian provinces require that adoption records be sealed, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, and Alberta are exceptions to the rule, and like Ontario, have legislated some type of disclosure register. The Child Welfare Act, S.A. 1984, C. 8.1, S. 65 establishes a passive registry in Alberta, which requires that adoptees, birth parents and birth siblings register a consent before identifying information can be shared. The Child and Family Services Act and The Family Relations Act, S.N.B., 1980, C. C-2.1, S. 92 allows for an active registry in New Brunswick in that the Ministry makes provisions, after the registration of one person, for the other party to be contacted to obtain their consent for the release of information. Saskatchewan has a semi-active registry and its guidelines for conducting searches have been used as a model for the recent legislature changes in Ontario (Ontario's New Adoption Disclosure Policy, 1986).

Scotland has allowed access to birth records since its first adoption legislation in 1930. Adopted people over 17 may apply for information from their original birth records. Similarly, Finland, Israel, and Sweden have made birth information readily available to adoptees (Edgar, 1976, 1977, p. 19). Three states in Australia have established a register where birth parents and adult adoptees may register their names if they wish to establish contact and non-identifying information is not subject to any limitations (Report from the Statute Law Revision Committee, 1978).

Adoption legislation was enacted in England in 1927 and was similar to Ontario legislation requiring sealed records. In 1970 a working paper, which was later expanded into the Houghton Report of 1972, became the basis for The Children Act of 1975. The Act allowed adoptees over 18 years of age to receive a copy of their original birth certificate. It is also interesting that the Act required compulsory counseling for those adopted before 1975 (Haines & Timms, 1985; Kirk, 1981; Triseliotis, 1984).

As in Canada, the legislative picture in the United States is complicated by the fact that each state legislates for its citizens, thereby creating an unevenness and disparity in adoption disclosure laws throughout the country. At least 69 bills were introduced in state legislatures

between 1981-1983. While most of the recent legislation has had a liberalizing effect on disclosure, some states that previously allowed adult adoptees access to birth records, attempted to limit access. Montana, for example, passed such a bill. Obviously, this issue has become a topic of intense legislative debate and is far from resolved (Harrington 1981, 1984).

Harrington (1984) and O'Donnell (1983) sum up the disclosure legislation, as of 1983, as follows: Six states allow access to original birth certificates or adoption records on demand, and 17 states provide for the release of identifying information, usually with the consent of the birth parent(s), through a registry or intermediary system. The Minnesota bill, passed in 1977, is unique in that it requires an adoption department to search for the birth parent(s), at the request of the adoptee, in order to acquire their consent for a release of information. In addition, the law stipulates that the court inform the birth parents of their right to deny the release of information (Weidell, 1980). This law is similar to the disclosure Amendments to The Child and Family Services Act, 1984.

#### THE UNIQUENESS OF THE ADOPTIVE FAMILY

The evolution of social policy relevant to adoption disclosure is based on changing societal values and attitudes



toward adoption. As the social context of adoption changed, so did the social policies which society implemented to control the adoption process.

Adoption disclosure laws were enacted in Canada (and in the United States) for what was considered, at the time, crucial to the adoption process, the protection of adopted children, birth parents, and adoptive parents. The sealed records laws reflected society's concerns, attitudes, and values. The stigma of illegitimacy was considered so great and so destructive that it was felt the "best interests of the child" were served by completely severing adopted children's connections to the past and giving them a brand new start in life, "as if they had been born" to their new parents. It was believed that only by starting anew could the child truly bond to the adoptive family and benefit from a stable family life with adoptive parents who were presumed to be in a position both psychologically and financially to care for and nurture the adopted child (Kirk, 1984).

In addition, sealed records were thought to protect the anonymity of the birth mother by allowing her to hide her "shame" and put the past behind her so that she could begin life again, as if the child had never been born. Adoptive parents had to be protected also if they were to be the "true" parents of the child. It was believed by law makers,

who were influenced by professional attitudes, that adoptive parents would not be available if they were not protected from possible interference by the birth mother. And for a time, adoptive parents were in demand as many infants were available for adoption, until about the middle of 1960. In addition, adoption became a very acceptable way of adding to one's family, and couples and single parents came forward to adopt children who were previously considered unadoptable.

While this change was taking place, fewer infants became available for adoption, due to wide ranging social changes which occurred in the sixties. Abortion became more widely acceptable and available, the stigma of unmarried parenthood was reduced, and more services and resources were offered to unmarried mothers as agencies began to focus on providing realistic options to unmarried parents and preventing situations or circumstances which would require that children become permanent wards of society (Hepworth, 1980). As the adoption picture was changing, so did attitudes toward discrimination and secrecy. Citizens became more assertive and many groups of people began speaking out and demanding equal treatment under the law and freedom from discrimination. Adult adoptees also began to speak out. They had been silent for years, afraid to ask questions, afraid to hurt their adoptive parents and seem disloyal, and afraid to challenge the existing laws which barred them from

seeking information about their biological roots (Garber, 1985).

Agency practice and policy has been based on the assumption, and still is to some extent, that adoptive families and biological families were similar, if not the same. This belief is stated in the law in S. 152(2): "For all purposes of law . . . the adopted child becomes the child of the adopting parent and the adopting parent becomes the parent of the adopted child, and the adopted child ceases to be the child of the person who was his or her parent before the adoption order was made . . . as if the adopted child had been born to the adopting parent" (The Child and Family Services Act, 1984)

Kirk, in his books Adoptive Kinships (1981) and Shared Fate (1984), expounds the theory that in the adoption process myth and reality have become entangled. The myth is based on maintaining the premise that adoptive kinship is the same as biological kinship and in denying that differences do exist. This myth, Kirk believes, made into law and reinforced through agency policies and procedures, has contributed to role confusions, communication breakdown, and a lack of trust between parents and their adopted children.

Adoption practice has basically confronted adoptive parents with two opposing practice principles. First,

adopted children should be told at an early age that they are adopted and second, that once the adoption order was signed they were a "real" family and had no further need for agency services. These families were to assimilate into the mainstream of family life. If they should encounter difficulties in the future, they would be treated and resources would be provided for them, as they would be for any family.

Agency practices further perpetuated the myth that adoptive and biological families were similar if not the same. Infants were matched as much as possible in terms of religious and racial background, physical appearance, and interests and talents (Sorosky, Baran, & Pannor, 1984). In addition, spacing children between placements or between natural and adopted siblings was considered good adoption practice. Children were seldom placed in homes where they were closer than nine months apart, in an attempt to copy the pattern of biological families.

As Kirk (1981) says:

Adoption was to disappear as a vital statistic, adoptive families were to become officially indistinguishable from the families of the mainstream. And this in turn required that the old records of the child's antecedents, ancestry and birth records would have to disappear too. The intent was clearly to protect children from being stigmatized and families from being disturbed by outsiders. But it was to be made a closed issue for all time, not for just the childrearing years.

Thus, there came into being the myth of adoptive kinship as a firm, well-constructed institution. (Kirk, 1981)

Kirk uses the terms "acceptance-of-difference" and "rejection-of-difference" as two ways to conceptualize the foundations of the adoptive family. He believes that adoptive parents deal with their status by basing their behaviors on one of the two mechanisms--they either acknowledge that their situation is different than that of biological parents or deny it (Kirk, 1984). This decision greatly influences the issues and their implications which are to be discussed in this thesis.

Kirk (1981, 1984) has studied adoptive relationships since 1951 and in his latest studies he administered a questionnaire to 283 adoptive parents. The results of this study and previous ones led him to the conclusion that adoptive and biological parenting differs in several significant aspects. First, adoptive parents do not have the same preparations for parenthood as do biological parents. Biological parents have a gradual preparation for parenthood through the time of the pregnancy and during this time couples, often through discussions with other parents, begin to consider their new roles and change in status. Adoptive parents often do not know when they will receive the child

and may not know other adoptive parents who could serve as role models.

Second, adoptive parents must rely on another party to become parents. They must meet agency criteria and go through extensive interviews before being "approved" for placement. In addition, adoptive parents are often older than biological parents when they adopt, and have usually been married longer before becoming parents. This is because the couple has been trying to conceive and have usually gone through vigorous and frustrating testing procedures before deciding to adopt. Third, adoptive parents may have role confusion regarding their entitlement to the child, especially prior to the completion of legal adoption which takes a minimum of six months in Ontario. This may affect bonding between the parents and child, especially since the parents know that the agency has the legal right and obligation to terminate the placement if the agency later determines the placement is not in the best interests of the child.

Fourth, adoptive parents may not receive the sanction and approval for parenthood that is usually associated with the birth of a child into the family. With the birth of a child, family members gather together and celebrate the arrival. The family looks for likenesses between the child

and family members and usually cards and presents are sent to the new family. For the couple who adopt an infant, this ritual is generally followed. However, if the adopted child is other than a healthy infant, family members and friends, having no prescribed role to follow, may appear to respond indifferently, at least initially. Kirk believes that although there are these difference between adoptive and biological parenthood, adoptive parents do not always accept and understand these differences and deal with adoption through "rejection-of-difference" (Kirk, 1981, 1984).

The issue of telling the children about their adoption is central to understanding the "acceptance-of-difference-rejection-of-difference" concept. As mentioned previously, adoptive parents were led to believe that their newly created family would be the same as any other family, but they were also directed to tell their children at an early age that they were adopted. However, social workers appeared to be unaware of how bewildered and confused adoptive parents might feel when confronted with this task, and how the confusion might inhibit communication within the family. Adoptive parents were given few, if any, guidelines and usually had no contact with the agency after the adoption was completed. To have approached the agency for help or guidance would have meant to the adoptive parents that they had failed in some way and would have probably been interpreted that way by the

agency. In fact, many families who did encounter difficult adoptions and returned to the agency were often serviced by the protection department and adoption workers were never consulted, informed, or asked to participate in the planning and development of a treatment program for the family. Indeed, they were treated as any other family that might be having difficulties. And so the myth persisted and was a great influence on social work practice.

Many authors and researchers are beginning to address this issue and an understanding is beginning to be formed about the high expectations we have placed on adoptive parents-- "the dual task of promoting the child's integration into and differentiation from the adoptive family, possibly at one and the same time" (Shaw, 1984). Studies have shown that adoptive families have often had difficulties around the issue of telling. In a study by Raynor (1980), she found that while most adoptive parents told their children that they were adopted, most were uncertain about when to tell, how much to tell, and how often to discuss adoption with their child. Of course, this was further complicated by the problem that many parents had very little information or background about the child or, if they had received a social history from the agency, many had forgotten the details or lost the written copy they may have received.



She also found that less than 40% of the adoptive parents she studied told the child all of the information that they had received from the agency. This uncertainty on the part of the adoptive parents was communicated to their children. Most parents in the study reported that adoption was discussed infrequently, with almost three-quarters of the participants stating it was discussed only one to three times a year. Many adoptive parents, apparently, felt that once they had done their duty and told their children they were adopted, it was up to them to bring up the adoption again, if they had any questions.

Glass and Novac (1984), in a study undertaken of adult adoptees in Windsor and London, Ontario, found that 68% of the adult adoptees they interviewed felt their adoptive parents withheld birth family information from them and 84% were dissatisfied with the amount of information given to them by their adoptive parents. They also reported that 41% of the adoptive mothers and 31% of the adoptive fathers displayed negative feelings, as defined by embarrassment, secretiveness, and anxiety when speaking about adoption. Glass and Novac concluded that, "adoptive parents often do not feel comfortable and confident in revealing the fact of adoption to their children" (p. 74). Adoptees seemed to sense their parents' anxiety about discussing adoption and

responded to it by inhibiting their own natural curiosity for fear of hurting or upsetting their adoptive parents.

This conclusion was also supported by a study done by Thompson, Stoneman, Webber, and Harrison (1978). They interviewed 40 adoptees and found that the majority of them were told of their adoption at an early age. However, "as the adoptee grew to the age of understanding . . . the adoptive parents stopped talking about the adoption. Their children's questions about their beginnings made the adoptive parents upset and anxious and they found it difficult to deal with the birth parents as real people" (p.17).

Why adoptive parents are reluctant to discuss the facts of their child's adoption has been discussed in the literature, and many theories have been proposed. Briefly, it is believed that the adoptive parents' own discomfort with their infertility (however, it was also found that couples who had biological children also had experienced difficulties in communication), negative attitudes toward illegitimacy, concern about their own ability to parent the child and their entitlement to parent the child, fear of losing the child's love, and concern about making the child feel different and insecure contribute to communication difficulties in discussing adoption (Raynor, 1980). Kirk would certainly add to this list, the confusion engendered when myth and reality become entwined in the adoptive parents' minds. He believes

that parents who accept the differences between adoptive and biological kinship are better able to more honestly and openly communicate with their children.

From a systems perspective, communication difficulties in adoptive families around "telling" and discussion of the child's biological family may contribute to family dysfunction. If family rules indicate that adoption is a topic to be avoided, "rejection-of-difference," children will learn to avoid asking questions or express feelings about being adopted. This means that an important aspect of the family's life is seldom discussed. The adopted children will, therefore, not have the opportunity to clarify their perceptions of adoption, to understand the process and how it relates to their world.

Adoption practice theory has, in the past, been based on a "rejection-of-difference" philosophy which ignored the unique aspects of the adoptive family. The assumption that the adoptive family was similar to, if not the same as, the biological family has contributed to communication difficulties in the adoptive family, especially concerning adoption related issues. An understanding of the uniqueness of the adoptive family and changing societal values and attitudes have been instrumental in the development of progressive social legislation related to adoption disclosure. The

present adoption disclosure legislation attempts to meet the needs of adoptees, adoptive parents and birth relatives, while protecting their rights.

#### ADOPTION OUTCOMES AND RELATIONSHIP TO SEARCHING

While the preceding discussion may lead one to believe that adoption, because of its unique status, is fraught with overwhelming difficulties that may handicap the child and family's development, this does not appear to be the case. While there may be stresses associated with the fact of adoption, the adopted family appears to be able to cope with them and with a high degree of success, overcome them. Studies of the outcome of adoption shed some light on this matter. However, some of the studies to be reviewed were undertaken more than 10 years ago. Keeping this in mind, in studies where the adopted child is now an adult, it means that the placement of the child would have taken place some 20 years prior to the study. Agency practice, values and attitudes toward adoption have changed radically over the intervening years.

Jaffee and Fanshel (1970) reported on a study of 100 adoptive parents. The adoptive parents were interviewed and permission was sought from them to make contact with the adult adoptee. Permission was only given in 33 cases--perhaps an indication of "rejection-of-difference." There

was no control group of comparable families with adult biological children that could be compared to the sample population. Therefore, it is difficult to determine to what degree problematic outcomes and difficulties may also be found among biological families in the general population.

Jaffee and Fanshel (1970) rated the families on the overall outcome of the adoption experience based on ratings by the adoptive parents of the child's overall adjustment. They found the families fell into three groups. Group I consisted of 33 "low problem" adoptees, group II of 34 "average" adjustment scores, and group III consisted of 33 adoptees rated as "high problem" adoptees. Both adoptee and adoptive parents' satisfaction with the adoption was related to perceived similarities between them. Of the 22 adoptive parents who reported unsatisfactory adoptions, only two saw the child as somewhat like them. Only nine of the 21 adoptees who reported poor adoptions felt they were very much or somewhat like their parents.

These feelings of "differentness" were related to adjustment. Adoptees who felt they were very different from their family tended to have behavior problems as a child. Three-fourths of the adoptees who did not feel similar to the parents had problems, while less than half of the adoptees who felt they were similar to parents experienced behavior

problems. Parents who rated their children as "low problem" tended to see them as similar to themselves. The adoptee's current adjustment was rated through responses to questions designed to determine the adoptees' satisfaction with their present life. Seventy-three adoptees (70%) were rated as having excellent or good life-adjustment at the time of the study. The remaining 27 (30%) were rated as having marginal or poor adjustment.

Hooper, Sherman, Lawder, Andrews, and Lower (1970) studied 100 children who were adopted as infants and compared their results to 100 control children who were matched for age, sex, and social class with the adopted groups. The California Test of Personality and the Thematic Apperception Test were administered to the two groups. No statistically significant differences were found in test results between the groups.

Louise Raynor (1980) studied 160 adopted children and their families. Most were placed as infants and about half of the children were adopted by their foster parents. Eighty-five percent of the adoptees and families rated the adoption very or reasonably satisfactory, and 21% rated the adoptive experience as mainly or very unsatisfactory. In addition she reported that 75% of those who were found to be satisfied with their adoptions were also satisfied with the

information about their background history which was given to them by their adoptive parents. In contrast, 86% of the adoptees who indicated a poor adoption experience, were also dissatisfied with the amount of information they were told about their biological family.

The most recent study of adopted children was carried out by the National Children's Bureau on all children who were born in 1958 in England, Scotland and Wales (Lambert & Streather, 1980). The sample consisted of 366 illegitimate children, 182 adopted children, and 12,000 legitimate children. The sample was followed up when the children were seven, and again when they were 11 years of age. At age seven the school achievement of adopted children was slightly better than legitimately born children and significantly better than illegitimate children who had not been adopted. This finding held at age 11. The researchers felt that it was not just the fact of adoption which gave adopted children advantages over illegitimate children who were not adopted, but a combination of factors which resulted in most of the adopted children being placed in financially secure middle class homes.

Several studies have specifically focused on adoption outcomes and their relationship to searching activity. Triseliotis (1973) has completed the most extensive study of

searching. In Scotland, adoptees over the age of 17 are able to obtain copies of their original birth certificates. These certificates usually include the names of the adoptees' birth parents and their original name. He interviewed 70 adoptees who requested copies of their birth certificate between 1961 and 1970. These adoptees gave subjective, personal accounts of their lives. Sixty-seven percent ( $n = 28$ ) of adoptees who rated their relationship with their adoptive parents as unsatisfactory were searching for their birth parent(s), while 33% ( $n = 14$ ) of those who rated their adoption as satisfactory or fairly satisfactory were hoping to meet their birth parent(s). Adoptees who described themselves as fairly content and perceived their adoptions as satisfactory tended to be interested in obtaining background information only. Eighty-eight percent ( $n = 33$ ) of those requesting background information described their adoptions as satisfactory, while only 12% ( $n = 3$ ) of the background information only group reported unsatisfactory adoptions.

While this study did find a relationship between poor adoption relationships and degree of searching activity, the data also indicated that there were two distinct groups of searchers--those who planned to search and those who were in the process of searching or had already achieved a reunion. The negative relationship found between searching and adoptive relationships was only established for the former



group, while the latter group was more equally divided between positive and negative evaluations of their adoptive family relationships. This result may help to explain the discrepancy between studies which find that searching is unrelated to adoption outcomes and studies which find searching is related to unfulfilled needs in the adoption home. Therefore, there may be two types or groups of searchers, each propelled by different needs or motives.

In examining the relationship between the amount of background information given to adoptees by their adoptive parents and the desire to meet the birth parents or receive background information only, 72% ( $n = 20$ ) of those who desired to meet their birth parents reported they were given no information about their birth parents, 26% ( $n = 11$ ) were given some information, and 2% ( $n = 1$ ) were given a considerable amount of information. In the background information only group, 27% ( $n = 7$ ) of the adoptees reported they received no information, 35% ( $n = 9$ ) received some information, and 38% ( $n = 10$ ) received a considerable amount of information. Triseliotis also reported a relationship between satisfactory adoptive family relationships and the amount of information about their background that was given to the adoptee. Sixty-nine percent ( $n = 26$ ) of the adoptees who reported unsatisfactory adoptions were given no

background information, while 17% ( $n = 5$ ) were given a little to a considerable amount of information (Triseliotis, 1973).

Day (1979) came to similar conclusions when 500 adoptees were interviewed who requested access to birth records in England. In an attempt to determine if adverse factors in the adoption were related to searching, four categories of adverse factors were identified. These included the early death of one or both adoptive parents, severe or prolonged marital problems between the adoptive parents, the birth of a natural child to the adoptive parents and other adverse factors. Adverse factors were determined when factual evidence was presented during the interview or when the subjects' expressed attitudes and concerns supported such a conclusion by the interviewer. From the total sample of 500 adoptees, 113 were determined to have had adverse factors present in their adoptions. Twenty-eight percent of the total sample intended to trace, while 43.6% of those who reported adverse factors intended to trace. Therefore, he concluded that the decision to attempt to locate one's birth parent(s) became more likely if adverse factors were present in the adoptive history.

Sobol and Cardiff (1983) administered a questionnaire to 120 adoptees who responded to an advertisement placed by the researchers in six newspapers in Southwestern Ontario. The

sample consisted of 23 males and 97 females. The subjects ( $n = 120$ ) were asked to rate their relationships with their adoptive parents on 18 scales which were thought to identify patterns in relationships. The respondents also rated their perceptions of the overall success of the adoption. As the researchers predicted, a significant correlation was found between searching and family relationships ( $r = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The more negatively adoptive family relationships were rated, the greater the degree of searching activity indicated by the adoptee.

Glass and Novac (1984) completed a study of adoptees in the Windsor-Essex and London-Middlesex areas of Ontario who were members of Parent Finders, a self-help group of adoptees and other interested parties dedicated to helping and supporting adoptees in their search for birth families. A questionnaire was administered to an availability sample of 50 adoptees which included 43 females (86%) and 7 (14%) males. The results of the study showed that 72% of the respondents had a close relationship with either both or one adoptive parents, while 28% reported that they were close to neither of their adoptive parent(s). This finding is noteworthy particularly because the sample consisted only of adoptees who were searching or had contacted birth relatives.

In the study by Sorosky, Baran, & Pannor (1984) of 50 adoptees who had achieved a reunion, the authors reported that 54 percent of the respondents stated that they had a good or fair relationship with their adoptive parents, while the remaining 46% reported a poor relationship with one or both adoptive parents. Leeding (1977) reported on a study of 279 adoptees in London who requested birth history information from the Registrar General and received the required counselling prior to the release of the information. The adoptees statements regarding their relationship with their adoptive parents were classified as being representative of excellent, satisfactory or poor relationships. Approximately 75% of the adoptees reported excellent or satisfactory relationship, while only 25% reported a poor relationship with their adoptive parents.

Thompson, Stoneman, Webber and Harrison (1978) reported similar results. They completed a study of adult adoptees who requested background information at the Toronto East and The Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto. The first 40 adoptees who requested service during the period of the study and who agreed to participate in the study by filling out a questionnaire and participating in an interview with a social worker were used as the sample. Part of the study attempted to assess the quality of the adoption experience by determining the adoptees perceptions of their

acceptance by the adoptive family and their feelings of belonging to their adoptive family. In addition, the interviewers assessed, based on their interview with the adoptee, how birth history information was shared with the adoptee and how the issue of adoption was handled by the family.

On the basis of these responses, each subject was assigned an Adoption Experience Score. These scores ranging from 0-4 (poor-good) were used as a measure of the quality of the adoption experience and were then correlated with the adoptees' desire for background information only or the desire for a reunion. Sixteen (40%) adoptees who scored either 4 or 3 were considered to have had a good adoption experience. Sixteen subjects (40%) scored 1 or 0 and were assessed as having been raised in a poor adoption environment. The remaining 8 adoptees (20%) scored 2, a midpoint range between 4 and 0. Adoptees with both good and poor adoption experiences were found in both groups (searchers and information only) with active searchers slightly weighted toward the lower end of the continuum of poor - good adoptions.

There is some inconsistency in the literature concerning the relationship between search activity and adoption outcomes. While some studies have found that adoptees who

report unsatisfactory adoptions are more likely to search than adoptees who report satisfactory adoptions, other studies have found no such relationship.

#### ADOPTEE PERSPECTIVE - REASONS FOR SEARCHING

Many adoptees, in autobiographical books and articles describing their personal feelings about being adopted and their desire to search for their birth relatives, have expressed their concerns about being adopted. In many instances these authors talked to adoptees across Canada and the United States in order to combine various points of view and search for commonalities between adoptees. These books and articles are not based on scientific research, but give readers insight and impressions as to why adoptees desire to search for birth relatives. Lifton (1979), Marcus (1974) and Maston-Graham (1983) describe the adoptees' preoccupation with fantasies, both positive and negative, about their birth family. These fantasies may deeply affect the adoptees' reunion experience in terms of expectations. Marcus (1979) believes adoptees are motivated by a need to know because adoptees know they have birth relatives and are simply curious about them. What they look like, what their interests are, whether they have birth brothers and sisters, are all concerns that adoptees have about their past. According to Marcus, it is the "not knowing", the secrecy, which propels adoptees to search.

Redmond and Sleightholm (1982), however, believe that it is much more than a simple need to know. They attribute searching to an instinctive reaction to understand the present by understanding and exploring the past. They state that not knowing about the past and one's roots and history leaves adoptees with a sense of incompleteness and this feeling draws them to search. Florence Fisher, the founder of the Adoptees' Liberty Movement Association, described her 20 year search for her birth family. During her search she felt powerless as she faced one obstacle after another. She believes that denying adoptees access to their birth records is a denial of their rights, as adults, to information they have a right to know--everything there is to know about themselves (Fisher, 1973).

Several studies have been conducted which confirm these personal accounts of the desire to search for a birth relative. Picton (1982) interviewed 48 adoptees, 37 women and 11 men, between the ages of 19 and 50 who were interested in obtaining more information about their birth family or in establishing contact with them. Adoptees were asked the question "Why do you want access to information about your birth?" Responses were categorized into three groups. Fifteen responses fell into the category of searching for personal identity. These responses were typified by statements such as the following: "I would like to know who

I am. To want to know is a part of my life. When you suffer from not knowing what other people automatically know, it unsettles your judgement for other things. I have feelings of insecurity."

Nine subjects felt that they had a basic human right to know about their past and that it was normal, natural desire. Five subjects stated they wanted to know more about their past because they were simply curious. Five adoptees wanted to obtain information in order to search for their birth relatives. Twenty-two adoptees stated that they had desired more information ever since they first learned that they were adopted. Seven subjects indicated that they became curious about their birth history during their teens, while eight felt that a particular event, such as marriage, pregnancy or birth of a child stimulated their interest in obtaining more information.

After the passage of The Children's Act of 1975 in England, a study was conducted of the 279 adoptees who approached the Registrar General for birth history information. The study was based on clinical impressions of the social workers who interviewed the applicants. The majority of the adoptees appeared to have a desire to know more about their birth family because they felt the information would make them feel whole--a more complete person. About ten per cent of the adoptees appeared to be



motivated by practical concerns such as a desire for medical information (Leeding, 1977).

Day (1979) in a similar study conducted in London, England interviewed 500 adoptees, 291 women and 209 men, who contacted the General Register office in order to gain access to their original birth records. The adoptees were divided into four groups based on their stated reason for requesting the information. The main category, into which the majority of subjects fell, was the desire to complete a sense of self-identity. Three hundred and seventeen adoptees fell into this category. Thirteen applicants were hoping to obtain information about their medical histories, while 84 reported that they were curious and had a need to know more about their birth history. Sixteen felt such information was their legal right and they were exercising this right by applying for their birth records. Seventeen subjects could not be placed in any of the categories due to inconsistencies in their information or apparent emotional instability.

Sobol and Cardiff (1983) administered an Adoption Experience Questionnaire to 120 adoptees which was composed of fixed alternative and open-ended questions. All subjects were asked to specify their interest in searching for a birth relative and were subsequently placed in two groups--searchers and non-searchers. Searchers were then asked to

state their reasons for searching. Fifty percent of searchers stated that their desire to search was based on the desire to learn more information about the facts of their biological histories. Twenty-one percent stated they were curious about their origins, while 29% decided to search in order "to increase their sense of identity and fulfillment" (p. 481).

Sobol and Cardiff (1983) also tested the hypothesis that stressful life events as measured by the Social Readjustment Rating Scale, were related to searching activity. They found that the number of stressful life events experienced prior to the last year and the stressfulness of these events was positively related to searching ( $r = .20$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, the number of stresses and their degrees of stressfulness experienced during the past year appeared not to be related to searching. The authors believed that this finding indicated that searchers may experience a sense of chronic stress.

Ganson and Cook (1986) undertook a study designed to address issues related to differences between males and females in their perceptions of adoption. A content analysis was performed on 96 letters which were received from adoptees to identify three main themes--identity, well-being and justice. Fifty-nine percent of the adoptees in the

sample commented on the need for records to be opened because they felt the lack of birth history information contributed to a sense of incompleteness. They felt they had no link to the past. Fifty-three per cent of the adoptees felt that open records would contribute to their sense of well-being. They spoke of the psychological need to know about their past, as well as their desire for complete medical histories. A majority of adoptees (68%) expressed opinions about the moral rightness of access to birth records. This would be expected because the subjects were responding to proposed legislation changes.

In a study of 40 adoptees who approached The Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto between September, 1977 and April, 1978, 30% ( $n = 12$ ) were requesting information only, while 70% ( $n = 28$ ) were interested in searching and a reunion with a birth relative. Eighteen of the adoptees (including both searchers and non-searchers) were motivated to approach the agency because of a significant life event such as birth, death, divorce or illness. Three were seeking information because of medical concerns, while the remaining 19 adoptees were prompted to act because of recent media coverage of the adoption record controversy (Thompson, Stoneman, Webber & Harrison, 1978). It is interesting to note that those adoptees who had positive adoption experiences appeared to be motivated to search because of

media publicity, to satisfy their curiosity and to fill in missing pieces in their past. In most cases, they discussed their plans to search with their adoptive parents. In contrast, those searchers who had poor adoptions tended to begin searching when experiencing a crisis or life stress.

Triseliotis (1973) conducted clinical interviews with 70 adoptees (29 males and 41 females) who applied to the Register House in Edinburgh, Scotland for information from their original birth certificates. The purpose of the study was to learn more about adopted adults who were seeking information about their birth origins and the reasons and motives for their search. Sixty percent ( $n = 42$ ) of the subjects were hoping to find and meet a birth relative and 40% ( $n = 28$ ) were interested in only obtaining additional background information about their birth family. He learned that while most of the adoptees in the sample who wished to search had desired to do so since adolescence, they had delayed the actual search until between three and ten years later. According to Triseliotis, while the adoptee may have felt the need to search during adolescence "the eventual search was a result of a combination of experiences and feelings from the past as well as from current life situations. At this stage, need or fantasy intensified by current events became urgent and could not be postponed." (p. 93).

Triseliotis believed that often some type of crisis prompted adoptees to begin searching, especially if their usual ways of coping were ineffective. Therefore, he theorized that some adoptees may connect their problem(s) with their adoptive status and hope that contact with a birth relative will resolve their problem(s) or crisis. He believed that since all adoptees do not react to a crisis or stress by searching, that some adoptees are more vulnerable to stress.

The adoptees ( $n = 42$ ) who hoped to meet their natural parents expressed the need to find out why they were given up for adoption and if their birth mother loved them and wanted them. Many of these adoptees, Triseliotis did not state the figures, also hoped to establish a friendly or close relationship with the parent(s). Apparently, according to Triseliotis, finding a loving and caring parent was important to the adoptee in that the adoptee seemed to need a positive image of the birth parent(s) in order to increase their own feelings of self-esteem. Eighty-one percent, ( $n = 34$ ) of the adoptees from the group that hoped to meet their birth relatives, indicated a negative or fairly negative self-image. Triseliotis felt adoptees who perceived their adoption as a rejection by their birth parent(s) tended to have a negative self-image. Those adoptees who wished to establish a close relationship with their birth parent(s)

apparently desired to do so because they "had missed out in previous relationships and hoped that the natural mothers would provide the love and warmth they never had. They spoke with real feeling about their misery and desolation and about their urgent need for a parent to care for them".

In contrast, the background information only group (n =28) mainly wanted to know more about their social histories and were not particularly interested in meeting or establishing a relationship with their biological parent. They appeared to harbor little resentment toward their birth parent and had no high hopes or expectations that meeting their birth parents would be greatly beneficial for them. They were apparently motivated by curiosity about their origins as they felt more knowledge about their past would lead to a greater understanding of themselves and did not appear to have the sense of urgency and determination which was expressed by most adoptees who wished to reunite with their birth relatives.

Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1984) interviewed or mailed questionnaires to 50 adoptees selected at random from adoptees who wrote to them about their personal reunion experiences. While they did not discuss their methodology, they apparently performed a content analysis on the letters in order to gather their data. The authors reported that the

adoptees' desire to search appeared to have been precipitated by several factors. In 36% of the cases, marriage, pregnancy or the birth of a child appeared to stimulate their interest in searching, while the death of adoptive parent(s) was reported by 14% of the subjects. Eighteen per cent of the respondents were interested in tracing their ancestry, learning of their adoption at a late age was given in 8% of the cases as a motivation for searching, 6% of the subjects were looking for love and acceptance, 8% decided to search because of publicity in the media and 10% of the cases fell into the "other" category.

The literature review on the reasons adoptees search for a birth relative indicates that adoptees search for various reasons based on their individual needs and desires. At the core of this need appears to be a need to complete a sense of identity. Many adoptees report that they feel incomplete and want to learn more about their origins. Adoptees also want to know their medical histories especially at times of marriage and the birth of their children. Some adoptees also appear to desire to find a birth relative because they hope to establish a warm, caring relationship with that person.

#### BIRTH RELATIVES' PERSPECTIVE

The birth relatives' perspective has been little explored in the literature, especially those of siblings or

grandparents. There is some indication in the literature (Stoneman, Thompson & Webber, 1980) that reunions between adoptees and birth siblings may be less painful than reunions between birth parents and adoptees and that extended birth family members often desire a relationship with the adoptee when the birth parent(s) may not wish to establish contact. While adoptees, and to some extent adoptive parents, have been vocal about their needs and been the focus of articles, books, and research projects, birth relatives have traditionally remained in the background and been reluctant to express their points of view. Concerned United Birthparents was formed in 1977 as an advocacy and support group for birth parents. In addition, the organization participates in research on adoption and teen pregnancy and promotes informed choices in the adoption process for birth parents.

Musser (1979) and Dusky (1979), among others have written books describing their experiences as birthmothers who relinquished their child for adoption. Musser (1979) describes the relinquishment process as follows: "At the time of relinquishment, we were told that we would have other children. We would start a new life, and no one need ever know about our past. They never bothered to check back and see how we had fared over the years. If they had, they would have then realized that signing one's name to a piece of



paper does not begin to erase all the emotional and deep feelings involved with giving birth (p. 69)." She cites case histories of birth parents who remained concerned about the children they had relinquished, had always thought about them and hoped one day for a reunion with them.

Dusky (1979) describes her feelings about her impending separation from her child: "Our separation is not going to be easy on either of us. I have to give you away and you have to be given away. Oh baby, I wish it didn't have to be that way. Afterward, both of us will always be different from most of the rest. There will be a mark deep inside that only you or I know about. Only you and I know how it feels. I know you didn't ask to be born a bastard, and if I could have chosen, I wouldn't have been born female. All we can do is make do." (p.49) Dusky has written many articles on adoption for popular women's magazines and has interviewed many birth mothers in the process. She believes most birth mothers desire a reunion with their child, that they never forget about the child and that not knowing anything about the child during the years the child is growing up is the most difficult part of the separation. Marcus (1981) in her survey of fifty five birth parents who responded to a request in local newspapers for participants in her informal study, found that forty nine birth parents hoped for a reunion with their birth child.

Baran, Pannor & Sorosky (1977) interviewed 38 birthparents who responded to publicity about their research project. Seventy-six per cent of the birth parents had married after the child was relinquished. Eighty-six percent of these had told their spouses about the adoption. Forty-five per cent of the subjects had completed high school, 42% had completed college and 13% had completed graduate school. Fifty per cent of the subjects stated that they had feelings of loss and pain over their separation from the child and 37% always thought about their children on their birthday. Eighty-two percent of the respondents wondered how the adoptees were, if they were happy and what kind of person they had turned out to be. Eighty-two per cent said they were interested in a reunion with the adoptee.

Rynearson (1982) interviewed 20 birth mothers who were receiving psychiatric outpatient services to assess their relinquishment experience and its effects on their lives. The relinquishment of the child was not considered to be the primary complaint or the reason for seeking service. There was no comparable control group used in the study. While all of the subjects agreed in writing to relinquish their child, 19 developed maternal identification with the developing fetus and had a fantasy that somehow they would be able to keep the child. All of the subjects perceived that the relinquishment was caused by external factors, such as

parental and societal demands, which overcame their desire to keep their child. In terms of post relinquishment adjustment, all of the subjects reported that they had recurrent dreams about the child mostly around issues of separation and reunion. All of the subjects reported that they experienced symptoms of mourning on the anniversary of the child's relinquishment or on the child's birthday.

Deykin, Campbell, and Patti (1984) conducted a study of 334 birth parents in order to assess various aspects of the birth parents current functioning and its relationship to demographic variables and the process of relinquishment. The birth parents were members of Concerned United Birthparents who responded to a request for subjects in the official newsletter of the agency. The sample consisted of 321 mothers and 13 fathers. Sixty-nine percent of the subjects cited external factors such as financial difficulties and family pressure as the primary reason for relinquishment. Fourteen per cent stated personal factors such as age, school, lack of preparedness to be a parent or feelings of shame as their reason for relinquishment, while the remaining 17% cited other factors. Ninety-six percent of the subjects had considered searching for the child and 65% had begun searching actively. It was found that those who had surrendered their child primarily for external reasons were

more likely to search than those who surrendered for personal reasons.

Stoneman, Blakely, Douglas and Webber (1985) conducted a survey of birthparents who returned to The Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto between 1979 and 1982 to enquire about the child they had surrendered. Nineteen percent ( $n=215$ ) of the subjects were single and had never married, 53% were presently married and 78% had been married at one time. Seventy-six percent had children while 24% were childless. Fifteen percent had completed college, 9% high school, 41% had some high school or technical training, and 35% did not complete Grade 9. Thirty-nine percent of the birthparents were employed in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations, 40% in clerical fields and 21% were in management or professional occupations.

The birth parents were personally interviewed by agency staff. The "overall emotional tone" (p. 36) of their expressed feelings about the relinquishment were judged based on the interviewer's assessment. The researchers felt that 73% ( $n=145$ ) of the birth parents appeared to have accepted the relinquishment of the child. Of these, 30% appeared to be experiencing no underlying emotions such as pain or regret. However, the remaining 43%, while they appeared accepting of the relinquishment, also expressed feelings of

pain, regret and sorrow over the relinquishment. The authors concluded that the majority of the birthparents continued to experience feelings of loss and sorrow after the relinquishment.

It appears that in many cases, birth mothers continue to have deep feelings and concerns regarding the relinquished child. Many birth mothers express feelings of pain, sorrow and regret concerning the relinquishment and appear to have not resolved or accepted the separation from their child. In addition, birth mothers often report that they have thought about searching for the child and hope for an eventual reunion with their child.

### REUNION OUTCOMES

There is very little literature available on the reunion process and outcomes because of the newness of this area of social work practice. Prior to the recent adoption disclosure amendments, searches and reunions were private affairs conducted by the parties themselves without the knowledge or assistance of social agencies. Because of this, much of the present literature consists of personal account of the reunion experience.

In a book published by Parent Finders, a search and support group, adoptees and birth relatives wrote short

stories about their reunion outcomes. Some of the adoptees and birth relatives reported that they found it difficult to integrate the newly found member into their present family relationships. Several adoptees stated that their birth mother was unable to tell her present family about the adoptee's existence and therefore they were unable to meet other family members. Others found that their birth mother refused to meet with them and they were only able to meet other family members. While some adoptees described a perfect reunion experience with both parties responding with love and understanding for one another, other adoptees and birth relatives experienced initial rejection and felt like they were on "an emotional roller coaster" (p. 10) and reported feelings of anger and frustration. Many adoptees were happy to find that they physically resembled their birth relative and others felt better about themselves after the reunion (Completed Searches).

Sanders and Sitterly (1981) describe the reunion as the moment when "fantasy meets reality" (p. 13). Part of this impact is what Sanders and Sitterly describe as age progression. Both the adoptee and birth parent have fantasized the other party as they were at the time of the adoption and may not have dealt with the reality that the other has matured and has a life separate from their reunion partner. They describe a honeymoon period which is

characterized by euphoria followed by an extreme let down after the reunion is over which leaves the participants feeling exhausted and depressed. The participants must deal with a series of first meetings with extended family members and the adoptee must begin to deal with conflicted loyalties to two sets of relatives. Often adoptees find that they spend a great deal of time and energy connecting these two worlds while trying not to cause either family any pain or feelings of rejection (Marcus, 1981; Sander & Sitterly, 1981). Sanders and Sitterly (1981) also point out the special difficulties that must be dealt with when one of the parties to a search is deceased, when reunion participants are confronted by racial and cultural differences, or when a participant is developmentally handicapped, mentally ill or has been convicted of a crime.

Marcus (1981) describes the meaning of reunion in the following way:

We who have been fortunate enough to be reunited with our families know it is a special experience that is difficult to describe. Our first reunion meeting is remembered and cherished no matter what follows or how many other relatives we may come to meet later on. These kin we meet in reunion are strangers, yes, but to the adoptee who has sought them out, our families hold the key to our healing and growth. Reunion is a milestone in the searching adoptees' life, when the adoptee finally breaks through the veil of secrecy that for so long separated him from his origins. Reunion is a link with history, a step towards feeling free to be oneself. Reunion is excitement and tears, perspiration and worry, smiles and meeting, and

above all, the quiet contented feeling that comes from knowing who you are and where you come from.

For parents long separated from their children, reunion brings release from anguish and concern about the child's welfare and the rightness of a decision made years earlier. Through reunion, adoptees and natural parents can share an experience of mutual forgiveness that would otherwise be impossible. (p. 121-122)

Marcus (1981) believes that the most important benefit to be gained by the adoptee from the reunion experience is that the adoptee gains self-knowledge. Knowledge that can assist adoptees to accept themselves and others. He feels that the adoptee should concentrate on gaining this knowledge rather than placing high hopes and expectations on the birth family to resolve insecurities and difficulties in one's life. Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1984) concur, believing that the greatest benefit of the reunion experience is the feeling of wholeness or completeness that many adoptees report after the reunion.

In a recent Ministry publication ("Adoption Information Unit", 1988) in a discussion of searches and reunions coordinated through the Ministry of Community and Social Services, several preliminary observations were noted. First, the age of the birth parents did not seem to be a significant factor in determining their reaction to the reunion. However if the birth mother had shared the fact of



the adoptee's birth with their present children and spouse, the response to the reunion appeared to be more positive.

Picton (1982), in his study of 48 adoptees discussed previously, reported that 22 of the subjects had participated in a reunion with a birth relative. Of these, 18 established regular contact with that relative, while the remaining subjects were undecided or definitely did not plan to continue the relationship. Dapp (1982) administered questionnaires to ten adult adoptees who had experienced reunions. Four described their present relationship with their birth parent as good, three as neutral and three described the relationship as poor. Six adoptive parents also participated in the study. Four indicated that their relationship with their adopted child had not changed since the reunion, one felt the relationship had improved, and one believed the relationship had deteriorated.

In a questionnaire survey given to members of Triadoption, a self-help group of adoptees and birth relatives, out of 64 respondents 73% ( $n = 47$ ) reported a positive reunion outcome, 5% ( $n = 3$ ) reported a negative outcome, and 22% ( $n = 14$ ) had mixed feelings regarding the outcome. In a second triadoption study of 458 reunions, 90.8 percent ( $n = 416$ ) reported favorable outcomes and 9.2 percent ( $n = 42$ ) reported unfavorable outcomes. The criterion

used to determine outcomes in both studies was not discussed. Twelve birth relatives were asked if they had contact with their child's adoptive family and 33% ( $n = 4$ ) reported that they did have such contact, but no reference was made to the frequency or quality of the contact (Rillera, 1987).

Glass and Novac (1984), in their study of adoptive family relations and their relationship to searching activity, found that out of the 50 adoptees in their study, 50% ( $n = 25$ ) had located and met members of their birth families. All of the subjects stated that they were definitely or somewhat satisfied with the outcome of the reunion. Seventy-two percent ( $n = 18$ ) felt that the reunion resulted in increased positive feelings about themselves, while 4 percent ( $n = 1$ ) reported a negative difference, and 25 percent ( $n = 6$ ) felt the reunion made no difference in their feelings about themselves. Regarding feelings toward their adoptive family, 44% ( $n = 11$ ) stated the reunion experience increased their positive feelings for their adoptive parents and 56% ( $n = 14$ ) felt that their feelings toward their adoptive parents were unchanged.

Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1984) evaluated 50 reunion outcomes from the perspective of the adoptee. Ninety percent of the adoptees were satisfied with the reunion outcome and appeared to gain a sense of personal fulfillment and a

stronger sense of their own identity. Fifty-eight percent of the adoptees felt that they were very similar to the their birth family in terms of personality and interests. Fifty percent of the adoptees developed a meaningful relationship with their birth relative which appeared to be defined as having frequent contact with them.

The most comprehensive study of adoption reunions was undertaken by Stoneman, Thompson and Webber (1980). Questionnaires were administered to 20 adoptees and 13 birth family members after they had participated in a reunion. Sixty percent of the adoptees, when assessing how they felt about the reunion experience after the first meeting, rated the experience as positive. However, when asked how they felt about the experience at the time of the study which was between 6 weeks and 7 years after the reunion, 40% rated the experience as positive, 30% as neutral and 30% as negative. Sixty-three percent of the birth relatives felt the reunion experience was positive and 37% described the reunion in negative terms. There was no corresponding shift, as with the adoptee, in their assessment of the reunion experience from the initial meeting until the time of the study.

The adoptees were asked to describe the feelings and reactions of their immediate families (spouses) prior to the reunion and after the reunion experience. Prior to the

reunion, 33% of the spouses were supportive of the decision to participate in the reunion, 25% were neutral and 42% were against the reunion plans. However, after the reunion there was a definite change in attitudes with 75% of the spouses favoring the reunion, 17% reporting neutral feelings and 8% reporting negative perceptions of the reunion experience. Fifty percent of the birth relatives felt that their immediate and extended families were accepting of the adoptee and were agreeable to continuing the relationship.

When the adoptees were asked to rate the reunion experience 50% ( $n = 10$ ) rated it as very satisfying, 35% ( $n = 7$ ) rated it as good and 15% ( $n = 3$ ) considered it disappointing. Of the three adoptees who rated the reunion as disappointing, two adoptees did not see their birth mother after the initial reunion and the third adoptee was disappointed because her birth mother would not answer her question about her birth father. All of the adoptees (100%) felt the reunion experience had a positive effect on them. Seventy percent ( $n = 9$ ) of the birth family members rated the experience as very satisfying, 15% ( $n = 2$ ) rated it as reasonably good and 15% ( $n = 2$ ) rated it as disappointing. None of the adoptees in the study reported any negative changes in their feelings towards their adoptive families as a result of the reunion experience. All of the adoptees felt

their feelings toward their adoptive parents had either increased in a positive way or remained unchanged.

Adoptees and birth relatives have reported that they have experienced problems and difficulties after the initial reunion. Many of these difficulties appear to center on issues of rejection and the complexities of incorporating a new family into one's existing life. However, the studies reviewed, appear to indicate that, despite difficulties and problems, most reunion participants appear to be satisfied with their reunion outcomes. In those studies which considered actual outcomes, the findings appear to indicate that satisfaction with outcomes was related to establishing regular contact with one's reunion partner and feeling better about oneself after the reunion.

### Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature on adoption disclosure laws, adoptive families, adoption outcomes and relationships to searching, adoptees' reasons for searching, the birth relatives perspectives and reunion outcomes. Adoption disclosure laws have been recently implemented which allow birth relatives (birth siblings and grandparents) and adult adoptees to register their consent to exchange information or proceed with a reunion. The present laws also have provisions to allow an adult adoptee to request a search

for their birth parent. These adoptions disclosure amendments appear to be the result of a recognition of the uniqueness of the adoptive family and are based on an "acceptance of difference" philosophy in regard to adoptive family relationships. This uniqueness is most readily apparent when adoptive families experience communication difficulties around issues of telling their children they are adopted and sharing birth family history with them.

Some research studies have indicated that adoptees who have experienced poor adoption outcomes or a lack of background information were more likely to search for a birth relative than other adoptees. However, other studies found no such relationship. The literature indicates that adoptees report a sense of incompleteness which may impede the development of a complete sense of personal identity. Adoptees have a desire to learn about their past because they feel they have a right to know about their history and to understand why they were placed in an adoption home. There is also some indication in the literature that searching activities may be precipitated by a life crisis or a significant life event.

There is very little information available regarding birth mothers and the relinquishment process. It appears that many birth mothers do not resolve the relinquishment of

their child. They continue to have feelings of love and concern for the child and hope to eventually have a reunion with the relinquished child. Studies on reunion outcomes have generally focused on the establishment of a relationship between reunion partners as an indicator of a positive outcome. The literature indicates that the majority of reunion participants are satisfied with the reunion and report feeling better about themselves after the reunion. In the following chapter the research methodology will be discussed.

### Chapter III

#### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research questions and research paradigm will be discussed in this chapter. In addition, the concepts will be defined and the study will be classified. The setting of the study, the sample, the data collection method, and instrument employed will be then explained. Further, the procedures for the data analysis will be explored. In conclusion, the limitations of the research methodology will be presented.

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH PARADIGM

There are seven main research questions this study sought to address:

(1) What were the socio-demographic variables of this sample in terms of age, sex, marital status, education, occupation, age at adoption or birth of child, initiator of the reunion and length of time since the reunion?

(2) What were the relinquishment experiences of the birth mothers who achieved a reunion with their children?

(3) What were the adoption experiences of the adoptees? This question focused on adoption revelation circumstances, the success of the adoption, the adoptees' closeness to their



adoptive parents and the length of time the adoptee thought about searching.

(4) What were the prereunion experiences of the adoptees and birth relatives? This question encompassed hopes and fears regarding the reunion, reasons for searching, preparation for the reunion and family support for the reunion.

(5) What were the reunion outcomes? First, what was the subject's initial response to the reunion? Second, what is the present relationship between the adoptee and birth relative? Third, what changes do the subjects report in feelings about themselves after the reunion? Fourth, what type of problems or difficulties did the subjects experience after the reunion. Fifth, did the reunion change the adoptees' relationship with their adoptive parents?

(6) Were the subjects satisfied with the reunion outcome? This also included determining if the subjects believed that meeting their reunion partner answered their questions about the past and if the subjects would recommend the reunion experience to others.

(7) Is there a relationship between the demographic variables and the independent variables (relinquishment,

adoption and prereunion experiences) and the dependent variables (reunion outcome and satisfaction with outcome).

Table 1 clarifies the variables which the research questions seek to explore.

Research Paradigm		
<u>Antecedent variables</u>	<u>Independent variables</u>	<u>Dependent variables</u>
Age	Relinquishment	Reunion outcomes
Sex	-Reasons	-First reaction
Marital status	-Thoughts of child	-Similarity
	-Resolution	-Expectations
Education		-Present relationship
Occupation	Adoption	-Met others
Age of adoption	-Revelation	-Feelings of self
Age at birth	-Success	-Problems
	-Closeness	-How get along
	-Thoughts of searching	-Effect on adoption
Initiator of Reunion	Prereunion	
	-Hopes & fears	Satisfaction
	-Reasons for searching	With Outcomes
	-Preparation	- Answered questions
	-Family Support	- Would do again
	-Initiator	- Recommend

### THE CONCEPTS

Adoption refers to the legal process whereby parenting is transferred from one set of parents to another. The new parents have the same rights, responsibilities, and obligations that exist between children and their natural

parents (Sachev, 1984). The Canadian Encyclopedia (1985) adds that the ties between the child and biological parents are severed and new ties are created between the child and people who are not biological parents.

Adult adoptee is a legally adopted person who has reached the age of 18. In order to register with the Adoption Disclosure Registry the adoptee must be 18 years of age (The Child and Family Services Act, 1984).

Birth relatives are persons related to the child by blood. The birth parent is defined by The Child and Family Services Act, 1984 as the person who is the child's parent at the time of birth. The birth relative, most often located through The Registry, is the birth mother. The birth mother gave up all rights to the child when the child was placed for adoption or made a Crown Ward. The term birth relative, for the purposes of this thesis also includes birth siblings. The term birth relative or birth family is used, in the literature, synonymously with the terms biological family or relative.

Adoption Disclosure Registry is a system established under The Child Welfare Act, 1984 to assist adult adoptees and birth relatives to exchange information or to meet through a reunion. Both parties must register and if both

agree a meeting between the parties can be arranged through the local Children's Aid Society (Adoption Disclosure Registry, pamphlet, Ministry of Community and Social Services).

Reunion refers to a face-to-face meeting between the adoptee and birth relative for the purposes of this paper. This meeting may have been arranged after both parties had registered with the Adoption Disclosure Registry and was coordinated by the local Children's Aid Society. In addition, this meeting may have been initiated after one or both parties searched independently, with the support of Parent Finders, a self-help group dedicated to reuniting adoptees and birth relatives.

#### CLASSIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The study is classified as hypothetical-developmental as the purpose of the study is "to describe social phenomena in a qualitative manner for the purpose of developing general concepts into more specific measurable variables or generating more specific research questions or hypotheses" (Tripodi, 1981, p. 199). Fellin, Tripodi, and Meyer (1969) further outline three criteria for determining the use of this classification which they categorized as exploratory. First, the study "should not be classifiable as either an experimental or quantitative descriptive study" (p. 155).

However, they state there is an exception to this rule in that they define a special type of hypothetical-developmental study which has some elements of a quantitative-descriptive study in that the study includes both qualitative and quantitative descriptions of the variables being studied. This sub-classification, which is called exploratory-descriptive, includes both "empirical and theoretical analyses." Because this study will include both quantitative and qualitative data it would also be classified under this category. The second criteria "is that relatively systematic procedures for obtaining empirical observations and/or for the analyses of data should be used." Third, "the investigator should go beyond the qualitative and quantitative descriptions of the data by attempting to conceptualize the interrelations among the phenomena observed" (p. 253).

To yield hypothetical-developmental knowledge, two criteria must be met: 1) Hypothesis researchability and 2) conceptual translatability. In response to the former, the research questions for this study could be studied. In response to the second criteria the independent and dependent variables were "distinct" and "definable" (Tripodi, 1983, p. 85). In addition, there were techniques and procedures that were available to gather the data. For example,

questionnaires and interviews were used. "Conceptual translatability" refers to the clarity, potential generalizability, and operationalization of concepts. The concepts in this study are specified and understandable. They are applicable to additional practice settings beyond the settings being used for this study.

### **THE SETTING AND POPULATION**

The study was carried out at a Children's Aid Society in Southwestern Ontario. In addition, the local chapter of Parent Finders agreed to contact members who had participated in a reunion. All the potential subjects contacted agreed to take part in the study.

The population consisted of all of the known adult adoptees and birth relatives who had experienced a reunion in the geographical region and who have agreed to participate in the study. Client confidentiality was protected through the use of group data and in no way were individuals identified.

The sample used for this study was a nonprobability sample. This classification is further divided into availability sampling, quota sampling, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling. An availability sample was used for this study. Seaberg (1981) describes this type of sample as "the first available appropriate sampling units" (p. 86).

This type of sample is often used in social work research because of its convenience and the necessity of its use when probability sampling is impossible or extremely difficult. The total number of reunions which had taken place in the area was unknown. The use of an availability sample is appropriate for exploratory studies at the knowledge level of hypothetical-developmental.

#### DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The subjects participated in clinical semi-structured interviews which were conducted by the researcher. The interview took between one and two hours to complete.

A semi-structured interview was appropriate for this research design. Gochros (1981) and Monette, Sullivan and DeJong (1986) have identified several advantages of research interviews. Interviewing gave the researcher the liberty to explain questions that the subject may not fully understand or may interpret incorrectly. The interview situation provided a controlled environment where the subject could participate free of distraction and interruptions, and the researcher was assured that the subject was not being influenced by other people when they responded to the questions.

In addition, the subject may voluntarily offer responses that were not anticipated by the researcher. This allowed

the interviewer to explore unanticipated events to determine if they were relevant to the research questions. Research interviewing could also be extremely flexible. The interviewer could shift the order of questions, probe for further details, and rephrase questions to respond to the subject's level of understanding. The final advantage was that the skilled interviewer could respond to nonverbal cues in the subject's behavior which may indicate sensitive areas which should be followed up with appropriate questions. As Gochrow (1981) pointed out, interviews provide more "in-depth" information than questionnaires.

There are several possible ways to record the responses of the subjects in an interview. These are "classifying responses into predetermined categories, summarizing the high points of what is said, taking verbatim notes or recording the interview with a tape recorder or videotape machine" (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 1986, p. 157). For this study, most responses were coded on the interview schedule into predetermined categories and notes were taken selectively on responses to the open-ended questions. A consent form was prepared for each subject to sign.



### DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

A semi-structured interview instrument was constructed by the researcher to gather data from the adoptees and birth relatives. Professional social workers, experienced in adoption, were asked to assess the instrument. In addition, the instrument was pretested with an adoptee and a birth relative. The instrument included both closed and open-ended questions which allowed the interviewer to clarify responses, probe for further details, and follow-up unanticipated responses. This procedure, known as "funneling," began with general questions and depending on the subject's response, were followed up with appropriate "probing" questions designed to go into the issue in more detail (Gochros, 1981). The purpose of the study and research questions provided the guideline for the questions to be included on the schedule. Because of the format of the semi-structured interview, probes and techniques such as paraphrasing, reflecting, clarifying, and showing interest allowed subjects the freedom to elaborate on their responses (Gochros, 1981).

The first section of the instrument consisted of fixed-alternative questions designed to gather general, demographic data. These included items such as age, sex, marital status, length of marriage, religion, number of children, education completed, and occupation.

The following section of the interview schedule was designed to elicit responses concerning the relinquishment experiences of the birth mother, and the adoption experiences of the adoptee. Adoptees were asked to rate the success of their adoption and their closeness to their adoptive parents on a scale from 1-5. Adoptees were also asked a series of questions related to the type and frequency of discussions about their adoption and birth history that took place with their adoptive parents. Subjects were then asked specific questions regarding their hopes, fears, and reasons for searching. Preparation and family support for the reunion were rated on a 5 point scale

In order to answer the research question related to reunion outcomes, subjects were asked to rate: (1) their closeness to their reunion partner, (2) their similarity to their partner, and (3) changes in feelings about themselves after the reunion. In addition, questions were asked about specific problems the subjects may have experienced after the reunion.

Satisfaction with the reunion experience was measured by answers to the following questions: (1) How would you rate your satisfaction with the outcome of the reunion with 5 being extremely satisfied and 1 being not satisfied at all? Why? (2) Are you glad you had the reunion experience?

## DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the process whereby meaning is derived "from the observations that have been made as a part of the research project" (Monette, Sullivan, DeJong, 1986, p. 335). According to Kerlinger (1975), data analysis is "the categorizing, ordering, manipulating, and summarizing of data to obtain answers to research questions" (p. 134). The research study was designed to yield both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data described the characteristics of the subjects being interviewed as it related to the research question. Statements resulting from the analysis of the qualitative data were supported by reference to the actual data which were in the form of quotes or descriptions of the content (Reid & Smith, 1981).

The quantitative data were coded through categorizing responses and assigning numbers to the appropriate category. The categories were mutually exclusive and exhaustive. Some parts of the interview questionnaire were recorded during the interview, using predetermined scales and categories. The translation of the concepts into numerical form facilitated the analysis of the data (Royer, 1981). The data analysis was completed using the SPSS program. Descriptive statistics were used to "assist in organizing, summarizing and interpreting the sample data" (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 1986, p. 340).

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There were several limitations to this study. The use of a nonprobability sample and an interview situation to gather data were based on the research design.

The small sample size and the use of a nonprobability sample had several built-in limitations. With a nonprobability sample "no real claim of representativeness can be made" (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 1986, p. 126). However, the use of a nonprobability sample is justifiable for exploratory studies, especially when it is impossible to develop a complete sampling frame. Since there had been no probability in the selection of elements for the sample, there was no way to determine what population the nonprobability sample represented. This problem limited the ability to generalize findings beyond the sample. In addition, the use of a nonprobability sample limited the use of inferential statistics. These statistics assume that a random process was used in selecting the sample. A nonprobability sample provides "no basis on which to determine sampling error" (Seaberg, 1981, p. 86). However, as Reid and Smith (1986) point out, in-depth studies of a few subjects may provide important information and ideas and hypotheses that are revealing with great general significance, although the significance is difficult to determine. The data can only indicate or suggest

conclusions. The sample of adoptees and birth relatives also shared some similar characteristics to the general population of adoptees and birth relatives in that the adoption and "relinquishment" process was common to all. In other words, adoptees and birth relatives all shared one particular characteristic--the fact of the adoption itself.

Another limitation related to the sampling procedure was that the sample consisted of all "known" reunions which had taken place in the county used for the study. There may very well be additional reunions which were not known to the placement agencies or Parent Finders and were arranged through the parties themselves after locating the adoptee or birth relatives through their own private search.

A further limitation of the study was related to the use of the interview to collect data. Interviews are time consuming and it is difficult to code responses from a semi-structured interview schedule which includes open-ended questions. In addition, because the researcher designed her own questionnaire, there was no way to determine the validity (except for content validity) and reliability of the measurement instrument (Bostwick & Kyte, 1981). Gochros (1981) has identified several disadvantages in relying on self-reports from subjects. The respondent may distort the facts in order to give "socially appropriate" answers or the

respondent may simply be unable to remember past events. Subjects may lie or misrepresent the truth in an attempt to be helpful to the interviewer. Some subjects may have found the interview stressful because of the emotionally laden material which was discussed. However, in many cases the subjects had discussed adoption and the reunion experience previously with a social worker at the Children's Aid Society because counseling was built into the reunion process. Therefore, it was expected that the subjects would be accustomed to discussing the reunion with others and it was not felt that the present research study would promote additional anxiety for the respondents or inhibit their participation.

In addition, the interviewer may bias the "purity" of the data by improperly asking questions, using probes that reduce the likelihood of a response, code answers that deliberately bias the data, and record responses improperly. The use of an experienced interviewer helped to reduce the first two possibilities. In addition, the interviewer had worked with adoptees and birth relatives on a professional basis prior to this study and has knowledge about the complexities of the reunion experience.

The subjects had recently gone through a very emotional experience--the reunion. The anxiety and emotional confusion

brought on by this significant event may very well have influenced the subject's responses and distorted their perception of events. However, the purpose of the study was to explore the reunion experience and the outcomes. It was expected that the experience itself would have a great impact on the adoptee and birth relative and that impact was the focus of this research study. In addition, because the subjects were asked to recall distant past events, the responses will be distorted by the passage of time and maturation. This was to be expected and the important issue was the subject's perceptions, in the present, of past events.

In addition, past adoption practices, attitudes toward illegitimacy, and the stigma associated with it which resulted in adoption being clouded in secrecy, have had an impact on present reunion experiences. The adoptions had taken place between 18 and 40 years ago and the experiences of adoptees and birth relatives were influenced by the emotional, attitudinal, and social context of the time. The "sealed" adoption records, the professional attitude that adoptive families were similar if not the same as biological families, and the felt need to maintain anonymity for all the parties to the adoption, contributed to the secrecy surrounding adoption. These issues impacted on the adoptive family in ways professionals are just beginning to

understand. The results of these historical factors were expected to influence the subject's descriptions, feelings, and attitudes toward past events.

### Summary

The seven research questions were explored in this chapter and the antecedent, independent and dependent variables were specified. The research project was classified as exploratory-descriptive. An availability sample of all known adult adoptees and birth relatives who had participated in a reunion was used for this study. A semi-structured questionnaire based on the research questions was developed and the subjects were interviewed by the researcher. In this chapter the limitations of the research methodology were also discussed. In the subsequent chapter the data analysis and discussion will be presented.



## Chapter IV

### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The results will be discussed in the following sections: demographic data, relinquishment experiences, adoption experiences, pre-reunion experiences and reunion outcomes.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

The sample consisted of 25 adoptees and birth relatives who had participated in a reunion experience. Of the total number of subjects 13 were adoptees, 8 were birth mothers and 4 were birth siblings. Sixteen of the subjects were matched pairs in that both the adoptee and the corresponding birth relative participated in the study. The reunions had taken place between one and seven years prior to the study. The majority ( $n = 10$ ) of the reunions had occurred between one and two years prior to the study. Five reunions had taken place three to five years earlier and two reunions had taken place between six and eight years prior to the study. Table 2 indicates the sex of the subjects categorized by status (adoptee, birth mother and birth sibling) and the total for each sex. While the total indicates a majority of the subjects were female, a finding reported by the literature review, a closer examination reveals that there was a fairly even distribution between males and females among the adoptees in the sample. The literature consistently

indicates that females are overrepresented in all studies of adoptees related to search activities, are more likely to volunteer to participate in research studies and tend to search for a birth relative more often than their male counterparts (Day, 1979; Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1984; Thompson, Stoneman, Webber & Harrison, 1978). The theory is that females have greater affiliative and attachment needs which may impede identity formation in females and propel them toward search activities (Ganson & Cook, 1986).

Table 2.--Sex of Respondents by Respondent Status

Sex	Adoptee Freq.	Birth Mother Freq.	Birth Sibling Freq.	Total %
Female	6	8	2	64.0
Male	7	0	2	36.0
Total	13	8	4	100.0

The number of males in this study can possibly be explained by assessing additional variables. Of the seven male adoptees, two did not initiate the search, but were found by a birth sibling independently of the Adoption Disclosure Registry. Three of the male adoptees were older, ages 35-45, and were the youngest siblings of a group of siblings who were brought into the care of the Children's

Aid due to protection issues. Their older siblings were not adopted and once these adoptees learned that they had birth siblings they became highly motivated to locate these siblings, but did not seem to have the same desire to establish contact with their birth parents. Perhaps these adoptees felt it was more socially acceptable to search for a sibling rather than a birth parent.

In addition, two of the four birth siblings in the sample were male. None of the studies previously reviewed included birth siblings in their sample. It is possible that their inclusion in this sample is an indication that in the future, especially under the present legislation which permits birth relatives to register, this type of reunion will become more common. It is also likely that more males will register now that the disclosure laws have, in effect, recognized adoptees and birth relatives need and right to establish contact and have provided a socially sanction method of doing so.

It is not surprising that birth fathers were not represented in this sample. The literature on birth parents has specifically focused on birth mothers. Ganson and Cook's (1986) study of 105 birth parents included six birth fathers and 99 birth mothers. Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1984) included 36 birth mothers and two birth fathers in

their study. In a similar fashion Deykin, Campbell and Patti (1984) and Stoneman, Blakely, Douglas and Webber (1985) also reported very few birth fathers in their samples.

Adoptees generally seek out their birth mothers first and may only then try and make contact with their birth father, if their birth mother reveals his identity. Birth fathers have traditionally remained in the background when it came to relinquishment decisions and may not have known of the pregnancy. In the past, birth mothers may have not revealed the identity of the birth fathers to the placement agency and often social histories were not obtained on the birth father. The revelation by the birth mother of the birth father's identity to the adoptee is an issue that has caused problems in the reunion process. Several of the adoptees, in this study, reported that their birth mothers refused to discuss their birth father and distorted the truth about him.

#### Age

Table 3 illustrates the ages of the subjects according to their status. The majority of the adoptees were between 19-29 years of age with a mean age of 29.15. This would be expected as these adoptees were at the stage where mate selection and child bearing are the main developmental

issues. The literature suggests (Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1985; Triseliotis, 1973) that search activities by adoptees are often precipitated by a life crisis or a significant developmental change.

Table 3.--Age of Respondents by Respondent Status

Age	Adoptee Freq.	Birth Mother Freq.	Birth Sibling Freq.	Total % Freq.
19-29	8	0	0	32.0
30-39	4	3	1	32.0
40-49	1	2	3	24.0
Over 50	0	3	0	12.0
Total	13	3	4	100.0

The birth mothers were between the ages of 36 to 55 with three birth mothers over 50 years of age. It is not possible to compare ages of the birth mothers in this study with other studies reviewed in the literature because the few studies which included birth mothers in their sample included birth mothers who had not participated in a reunion.

The birth siblings were between the ages of 36 - 48. They were very close in age to the birth mothers in the

sample and indicate their positions as the oldest sibling in the birth family. These older siblings appeared to express many of the same emotions and feelings toward the adoptee as the birth mothers and their desire for a reunion was no less intense.

#### Marital Status

Table 4 indicates the present marital status of the subjects. The majority of the subjects (68%) were married or involved in a long-term common-law reunions. These results seem to fall within expected demographic patterns and are similar to those reported by Glass and Novac (1984). Five of the birth mothers (63%) had been divorced with two having gone through a divorce twice. This appears to be a higher rate of divorce than would be expected in the general population and is also higher than reported by Deykin, Lee, Campbell & Patti (1984) and Stoneman, Blakely, Douglas and Webber (1985) who found that 15% and 33% respectively of the birth parents in their studies had been divorced. It is difficult to speculate why this sample of birth mothers had experienced a significantly high rate of divorce as there are few studies of birth mothers in the literature and often they do not differentiate between those who have had a reunion and those who have not. Three (38%) of the birth mothers had no subsequent children. This is similar to the

findings of Deykin, Lee Campbell and Patti (1984) and Stoneman, Blakely, Douglas and Webber (1985).

Table 4.--Marital Status by Respondent Status

Marital Status	Adoptee Freq.	Birth Mother Freq.	Birth Sibling Freq.	Total %
Single, never married	3	0	0	12.0
Married	7	6	4	68.0
Common-law	2	0	0	8.0
Divorced & separated	1	2	0	12.0
Total	13	8	4	100.0

#### Education and Occupation

The educational level attained by the subjects is presented in Table 5. This is similar to the educational attainment reported by Stoneman, Blakely, Douglas and Webber (1985) in their study of birth parents. However, Glass and Novac (1984) reported that 88% of the adoptees in their study had completed high school. All of the subjects in that particular study were members of Parent Finders and perhaps this self support group attracts adoptees who have achieved more education.

Table 5.--Education by Respondent Status

Education	Adoptee Freq.	Birth Mother Freq.	Birth Sibling Freq.	Total %
Post-secondary	5	1	0	24.0
High School	4	2	2	32.0
Some High School	2	3	1	24.0
Elementary/Special Education	2	2	1	20.0
Total	13	8	4	100.0

The occupation of the subjects (Table 6) reflects their educational attainment. Thirty-six percent of the subjects were employed in factory, blue collar jobs.



Table 6.--Occupation by Respondent Status

Occupation	Adoptee Freq.	Birth Mother Freq.	Birth Sibling Freq.	Total %
Factory/ Blue Collar	5	2	2	36.0
Office Manager/ Sales	3	2	1	24.0
Unemployed/ Disability	3	2	0	20.0
Cashier	0	2	1	12.0
Student	2	0	0	8.0
Total	13	8	4	100.0

Age at Relinquishment

The age of relinquishment for the birth mothers ( $n=8$ ) ranged from 15-25 years with four birth mothers 18 or younger and four 20 and older. The mean age was 19. All were unmarried when the child was born. This appears to be similar to the age of relinquishment reported in other studies. Stoneman, Blakely, Douglas and Webber (1985) reported that 75% ( $n=170$ ) of their sample of birth parents were in their teens and early 20's when the child was relinquished. In addition, Sorosky, Baran, and Pannor (1984) reported that 80% of their subjects, ( $n=38$ ), were

between 14 and 21 years when their child was placed on adoption. Rynearson (1982) in his study of 20 birth mothers found that they were between the ages of 15-19 when they relinquished. The four birth siblings in the sample were between the ages of 0-9 when the adoptee was relinquished. Two birth siblings were 9 years old, one was 4 and one birth relative was born after the relinquished child.

#### Age Adopted

As indicated in Table 7, the adoptees, (n=13), were placed in their adoptive homes between the ages of 1 month and 6 years with the mean age being 20.5 months. Other studies have shown a higher percentage of children adopted under the age of one. Glass and Novac (1984) reported that 64% of their subjects were adopted under the age of one, 28% were between 1-4, and 8% were over five. Thompson, Stoneman, Webber and Harrison (1978) also reported similar results. The slightly higher incidence of adoptions in the middle range and subsequently fewer infant placements may be explained by two possible factors. Several of the adoptees in this study were removed from their birth family due to child protection issues. The general practice of a Children's Aid Society is to work with family as long as possible in order to help the family resolve their difficulties. Therefore, children placed from these families would have likely been older. In addition, four of

the birth mothers in the sample were 20 years of age and older when they relinquished the child. Therefore, they may have kept the child for a time before deciding to relinquish.

Table 7.--Age Adopted

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Under 1 year	6	46.2
1 - 3 years	6	46.2
4 - 6 years	1	7.7
Total	13	100.1

### RELINQUISHMENT EXPERIENCES

Eight birth mothers were included in the sample. In order to answer the second research question related to the relinquishment process, birth mothers were asked to identify their reasons for the relinquishment, discuss how often they thought about the child, and assess their acceptance of the relinquishment.

### Reasons for Relinquishment

While there is very little literature available on birth mothers and the process of relinquishment, the present level of understanding indicates it is a complex, emotional, process. The majority of birth mothers in this study ( $n=7$ ) stated that they relinquished their child because of family pressure. Deykin, Campbell, and Patti (1984) in their study of birth mothers, determined that 69% of the sample surrendered their child because of pressure from family, social workers, or physicians. One birth mother reported that she became ill after the birth of the child and was hospitalized. Her family, fearing she was physically and emotionally unable to care for the child, pressured her into placing the child with a relative.

Another birth mother stated that her mother refused to help her with the child and said that if she kept the child, she would have to raise him alone. Three birth mothers believed that their families made the decision for them and that keeping the child was never considered an option as they were "good, Roman Catholic girls." For these birth mothers, the birth of the baby was a family secret. One birth mother stated that she had always regretted that she was unable to "stand up to my parents and admit to the world that I had baby and was going to keep it."

This finding is not surprising considering the social climate of the time. These birth mothers gave birth to children some 35 - 45 years ago. At that time it was not considered acceptable for a single mother, regardless of her age, to keep her child. Even the four birth mothers who were over 20 when they relinquished appeared to feel the same family pressure to relinquish the child.

Three of the birth siblings stated that their sibling was placed in an adoption home because of child protection issues. These families were disrupted due to serious difficulties in the nuclear family. In all three cases the children were removed from the home and placed with relatives or foster parents. However, the youngest child was eventually adopted while the older children were returned home, remained with relatives or were placed in permanent foster care.

This type of situation was not uncommon at that time. The agency believed that it was better for younger children to be adopted than to remain for any length of time in a foster home. Present agency practice is predicated on the assumption that in most instances children should remain with their natural families and that services should be offered to the family to assure that it does not become necessary for the children to come into care.

Thoughts of the Child

All of the birth relatives (birth mothers and birth siblings) stated that they had thought about the relinquished child "some" or "a lot" of the time. This belies the notion that once the birth mother has relinquished the child she is able to put it behind her and go on with her life. For this group of birth mothers, the pain of the relinquishment appears to have never been forgotten and the birth mothers appeared to be concerned and worried about their child during the years between relinquishment and reunion.

Five of the birth mothers said that they had felt somewhat depressed all their lives and they believed it was because of the relinquishment. As one birth mother put it, "I never felt I did the right thing. I've always regretted my decision and felt a great sorrow." Another birth mother said, "I thought about him every day." "I wondered where he was, how he was and if his parents were good to him." Birth mothers expressed a great deal of concern about their children's welfare. They worried, over the years that they might be unhappy, unloved or abused.

Similarly, the birth siblings expressed deep concern and caring for their missing sibling. The three birth siblings who remembered the adopted child as the infant in

their family appeared to feel the same feeling of loss as the birth mothers. Feelings were expressed such as: "He was my lost brother. A part of me was missing. I cried whenever I thought about him." "My sister and I talked about him all of the time. We missed him very much. It was heartbreaking to never see the baby again. He was like my own child, a part of me." The fourth birth relative found out that he had a sibling that was born prior to his birth and he became very curious about his sibling since he was an only child. He deeply resented the fact that his mother never told him about the relinquished child and felt he had a right to find her and meet her. The birth siblings all stated that they had approached the placement agency at least one time for help in locating their sibling. They felt the agency was unresponsive and offered them no hope or encouragement. At the time they approached the agency The Child and Family Services Act (1984) did not have provisions for birth relative registrations and the birth siblings did not believe their mothers would register. This prompted them to begin their search on their own.

Fifty percent ( $n=4$ ) of the birth mothers had thought about searching for the child since relinquishment, three had thought about it for the past 10-14 years, and one did not seriously think about searching until the child reached adulthood. Deykin, Campbell and Patti (1984) found that 96%

of the subjects in their study had thought about searching. The birth siblings also indicated that they had thought about searching for many years. Two birth siblings had thought about it for more than 15 years, one for more than 20, and the fourth for more than 30 years.

Sorcsky, Baran and Pannor (1984) found an equally high percentage (82%) who were interested in a reunion, while Marcus (1981) stated 89% of her sample indicated a desire for a reunion. These studies found results similar to the present study which strongly supports the view that for the birth mothers the surrendered child is frequently on their mind and they hope to eventually be reunited with the child.

#### Acceptance of Relinquishment

All of the birth mothers in this study reported a great deal of pain, sorrow and regret regarding the relinquishment of the child. Based on the subjects' response to the questionnaire and an assessment of the emotional context of the interview, it appeared that none of the birth mothers in this sample had resolved the relinquishment of their child, although two birth mothers stated that they felt they had made the right decision at the time. This finding is similar to personal accounts of the relinquishment reported in the literature.



However, Stoneman, Blakely, Douglas and Webber (1985) reported that 73% of the birth mothers in their study were assessed to have accepted the relinquishment, although anger and regret was frequently expressed by these birth mothers. Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1984) found that 50% of their subjects had resolved or accepted the relinquishment. The reasons that the majority of birth mothers in this study appeared to have many unresolved feelings regarding the relinquishment can be possibly explained by several factors. First, it is likely that because the birth mothers in this study were interviewed personally they were able to express their deep feelings about the relinquishment. This interview may have been their first opportunity to discuss the relinquishment in such detail.

In addition, it is possible that this variable may be related to the birth mothers' hopes for the reunion and the reason for the relinquishment. The majority of the birth mothers in this study appeared to have high hopes for the reunion - the formation of a close relationship with the relinquished child. In addition, the birth mothers in this study appeared to have relinquished their child because of family pressure. Perhaps because they felt powerless against this pressure, it was more difficult for this group of birth mothers to resolve the surrender of the child. This may have contributed to the high expectations placed on

the reunion outcomes. Whether this relationship is unique to this group of birth mothers or more generalizable, it is not possible to determine considering the present scarcity of research on birth mothers.

### ADOPTION EXPERIENCES

What were the adoption experiences of the adoptees? was the third research question. The subjects were asked questions about their adoption revelation experiences and the success of their adoptions.

#### Adoption Revelation

As Table 8 indicates, the age of adoption revelation for the subjects ( $n=13$ ) ranged from 3-23 years. The mean age was 7.8 and the mode was 7.0. This is similar to the results reported by Glass and Novac (1984). Triseliotis (1973), in his study of 68 adoptees, found that 16% ( $n=11$ ) of his subjects learned of their adoption between 0-5 years of age, 56% ( $n=28$ ) learned between 6-17, and 28% ( $n=19$ ) were 18 and over. Compared to the present study, the larger number of adoptees who were told at an older age of their adoption can perhaps be explained by the fact that Triseliotis' study was conducted over 15 years ago and the adoptees in the study would have been adopted at least 18

years prior to that time. According to the literature, (Kirk, 1984) the social climate of that time reflected a "rejection of difference" philosophy toward adoption and adoptive parents were given little, if any, guidance concerning adoption revelation and the importance of telling their children about their adoption.

Table 8.--Age of Adoption Revelation

Age	Frequency	Percentage
3-6	5	38.5
7-10	7	53.8
Over 10	1	7.7
Total	13	100.0

The majority (53.8%) of the adoptees learned of their adoption from their adoptive parents. Three learned from a sibling, one adoptee was adopted as an older child and two adoptees learned from a friend. These results are similar to Glass and Novac (1984). They found that 66% of the adoptees in their sample were told by their adoptive parents. Therefore, approximately half of the adoptees were told of their adoption by the people who would be considered by professionals as the ones with the major responsibility and obligation to do so. The fact that some adoptees were told of their status by others indicates that some of the

adoptive parents were uncomfortable with the "telling" issue and were perhaps likely to avoid the topic.

Table 9.--Extent of Discussions about the Adoption

Extent of Discussions	Frequency	Percentage
Never - 6 times in life	6	46.2
1-2 times a year	4	30.8
1 time a month	3	23.1
Total	13	100.1

This difficulty is reflected in Table 9, which indicates the frequency of discussions about adoption in the adoptive home. Most adoptees reported that adoption was seldom, if ever, discussed in the home. Similar results were found by Raynor (1980). She reported that 75% of the adoptive parents in her study stated that adoption was discussed between one - three times a year. While many adoptive parents apparently believed that it was important for them to tell their children they were adopted, they appear to have felt that they had discharged their responsibility after this task was completed. Kirk (1984) believes that this type of behaviour again reflects a "rejection of difference" frame of reference and indicates

the difficulties parents face when dealing with "telling" issues.

Many of the adoptees in this study stated that adoption was never discussed unless they, the adoptee, brought it up. The adoptees felt that bringing up the issue of adoption and asking questions about their background upset their adoptive parents. Therefore they usually chose not to ask their adoptive parents questions. One adoptee reported that when she was younger her adoptive parents frequently discussed the fact of her adoption with her, but as she entered the teen years they became reluctant and anxious about the issue. Apparently as her questions and concerns became more complex and specific, they were no longer able to deal with the issue in an open manner. Another adoptee, who reported that adoption was never discussed, said that his adoptive parents told him they did not know anything about his birth family and did not want to know anything. These comments appear to reflect the anxiety felt by adoptive parents.

It follows from the preceding discussion that adoptees would have been told very little about their birth families. Most adoptees reported that they were told only a minimal amount of information about their birth family, such as, that their birth mother was very young, poor, or had died. Only two adoptees were given information that could be

considered of a personal note and reflective of having a knowledge of the adoptee's social history. Glass and Novac (1984) also reported that the adoptees in their study received very little background information on their birth families. It is interesting to note that three adoptees were told their birth names, but were given no other information. Either adoptive parents were not given social histories on their child, were told very little, or chose not to share the complete information with their child. It is likely to be a combination of all three factors. At the time these adoptions were completed many social histories on the birth family were incomplete.

However, there was often much more information available than would be indicated by the amount of information that was actually revealed to the adoptees. The adoptees expressed this concern when asked if they believed their adoptive parents had told them everything they knew about their birth families. Eight adoptees (61.6%) felt that their adoptive parents had withheld information from them, while five adoptees (38.5%) felt that their adoptive parents had told them everything they knew. Glass and Novac (1984) reported similar findings in their study. Sixty-eight percent of the adoptees they interviewed felt that their adoptive parents had withheld information from them.

Success of Adoption

Table 10.--Adoptee's Perception of the Success of their Adoption

Success Ratings	Frequency	Percentage
Very successful	8	61.5
Somewhat successful	2	15.4
Neither	0	0.0
Somewhat unsuccessful	3	23.1
Very unsuccessful	0	0.0
Total	13	100.0

While most of the adoptees in this study reported that adoption was seldom discussed in the home and they received little background information on their birth family, this did not appear to affect the success of the adoption. As Table 10 demonstrates, the majority of the adoptees felt their adoptions were either very or somewhat successful and none of the adoptees rated their adoption as extremely unsuccessful. Similarly, Table 11 indicates that most felt "somewhat" or "very close" to their adoptive parents. It appears that, for the adoptees in this study, they were close to their adoptive parents and felt their adoptions were successful. The poor communication in the family

regarding adoption did not appear to adversely affect the adoption relationship.

Table 11.--Adoptee's Relationship to Adoptive Parents

Relationship	Frequency	Percentage
Very close	8	61.5
Somewhat close	3	23.1
Neutral	0	0.0
Somewhat distant	1	7.7
Very distant	1	7.7
Total	13	100.0

Glass and Novac (1984) came to a similar conclusion. They reported that 81.25% of the adoptees in their study who hoped to locate their birth family reported that they were close to their adoptive parents. Leeding (1977) reported that 75% of the subjects in his study were satisfied with their adoptions. Stoneman, Thompson and Webber (1980), in their study of adoptees who were requesting background information about their birth families, reported that 60% of the adoptees in their sample were considered to have grown up in a successful or somewhat successful adoption environment.



However, Triseliotis (1973) believed, based on his study of 68 adoptees, that adverse factors in adoptive family relationships, especially difficulty around "telling", was related to the desire to search for a birth relative. He reported that 67% of the adoptees who perceived their adoptive home as unsatisfactory were trying to find a birth relative as opposed to 33% of those adoptees who perceived their adoptions as satisfactory. In addition, he found that those adoptees who reported unsatisfactory adoptions also indicated that they had received little or no background information from their adoptive parents.

Triseliotis' results have been widely disseminated as one of the few studies of its kind and have been the basis of many fears that adoptees who search are often the product of unhappy adoptive homes. It is important to note that his study was conducted some 15 years ago and considerable adoption theory has been developed since that time especially in the area of "acceptance of difference." In addition, there may be some differences in adoption practice between Scotland, where Triseliotis' study took place, and Ontario which has often been considered to be progressive in terms of adoption practice and legislative response to adoption disclosure issues.

Desire to Search

Table 12 indicates that the majority (69.3%) of the adoptees had a desire and interest to locate their birth families through most of their teen years. Triseliotis (1973) also found that the adolescent years and the difficulty adoptees face when dealing with identity issues appeared to motivate many adoptees to begin to think about pursuing a search. One adoptee did not think of searching because he did not know he was adopted until about 2 weeks before his birth sibling located him. The three adoptees who stated that they did not begin to think of searching until they were adults generally seemed to feel little motivation or interest prior to that time. They indicated that they were very attached to their adoptive parents and considered them to be their "true" parents.

Table 12.--Age of Adoptee When Began Thinking about a Reunion

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Never Thought	1	7.7
Preteen	3	23.1
Teen	6	46.2
Adult	3	23.1
Total	13	100.1

### PREREUNION EXPERIENCES

This section seeks to answer the fourth research question: What were the prereunion experiences of the adoptees and birth relatives? The subjects were asked questions pertaining to their hopes and fears about the reunion, their reasons for searching, their preparation for the reunion, and family support for the reunion.

#### Hopes and Fears for the Reunion

Table 13 clearly indicates that all of the subjects in this study were hopeful of achieving a relationship with their reunion partner regardless of their status. This finding is especially significant in light of the fact that the question, "What did you hope to get out of the reunion?" was asked in a completely open way in the hopes of receiving varied and multiple responses. While the subjects had various reasons for wanting to search, they were unanimous in what they hoped would be the outcome of the reunion - some type of personal relationship. Three of the adoptees who hoped for a very close relationship expressed a desire for a mother-child relationship and indicated that they hoped to find a loving mother. Two of these adoptees reported being very close to their adoptive parents while the third adoptee reported being somewhat distant to her adoptive parents.

Table 13.--Relationship Expectations as a Result of Reunion  
by Respondent Status

Expectation	Adoptee Freq.	Birth Mother Freq.	Birth Sibling Freq.	Total %
Very close relationship	6	3	2	44.0
Friends	7	5	2	56.0
Total	13	8	4	100.0

It is important to note that five of the birth mothers desired to be friends only and did not hope or expect a mother-child relationship. They made comments such as "I know his adoptive parents are his real parents. I just hope we can be friends." The three birth mothers who hoped for a close relationship appeared to have a desire for a mother-child type of relationship. One birth mother responded, "I hoped we would look at each other and feel instant love. I hoped we could make up for all the lost years."

Table 14 identifies the most frequently reported fears concerning the reunion that were expressed by the subjects. All of the subjects reported concerns about the reunion. These centered mainly around fears of rejection, finding out that there were problems in the birth relatives' family history or fears by the birth mother that the adoptee would

hate her and never forgive her. It would be expected that adoptees and birth relatives would be apprehensive regarding a reunion. These fears did not appear to be exaggerated by the subjects, but seemed to be reasonable, possible outcomes that could be anticipated. However, it appeared that for those subjects who did experience a negative consequence from the reunion as their fears became reality, prior knowledge that the reunion could be a negative experience, did not help the subjects to prepare for this reality. However, this did not deter subjects from reporting positive outcomes, as will be discussed in the next section, regardless of difficulties encountered.

Table 14.--Fears About Reunion Outcomes by Respondent Status

Fears	Adoptee	Birth Mother	Birth Sibling	Percentage %
Rejection	7	4	1	48.0
Child would hate me	0	4	0	16.0
Problems in background	4	0	2	24.0
None	2	0	1	12.0
Total	13	8	4	100.0

As Table 15 shows, more than half (68%) of the subjects delayed searching because they feared intruding on the other's life and felt they did not have the right to search out the other party. All of the birth mothers reported that concerns about intruding prevented them from searching. However, this concern did not impede the adoptees from pursuing a search. Adoptees initiated the reunion in 13 of 17 reunions examined in this study. Only three of these reunions were coordinated through the use of the Adoption Disclosure Registry. The adoptee's desire to locate a birth relative appeared to overcome their concerns of intruding.

Table 15.--Fears Regarding Searching by Respondent Status

Fears	Adoptee Freq.	Birth Mother Freq.	Birth Sibling Freq.	Total %
Intruding	7	8	2	68.0
What might find	2	0	1	12.0
Rejection	1	0	1	8.0
None	2	0	0	8.0
Upsetting parents	1	0	0	4.0
Total	13	8	4	100.0

Only two of the reunions were initiated by the birth mother and two were initiated by the birth sibling. This

finding was expected as the literature (Stoneman, Thompson and Webber, 1980) indicated that adoptees are registered in a ratio of 3:1 compared to birth relatives. In addition, adoptees are much more likely to approach the placement agency for updated social histories than birth mothers. As the literature indicated, birth mothers, in the past, have often felt that while they would like to reunite with their child, it is up to the adoptee to initiate the process. Birth mothers appeared to be concerned about intruding on their child's life and felt they did not have the right to do so. Fears of rejection appeared to impede search activities for birth mothers.

It appeared that the birth siblings did not feel encumbered by the same restraints that the birth mothers felt because they did not feel they were bound by an implicit contract not to interfere in the adoptees life. Only one of these birth mothers had registered with the Adoption Disclosure Registry. However, three other birth mothers registered after they were contacted by the Registry and were told that the adoptee was registered and was requesting contact. While the intent of the recent adoption disclosure amendments was to encourage both adoptees and birth relatives to register, registration of birth relatives continues to lag behind adoptee registrations. (Ministry, 1986).

### Reasons for Searching

Adoptees were asked to indicate the two primary reasons they decided to establish contact with a birth relative. The primary reasons given were: curiosity and to learn more about their background ( $n=5$ ), to obtain medical information ( $n=5$ ), to find out the reasons they were adopted ( $n=3$ ), and to find out who they looked like. The second reason given by adoptees was: to complete feelings of personal identity ( $n=5$ ), to find out who they looked like ( $n=3$ ), changes in their lives ( $n=2$ ), curiosity ( $n=1$ ), and to find out why they were adopted ( $n=1$ ). These reasons are similar to those reported in the literature (Day, 1979; Leeding, 1977; Picton, 1982; and Sobol & Cardiff, 1983).

However, few adoptees reported being motivated by a crisis or death of an adoptive parent as Sobol & Cardiff (1983) and Triseliotis (1973) reported. This group of adoptees appeared motivated to search mainly out of a desire to learn more about their past and establish contact with a birth relative. They did not appear to be driven by strong, compelling needs that erupted at a time of crisis. However, this desire for more information indicates that for these adoptees the lack of information available to them about their history was a determining force in their desire to search. As indicated in the previous section, the adoptees were told very little about their birth histories by their



adoptive parent and it is possible that this factor is more related to the desire to search, than is a negative adoption outcome.

Birth mothers were evenly divided among the following reasons for searching: To find a missing part of themselves ( $n=3$ ), to find out how the adoptee turned out ( $n=2$ ), for peace of mind ( $n=2$ ) and did not search ( $n=1$ ). The second most frequent reason given for searching was: Peace of mind ( $n=3$ ), to let my child know I still cared ( $n=3$ ), and to explain the reasons for relinquishment ( $n=1$ ). All of the birth siblings indicated that they wanted to search in order to find a missing part of themselves. These reasons indicate that the birth relatives maintained an ongoing interest in the child and experienced a sense of incompleteness due to their separation from the child. While there have been no specific studies undertaken regarding birth relatives reasons for searching, the limited information available (Dusky, 1979; Musser, 1979; Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1984) would indicate that the birth relatives in this sample were experiencing feelings and needs that may be similar to other birth relatives.

#### Preparation for reunion

None of the subjects, regardless of status, felt fully prepared for the reunion experience. Five of the adoptees

and four birth mothers had received counselling with a social worker prior to the reunion experience. They all stated that the social worker had been very supportive and helpful and had discussed possible negative consequences with them. However, it appears they tended to push the thought of negative outcomes to the back of their mind in order to proceed with reunion plans. The subjects made comments such as "I tried not to think about it. I tried to keep an open mind about the reunion and not dwell on bad things." "I was afraid, but I knew if I kept thinking about it I would change my mind and decide not to meet her."

#### Family support

Over 80% of the subjects ( $n=18$ ) felt that their spouses and or children were somewhat or extremely supportive of their decision to meet their birth relative. This is a higher rate of support than reported by Stoneman, Thompson and Webber (1980). Only one birth mother reported that her spouse was completely unsupportive. In this case her husband could not accept the adoptee and refused to meet or acknowledge her. Most of the subjects stated that their spouse was happy for them and felt their desire to meet their birth relative was normal and natural. Several respondents commented that their spouse was afraid they would be hurt, and cautioned them not to expect too much. In many cases the spouse had actively encouraged the subject

to search and one spouse conducted all the search activities for her husband. All of the birth mothers indicated that they had told their present spouse about the child.

However, adoptees did not report receiving such support from their adoptive parents. Over half ( $n=7$ ) of the adoptees rated their adoptive parents as either neutral or unsupportive regarding their desire to be reunited with a birth relative. This is similar to the finding reported by Glass and Novac (1984). Of the adoptees in their study who had informed their adoptive parents of their search activities, 43% of their adoptive parents were considered to be unsupportive of their search.

This lack of support can be partly understood by the fact that almost half ( $n=6$ ) of the adoptees reported that their adoptive parents were hurt by the adoptees' search and were afraid they would be rejected by the adoptee. One adoptee stated that she did not tell her adoptive parents that she had met her birth mother until two years after the reunion. Every time she tried to bring the issue up, her parents became very upset and anxious. When she finally did tell them, they were very hurt and were afraid they would lose her to her birth mother. Another adoptee said his adoptive parents would not be involved in his search or reunion in any way. They insisted that he not give their

name or address to his birth family and said if he liked his birth family so much he should move in with them.

Some of the adoptees who felt their adoptive parents were supportive of their search indicated that their adoptive parents helped them in their search activities and treated their desire to search as normal and natural. However, three adoptees felt that while their adoptive parents understood their desire to search, they were very concerned that the adoptee would be hurt and or disappointed after the reunion. One adoptive mother, who actively tried to discourage her daughter from searching, told her that she would be very disappointed after meeting her birth family because they were "welfare type people and not the kind of people she would like to associate with."

### REUNION OUTCOMES

This section attempts to answer the fifth research question: What were the reunion outcomes? The subjects were asked questions about their initial reaction to their reunion partner, similarity to their reunion partner, and how they felt after the reunion. The subjects were also asked if the reunion met their expectation, their present relationship with their reunion partner, and if they met other members of their family. In conclusion, the subjects were asked to report changes in feelings about themselves

after the reunion and to rate their satisfaction with the reunion experience.

### Initial Reaction

Table 16.--First Reaction to Reunion Partner by Respondent Status

Reaction	Adoptee Freq.	Birth Mother Freq.	Birth Sibling Freq.	Total %
Liked alot	8	7	3	72.0
Liked somewhat	4	1	0	20.0
Neither	1	0	1	8.0
Disliked	0	0	0	0.0
Disliked intensely	0	0	0	0.0
Total	13	8	4	100.0

As seen in Table 16, 92% ( $n=23$ ) of the subjects indicated that their first reaction upon meeting their reunion partner was positive and no subjects reported having an initial negative reaction or response to the other party. Stoneman, Thompson and Webber (1980) reported the 60% of the subjects in their study assessed the initial reunion experience as positive. The two subjects who reported a neutral response appeared to base this on a slightly negative reaction to the physical appearance of the other

party. Considering the emotional impact that the initial reunion experience has on the participants, it appears that the initial response of most subjects was positive and provided a basis for pursuing the relationship.

One birth mother said meeting her son was "a dream come true. We hugged each other before we said a word." Another birth mother felt "there was instant love between us - a connection. He called me mom right away." An adoptee described the first meeting with her birth mother as the high point of their relationship because "she was herself - open and vulnerable." Another adoptee remembered that her birth mother cried and this made her feel good "because it showed she cared about me."

### Similarities

Part of the explanation for this initial positive response may lie in the fact that 80% ( $n=20$ ) of the subjects rated their birth relative as either somewhat similar or very similar to themselves (Table 17) and sixty four percent ( $n=16$ ) felt these similarities made the reunion a better experience for them. Most of these reported similarities were in the area of physical appearance, while some subjects also reported that their birth relative was similar to them in personality, mannerisms and interests. Three birth mothers and two adoptees (one matched pair) reported more

differences than similarities between themselves and their birth relative. These differences were generally in the area of values, attitudes and life styles. The majority of respondents reporting similarities is similar to the findings reported by Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1984).

Table 17.--Similarity to Reunion Partner by Respondent Status

Reported Similarity	Adoptee Freq.	Birth Mother Freq.	Birth Sibling Freq.	Total %
Very similar	7	2	2	44.0
Somewhat similar	4	3	2	36.0
Neither	0	0	0	0.0
Not very similar	2	2	0	16.0
Not similar at all	0	1	0	4.0
Total	13	8	4	100.0

#### Feelings after Reunion

As Table 18 indicates, 72% (n=18) of the subjects felt either somewhat or very happy after the initial excitement of the reunion experience and did not experience the emotional let down described by Sanders and Sitterly (1981). The three birth mothers who did report such a let down, were saddened by the fact that they had missed the joy of

watching their child grow up. The reunion appeared to make their sorrow and regret more intense. As one birth mother explained, "I realized how much I had missed. Especially after he showed me his baby pictures. I was very depressed for a while."

Table 18.--How Participants Felt After the Reunion by Respondent Status

Feeling	Adoptee	Birth Mother	Birth Sibling	Total %
Very happy	2	3	2	28.0
Somewhat happy	7	2	2	44.0
Neither	2	0	0	8.0
Somewhat unhappy	2	2	0	16.0
Very unhappy	0	1	0	4.0
Total	13	8	4	100.0

The fact that few respondents experienced a let down can perhaps be explained by an examination of Table 19. It appears that for most subjects the reunion met their expectations or they had few expectations. This positive experience may have given the subjects reason to continue to feel positive toward the reunion process. In addition, twenty-eight per cent ( $n=7$ ) of the respondents stated they tried to have few expectations as to the type of person they



would meet and tried to keep an open mind. Forty-eight percent of the subjects ( $n=12$ ) stated their reunion partner met their expectations. Therefore, 76% of the subjects either had no expectations of the person they would meet or felt their expectations were fulfilled.

The phenomenon described by Sanders and Sitterly (1981) as "fantasy meeting reality" (p.13) does not seem to apply with this group of subjects. The two adoptees who indicated their birth relative was not what they expected, again, were responding to the physical appearance of the relative and to perceived differences in life style between themselves and their birth relative. Similarly, the three birth mothers who responded that the adoptee was not what they expected found the adoptee very different from themselves in terms of appearance, life style and abilities.

Table 19.--Extent to which Reunion Met Expectations

Met Expectation	Adoptee Freq.	Birth Mother Freq.	Birth Sibling Freq.	Total %
Exactly as expected	3	1	1	20.0
Somewhat as expected	5	4	2	44.0
Neither	2	1	0	12.0
Somewhat different	2	0	0	8.0
Extremely different	1	2	1	16.0
Total	13	8	4	100.0

Present Relationship

A majority (72%) of the subjects (n=18) (Table 20) reported having a somewhat close or very close relationship with their reunion partner. This is similar to the findings reported by Depp (1982) and Picton (1982) but larger than reported by Stoneman, Thompson and Webber (1980) and Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1984). As these two studies did not address variables such as geographical proximity, expectations or similarities, it is difficult to compare results with the present study. For this group of subjects, these variables among other, may have been interrelated and contributed to the closeness of the present relationship.

Table 20.--Present Relationship with Reunion Partner by Respondent Status

Relationship	Adoptee Freq.	Birth Mother Freq.	Birth Sibling Freq.	Total %
Very close	4	2	3	36.0
Somewhat close	4	5	0	36.0
Neither	0	0	0	0.0
Somewhat distant	3	1	0	16.0
Very distant	2	0	1	12.0
Total	13	8	4	100.0

However, as Table 21 indicates, this closeness did not necessarily mean frequent contact. Contacts may be limited by geographical proximity as 3 subjects reported they live a four hour drive from their relative and 3 lived a long distance from their relative. The remaining subjects all live in the Windsor area. Twenty-four percent ( $n=6$ ) of the subjects reported that they had no contact, even by phone or letters, with their birth relative. This finding would be expected as 28% ( $n=7$ ) of the subjects reported having a very distant or somewhat distant relationship with their birth relative. It is interesting to note that 52% ( $n=13$ ) of the subjects reported that the frequency of contact diminished over time. This would be expected as the literature indicates that after the initial excitement of the reunion

diminishes, the parties must deal with the complexities of determining what type of relationship they desire and fitting the new found relative into their present patterns of living (Stoneman, Thompson & Webber, 1980). This phenomenon is also supported by this study as there was a decrease in satisfaction ratings from the initial response to the present relationship with the reunion partner.

Table 21.--Frequency of Visits with Reunion Partner by Respondent Status

Frequency of Visits	Adoptee Freq.	Birth Mother Freq.	Birth Sibling Freq.	Total %
Never	3	2	1	24.0
1-2 times a year	3	1	0	16.0
1-2 times a month	3	4	1	32.0
1-2 times a week	3	0	2	20.0
Live together	1	1	0	8.0
Total	13	8	4	100.0

#### Others Met

Eighty-four percent ( $n=21$ ) of the subjects reported that they had met other members, in addition to their reunion partner, of their family. Five adoptees met their

birth fathers and birth siblings. Five birth relatives met the spouse and children of the adoptee and four met the adoptees' adoptive parents. This finding may help explain the finding that 72% of the subjects reported a good ongoing relationship with their reunion partner. It appears that for this group of subjects many participants were able to make an effort to integrate their newly found family members into their present family structure. This may contribute to feelings of closeness.

Previous studies of reunion outcomes have not addressed this issue. The literature (Marcus, 1981; Sander & Sitterly, 1981) indicates that this may be a painful process, as adoptees and birth relatives struggle to find a common ground and integrate two families. These subjects appear to have done this on a limited basis by introducing their reunion partner to spouses, children or siblings. These subjects may have felt freer than subjects in previous studies to work toward this goal because of the recent publicity on reunions and the more open and understanding attitude of society toward the reunion process.

However, this occurrence did not extend to meetings between the adoptive parents and birth relatives. In only four cases did such a meeting occur and only two subjects reported that such meetings occurred on a regular basis.

Four subjects felt that such a meeting was possible sometime in the future. Four reasons were given by the subjects for not pursuing such contact: (1) having no desire or interest, (2) adoptive parents not willing, (3) adoptee not willing, and (4) adoptive parents and birth relative live too far away from one another to plan visits. It is not surprising that the majority of reunion participants would be reluctant to pursue such a meeting considering the "rejection of difference" philosophy prevalent at the time these adoptions were finalized.

#### Feelings About Self

As Table 22 indicates, 84% ( $n=21$ ) of the subjects reported that they felt better about themselves after the reunion. None of the adoptees appeared to feel worse about themselves after the reunion. Glass and Novac (1984) reported that 72% ( $n=18$ ) of their subjects felt the reunion increased positive feelings about themselves. As Marcus (1981) and Sorosky, Baran, and Pannor (1984) indicated, the reunion process appears to contribute to helping participant understand and accept themselves better and feel more complete and whole.

Table 22.--Changes in Feelings About Self after Reunion by Respondent Status

Changes	Adoptee Freq.	Birth Mother Freq.	Birth Sibling Freq.	Total %
Feel much better	7	3	3	52.0
Feel somewhat better	4	3	1	32.0
No change	2	0	0	8.0
Feel somewhat worse	0	1	0	4.0
Feel much worse	0	1	0	4.0
Total	13	8	4	100.0

One adoptee stated that she learned a lot about herself after meeting her birth mother and now she has more self confidence. "Now I have a bigger family to care about and to care about me." Another adoptee said she felt more "fulfilled and at ease because now I know who my birth mother is and I don't have to keep wondering if every stranger is my mother." A third adoptee felt the reunion helped him to understand himself better and gave him direction in life. "I learned why and who I was." Another adoptee felt the reunion gave her "inner peace and true peace of mind." Some adoptees felt they were more self assured and relaxed with other people, felt more satisfied with their lives and more complete since the reunion. One

adoptee put it this way: "I'm more in touch with my own needs. Now I know that my adoption was the right thing for me." Only one adoptee felt worse about herself after the reunion because she was rejected by her birth mother and now has no contact with her.

While the majority of birth mothers reported that they felt better about themselves after the reunion, many continued to feel upset and depressed about the relinquishment process after the reunion. Several birth mothers indicated that they felt great relief after meeting their child. However, as the literature indicates (Duskey, 1979; Musser, 1979 among others) the effects of relinquishment on many birth mothers appears to be long-termed. Birth mothers made comments such as: Even though I'm happier now I still feel depressed because of all the years we missed being together. Now I feel I have to try harder to be a good mother. I feel more serious about life and it has put a stress on my marriage because I feel I have to keep everybody happy. The two birth mothers who reported feeling much or somewhat worse since the reunion both experienced poor reunion outcomes. One birth mother does not see her daughter at all because her husband could not accept the fact of the child's birth.



### Problems

Ninety-six percent ( $n=24$ ) of the subjects reported that they had experienced difficulties with the relationship since the reunion and that some of these problems were complicated and difficult to resolve. In spite of these problems, 76% ( $n=19$ ) of the subjects indicated they got along fairly well or very well with their reunion partner (Table 23). One of the main problems expressed by adoptees was that their birth relative pressured them into forming a relationship before they were emotionally prepared for such a relationship. Part of this problem stemmed from the fact that some adoptees felt overwhelmed by the amount of information they received from their birth relative and needed time to sort through their feelings and emotions.

Table 23.--How Participants are Getting Along Since Reunion by Respondent Status

Get Along	Adoptee Freq.	Birth Mother Freq.	Birth Sibling Freq.	Total %
Very well	7	1	3	44.0
Fairly well	3	5	0	32.0
Neither	2	1	0	12.0
Poorly	0	1	0	4.0
Very poorly	1	0	1	8.0
Total	13	8	4	100.0

Three adoptees found it difficult to accept their birth mother's life styles and felt they were very different from their birth mother in terms of personality, attitudes and values. Two adoptees felt their birth mothers were insensitive to their needs and attempted to interfere in their lives. For example, one adoptee stated that her birth mother frequently came over to her house unannounced and would criticize her boyfriend, cooking and housekeeping standards. One adoptee found that his adoptive parents became very bitter and angry after the reunion when he began developing a close relationship with his birth mother.

Birth relatives expressed similar problems, with four commenting that they would like to be closer to the adoptee. Another common problem appeared to be that several birth mothers felt that their present family, spouse and children, had a difficult time accepting one another. Birth mothers made comments such as, "My children are very jealous of her. They just can't seem to get along." Two birth mothers found their adopted child to be self-centered and felt the adoptee took advantage of them by expecting them to help support them. Three birth mothers found that the adoptee appeared to be angry at them for placing them on adoption and did not appear to understand or sympathize with their reasons for the relinquishment.

It is interesting to note that birth siblings, while indicating that there were some problems, tended to minimize these difficulties and felt they would soon be resolved. For example, one birth sibling was concerned about the adoptee's drinking habits, but commented, "He's my brother and I love him no matter what. He knows I'll always be there for him." Another birth sibling said, "I was hoping that finding my brother would bring our whole family back together. That didn't happen, but at least we have each other now."

#### SATISFACTION WITH OUTCOMES

Table 24.--Satisfaction with Reunion Outcome by Respondent Status

Satisfaction	Adoptee Freq.	Birth Mother Freq.	Birth Sibling Freq.	Total %
Extremely satisfied	8	1	3	48.0
Somewhat satisfied	3	3	0	24.0
Neither	1	3	1	20.0
Somewhat dissatisfied	0	0	0	0.0
Very dissatisfied	1	1	0	8.0
Total	13	8	4	100.0

As Table 24 indicates the majority of the subjects (72%) were somewhat or extremely satisfied with the reunion outcome. This finding is identical to the results reported on the variable closeness of present relationship. The literature has also reported a high degree of satisfaction with reunion outcomes. Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1984) reported that 90% of their subjects were satisfied with their reunion, while Glass and Novac (1984) found that all of the adoptees in their study were somewhat or definitely satisfied with their reunion outcomes. Rillera (1987) and Stoneman, Thompson and Webber (1980), in their studies of adoptees and birth mothers, reported 73% and 60% respectively of the subjects were satisfied with the reunion outcomes.

It is likely that this discrepancy in favourable outcomes reported in the literature can be explained by noting that the studies with highest outcomes included only adoptees in their sample, while the remaining studies included adoptees and birth relatives. This study would indicate that adoptees tend to report more positive satisfaction scores than birth mothers. While both adoptees and birth mothers indicated that they desired to establish a close relationship or friendship with their reunion partner, it appears that for this group of birth mothers, this need was not easily met. As previously discussed, the majority

of birth mothers in this study appeared to have continued, unresolved feelings about the relinquishment process which may have made it difficult to have these unmet needs fulfilled through the reunion process. The majority of adoptees in this study appeared to have positive adoption experiences and may not have had as strong a need to continue to affiliate as the birth mothers.

Three additional questions were asked to further assess the subjects' feelings about the outcome of the reunion. First, the subjects were asked if the reunion answered questions they had about the past. Second, the subjects were asked if they would go through the reunion experience again. Third, the subjects were asked if they would recommend reunions to others contemplating a reunion. As Table 25 indicates the majority of the subjects felt the reunion answered at least some of their questions. Three of the birth mothers reported that they felt uncomfortable asking the adoptee questions about sensitive issues and felt it was more appropriate to wait for the adoptee to volunteer information.

Table 25.--Did the Reunion Answer Questions by Respondent Status

Answered Questions	Adoptee Freq.	Birth Mother Freq.	Birth Sibling Freq.	Total %
Yes	8	4	3	60.0
Somewhat	4	1	1	24.0
No	1	3	0	16.0
Total	13	8	4	100.0

Eighty-four percent ( $n=21$ ) of the respondents reported that they would go through the reunion experience again. Four subjects (16%) were uncertain or felt they would not wish to repeat the experience. In a similar vein, 84% ( $n=21$ ) of the subjects felt they probably or definitely would recommend reunions to others who were considering a reunion. The remainder of the subjects were uncertain or felt they would probably not recommend a reunion to others.

It is interesting to note that none of the adoptees reported that the reunion with their birth relative had a negative impact on their relationship with their adoptive parents. All of the adoptees perceived either no change or a positive change in their relationship with their adoptive parents. While the literature (Stoneman, Thompson, Webber, 1980; and Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1984) indicates that

adoptive parents have many concerns about the effects a reunion may have on the adoptee and their relationship, this study indicates that the reunion is not a threat to the adoptive family.

### Advice

All of the adoptees and birth relatives who participated in this study were pleased to offer advice to others who were considering a reunion. There were five main areas which received the most frequent responses. The advice given most frequently was that counselling was recommended both before and after the reunion. In conjunction with this comment was the belief that the agency should be used to plan the reunion, especially now that the Registry was searching out birth relatives at the request of the adoptee. It was felt by some that it was not appropriate to search independently and suddenly confront a birth relative or adult adoptee.

The next four pieces of advice most frequently given followed from the need for counselling. First the subjects felt it was important to be prepared for all possibilities. Many subjects expressed this idea as, "Keep an open mind." One birth mother expressed it this way, "Be prepared for differences. Don't expect them to be like you or feel the same way you do about things." In a similar fashion one

adoptee said, " You have to be prepared to accept the person the way they are. Don't expect to change them. Remember to keep reality in mind and not your fantasy." Several subjects noted that one must always be prepared for rejection or the fact that the other persons might not wish to get as close as one would like.

Second, subjects stated that reunion participants should try and not have high expectations. They made comments such as, "If you don't have many expectations, then you won't get hurt. If you think of the reunion as a fantasy dream come true like the reunions you read about in magazines, then you are bound to get hurt. Those articles never tell you what happens after the initial excitement is over."

The third most frequent advice given was to "take it slowly." In a similar way subjects felt that one should remember that the person you are going to meet is a stranger and that "it takes time to develop friendship and love. Don't try and rush it or you may be stuck with a relationship you don't want."

The fourth type of advice given was in the area of self knowledge. The subjects who responded with this advice appeared to be people who had put much thought into the



reunion experience and appeared self confident and assured with their advice. These respondents urged that reunions were best considered by mature adults. Adults who were mature enough to deal with any reunion outcome, who knew themselves well enough to know they could deal with the reunion experience. These individuals would also know why they were searching and what they wanted out of the reunion.

#### Associations with Outcome Variables

In order to determine if any of the variables were associated with satisfaction with outcome and closeness of present relationship to the reunion partner further analysis was done. A chi-square was calculated; however no significant relationships were obtained on the nominal level data. However as Table 26, indicates several associations were obtained using gamma, which was an appropriate statistic for ordinal level variables. Gamma determines the degree of association between variables based on whether or not they are concordant (agree) on each pair of observations. The gamma is a coefficient of association between two sets of observations based on their predictability in terms of agreements in their rank order.

As Table 26 indicates, those variables that were associated with satisfaction with outcome were also associated with closeness of the present relationship as

this was expected since the Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was .63 with a significance level of .001 between the two variables. This would indicate that there is a positive relationship between satisfaction with outcome and closeness of present relationship. As closeness increases so does satisfaction with the reunion outcome. This finding would be expected as the majority of subjects in this study hoped to achieve some type of relationship with their reunion partner.

Table 26.--Variables Associated with Closeness of Relationship and Satisfaction with Reunion Outcome.

Variables	Closeness of Relationship (Gamma)	Satisfaction with Outcome (Gamma)
Reunion met expectations	.92	.93
How well getting along	.84	.86
Feelings about self	.50	.85
Would go through again	1.00	.82
1st Reaction to partner	1.00	.80
Similarity to partner	.71	.76
Person met expectation	.66	.64
Amount of spousal support	1.00	.58
Would recommend	.86	.55

NOTE. Results based on Goodman and Kruskal's gamma.

It is interesting to note that only one of the independent variables, amount of spousal support, was positively associated with one of the main dependent variables. None of the demographic variables, relinquishment experiences or adoption experiences variables

were significantly related to closeness of the relationship or satisfaction with the outcome. In addition, the pre-reunion variables such as preparation for the reunion, hopes, and fears and reasons for searching were found to be not significantly associated with reunion outcomes.

The amount of support the subject received from their spouse was found to be associated with closeness and satisfaction. It would appear that there is a perfect linear relationship between spousal support and closeness to reunion partner and a relatively strong relationship between spousal support and satisfaction. As spousal support increases so does closeness and satisfaction. This finding points to the importance of family members in the reunion process for both the adoptee and birth relative. Without the support and encouragement of spouses, adoptees and birth relatives are likely to find it difficult to establish a relationship with their reunion partner.

Apparently, one's spouse must accept and be willing to incorporate the reunion partner into the present family in order for the participant to establish the desired relationship. Birth mothers who have not told their present partners about their relinquished child would obviously have to keep their reunion a secret and would therefore find it difficult to establish a personal relationship as they would

not have the flexibility and freedom to pursue such a relationship. As the adoptees reported receiving very little support from their adoptive parents, it would be natural that they would rely on their spouses for support and validation of their desire for a reunion.

Expectations appeared to be strongly associated with satisfaction and closeness. It appears that, for these respondents, those who found that their reunion partner met their expectations tended to report a close relationship with that person and to be satisfied. In a similar vein, no subjects reported being satisfied with the reunion outcome if the reunion did not meet their expectations. In fact, closeness and satisfaction were found to be strongly associated with whether the reunion met the subject's expectations. While many subjects reported that they tried to keep an open mind regarding the reunion and have few expectations, this appeared to be an almost impossible task. Hopes and expectations appeared to be high - failure to meet these expectations resulted in a reduction in reports of satisfaction and closeness.

Table 26 indicates that there is a perfect relationship between the subject's first reaction when meeting their reunion partner and the closeness of their present relationship. While no subjects reported an initial

negative response, the subjects who rated their response as neither liked nor disliked, had a very distant relationship with their reunion partner. It would seem that subjects are reporting an "instant chemistry" between themselves and their reunion partner.

This positive response may be related to the apparent association between similarity, closeness of relationship and satisfaction with outcome. As similarity increases so does closeness and satisfaction. Only two subjects reported being close and not being similar to their partner. It would be expected that perceiving the partner to be similar to oneself would provide a basis, a common ground, for developing a close relationship, just as it does for many relationships.

The literature strongly suggests that adoptees feel incomplete and may not have a fully developed self-identity due to their adoption and subsequent separation from their biological heritage. It has been suggested that a reunion may assist the adoptee in resolving self-identity issues. In a similar fashion, birth relatives may benefit from the reunion by being given the opportunity to deal with the guilt and sorrow they have experienced due to the relinquishment. The strong relationship between improved feelings about self after the reunion and closeness and

satisfaction ratings, supports this conclusion. While none of the variables specifically related to adoption and relinquishment were found to be significantly related to closeness and satisfaction, feelings about oneself would likely be related to these previous experiences.

### Summary

Chapter four presented the data analysis and discussion. The sample consisted of 25 adoptees and birth relatives who had experienced a reunion. The majority of the subjects were female. There were eight birth mothers in the study and their relinquishment experiences were discussed including their reasons for the relinquishment, their concern for the child and their acceptance of the relinquishment. The adoptees' adoption revelation experiences, their reported success of the adoption, their relationship with their adoptive parents and their desire to search were then explored.

The prereunion experiences of the subjects were then presented. This included their hopes and fears about the reunion, their reasons for searching and their preparation for the reunion.

The final section in the chapter presented the results related to the reunion outcomes. The findings related to

the subjects' initial reaction to their partner, perceived similarities and their feelings after the reunion, were presented. In addition, the present relationship between the participants and the subjects' satisfaction with the outcome of the reunion were discussed. The chapter concluded with a discussion of variables which were found to be associated with the subjects satisfaction with the reunion outcome and the closeness of their present relationship. The following chapter presents the summary of the research findings and the conclusions and recommendations for practice and research.

## Chapter VI

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present chapter includes the summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations for practice and for future research. The purpose of the study was to assess reunion outcomes between adult adoptees and birth relatives. A further purpose of the study was to determine if there were any independent variables related to reunion outcomes and satisfaction with reunion outcomes. The sample consisted of 25 adoptees and birth relatives who had participated in a reunion. Each subject participated in a semi-structured interview based on an interview schedule designed by the researcher who was an experienced practitioner.

The research questions were as follows: (1) What were the demographic characteristics of the sample? (2) What were the relinquishment experiences of the birth mothers in the sample? (3) What were the adoption experiences of the adoptees? (4) What were the pre-reunion experiences of the subjects? (5) What were the reunions outcomes? (6) Were the subjects satisfied with the reunion outcomes? and (7) Were there any relationships between the antecedent and



independent variables with the outcome measures of satisfaction with the reunion outcome and closeness of the personal relationship between the reunion partners following the reunion experience.

### Major Findings

The sample consisted of 13 adoptees, eight birth mothers and four birth siblings. The majority (64%) of the subjects were females since 8 were birth mothers. However, there was a fairly equal division between male and female adoptees. The adoptees were between the ages of 19 and 44 with a mean age of 29. The birth relatives were between the ages of 36 and 55 with a mean age of 38. The majority (68%) of the subjects were married.

Fifty-six percent of the subjects had completed high school. The majority (36%) of the subjects were employed in factory or blue collar jobs with 24% of the subjects employed in office manager or sales positions. The birth mothers were between the age of 15-25 when they relinquished their child with the mean age being 19.5. The adoptees were adopted between the ages of one month to 6 years when they were placed in their adoptive home. The mean age was 20.4 months.

### Relinquishment Experiences

The majority of the birth mothers in this sample relinquished their child because of family pressure to do so. Three of the birth siblings were full siblings and had been separated from the child who was eventually adopted because of child protection issues. All of the birth relatives thought of the adopted child frequently. All of the birth mothers in this sample reported a great deal of sorrow and regret concerning the relinquishment. They did not appear to have resolved the relinquishment and experienced depression and anger regarding the relinquishment.

### Adoption Experiences

The majority (92.3%) of the adoptees had learned of their adoption by the age of 10. The mean age was 7.8. Slightly over half of the adoptees were told of their adoption by their adoptive parents. Ten of the adoptees reported that adoption was seldom discussed in their adoptive home. Three adoptees reported that adoption was discussed about once a month. Eleven adoptees were told only a minimal amount of information about their birth history. Only three adoptees reported that they were told a great deal about their birth history. Over 60% of the adoptees felt their adoptive parents had withheld information from them. However, over 75% of the adoptees

rated their adoptions as somewhat or very successful. Over 80% of the adoptees felt somewhat close or very close to their adoptive parents. The majority of the adoptees (69.3%) had a desire to locate their birth families beginning in their teen years.

### Pre-reunion Experiences

All of the subjects in this study were hopeful of achieving some type of relationship with their reunion partner. Fifty-six percent hoped to become friends, while the remainder hoped for a very close relationship. However, the subjects had many fears about searching and reunion outcomes. These generally were in the area of concerns about intruding on the other's life, fears of being rejected, and concerns about what they might find or learn about in their reunion partner's life.

These concerns did not appear to impede adoptees from searching as adoptees initiated the reunions in 13 of the 17 reunions investigated in this study. Only three reunions were coordinated through the Disclosure Registry. Adoptees indicated three main reasons for their desire to search: to satisfy their curiosity about their background, to obtain medical information and to find out the reasons they were adopted. The birth relatives gave the following primary reasons for a desire for a reunion: to find a missing part

of themselves, to learn how the adoptee turned out, and for peace of mind.

None of the adoptees felt fully prepared for the reunion experiences. Nine of the subjects had received counselling from a social worker, but most appeared to try and avoid thinking about possible negative consequences of the reunion. Over 80% of the respondents felt their spouses were supportive of their decision to meet their birth relative. However, over half ( $n=7$ ) of the adoptees felt their adoptive parents were either neutral or unsupportive toward their search activities. Six of the adoptees stated their adoptive parents were hurt by their search and were afraid they would be rejected by the adoptee after the reunion.

#### Reunion Outcomes

Ninety-two percent ( $n=23$ ) of the subjects rated their initial reaction to their reunion partner as positive. No subject reported having an initial negative response to their reunion partner. Eighty percent ( $n=20$ ) of the subjects rated their reunion partner as somewhat or very similar to themselves. Seventy-two percent ( $n=18$ ) of the respondents felt somewhat or very happy after the reunion experience. Two adoptees and three birth mothers rated their feelings as somewhat or very unhappy after the

reunion. For most respondents ( $n=19$ ) the reunion either met their expectations or they had few expectations. Three adoptees, one birth mother and one birth sibling rated the reunion as somewhat or extremely different from their expectations. Similarly, over 70% of the respondents had no expectations as to the type of person they would meet or the person met their expectations.

Seventy-two percent ( $n=18$ ) of the sample rated their relationship with their reunion partner as somewhat or very close at the time of interview. Twenty percent of the respondents had no contact with their reunion partner and sixteen percent visited 1-2 times a year. Sixty percent of the subjects had daily, weekly or monthly contact. Eighty-four percent ( $n=21$ ) of the reunion participants had met other members, in addition to their reunion partner, of their family. Four adoptive parents met the adoptee's birth relative. Five adoptees met their birth fathers.

Eighty-four percent ( $n=21$ ) of the subjects reported that they felt better about themselves after the reunion. None of the adoptees felt worse about themselves after the reunion. Two birth mothers reported an increased in negative feelings about themselves after the reunion. Twenty four of the respondents reported that they experienced problems or difficulties after the reunion.

Birth siblings appeared to report fewer, less serious problems. Seventy-two percent of the sample indicated that they were somewhat or extremely satisfied with the outcome of the reunion. Eight percent (n=2) were dissatisfied with the outcome, while 20% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Eighty-four percent of the subjects reported that they would go through the reunion experience again and would probably or definitely recommend a reunion experience to others. Eighty-four percent of the subjects felt the reunion answered at least some of the questions they had about their reunion partner and family. None of the adoptees reported that the reunion had a negative impact on their relationship with their adoptive parents.

#### Conclusions and Recommendations for Practice

Reunions between adult adoptees and birth relatives represent a new challenge for social work practice as social workers struggle to understand how they can best assist the members of the adoption triad--the adoptee, the birth relatives and the adoptive parent. As such, the placement agency has come back into the foreground and is thrust into its, perhaps reluctant, place as the fourth member of what now may be called the adoption rectangle.

While adoption services have, in the past, been thought of as only being necessary and warranted for a short time

after the placement of the child in the adoptive home, it is now apparent, based on a better understanding of the uniqueness of the adoptive family, that the need for services does not terminate at that time. This study supports that conclusion. As the present disclosure legislation mandates that placement agencies coordinate reunions, social workers are beginning to see how previous adoption practice based on a rejection of difference philosophy, has affected the lives of the members of the adoption triad and the reunion process.

#### Adoptees

The majority of the adoptees in this study reported that they had thought about searching for their birth relatives for many years, usually since their teen years. The adoptees frequently gave as their reasons for searching: 1) curiosity and 2) the desire to learn more about their birth history. Adoptees in this study, as in previous studies, indicated that adoption was seldom discussed in their adoptive home. In addition, they were told very little about their birth family. Although adoptive parents had, in the past, been encouraged to share birth history with their adopted children and discuss the fact of their adoption, adoptive parents apparently found this very difficult. Adoptees have a need to know, a need which is not being met by adoptive parents. This apparently has

contributed to a sense of incompleteness, a sense of not feeling whole. Adoptees felt a reunion would help them achieve a more complete sense of identity.

Based on the above conclusions the following recommendations are proposed:

1) That placement agencies gather as much birth history information as possible. Complete histories on the birth father's family should also be obtained. This information should be shared with the adoptive parents in writing.

2) Couples applying to adopt should be assessed regarding their ability to deal appropriately with revelation issues. Adoptive parents must be sought who can base their relationship with their child on an "acceptance of difference" philosophy. Adoptive parents must be sought who can accept the reality of the birth family and help the adoptee deal with this reality.

3) That the role of the placement agency in this process should be understood and accepted. It is recommended that agencies develop post adoption services for adoptive families. These services should be built into the adoption process, so that adoptive families come to accept the need for these services as normal and natural. These



services may take the form of post adoption groups for parents and adoptees. This may assist the adoptee in dealing with the curiosity they feel until reunion. In addition, adoptees and adoptive parents will begin to view reunions as a natural progression and a developmental task.

### Adoptive Parents

It is apparent from this study that adoptive parents are finding it difficult to accept and understand the adoptees' reasons for searching and desire for a reunion. Adoptive parents may feel left out of the reunion process and this study indicates adoptive parents continue to be afraid that they will lose their adopted child to the birth mother. However, it appears that relationships between adoptive parents and adoptees are not being adversely affected by the reunion, and may in fact be enhanced. Therefore, it is recommended that agencies reach out to adoptive parents to include them in pre-reunion and post-reunion counselling.

### Birth Mothers

All of the birth mothers in this study indicated a great deal of anguish, pain and sorrow concerning the relinquishment. It appears that for most of the birth mothers in this study, the relinquishment of the child was never fully resolved. Previous agency practice, based on

the assumption that birth mothers would forget about the relinquished child and go on with their lives, appears to have been based on erroneous assumptions, at least for this sample. In spite of this, birth mothers appear to be reluctant to register. This study suggests birth mothers may fear intruding on the adoptee's life. The birth mothers in this study had told their spouse about the relinquished child and this may have some relationship to their positive response to the adoptee's search.

Therefore, it is recommended that:

1) Birth mothers be actively involved in the choice of adoptive parents for their child.

2) Some form of open adoption be considered for placements.

3) At the very least, birth mothers should receive updated information, through the agency, about the child's development. Birth mothers should also be encouraged to update agency files regarding pertinent health history or significant life events. This information should be shared with the adoptive parents.

4) Birth mothers should be given the opportunity to register with the Adoption Disclosure Registry and request a search for the adoptee. The present legislation appears to reinforce the birth mother's fears of rejection. Many adoptees express these same fears, which are partly alleviated if both parties are registered.

5) Initial contact with the birth mother through a registry search would be more appropriately made through the local agency, rather than the Ministry. Birth mother's may be more responsive and receptive to counselling if they have an immediate opportunity to have a personal interview with a social worker to discuss their concerns.

6) Counselling should be offered and encouraged to the birth mother, prior to her decision regarding whether or not to agree to the reunion. Birth mothers should be advised that the adoptee may pursue the search, if she refuses contact. Birth mothers should also be advised that adoptees may request a search for a birth sibling. This could be quite upsetting if the birth sibling was not aware of the relinquished child or if the adoptee learns the identity of the birth mother from the sibling, which is extremely likely.

### Birth siblings

The indications are that birth sibling reunions generally have positive outcomes and fewer problems or difficulties than reunions with birth mothers. The birth siblings in this study were often separated from the adoptee due to child protection issues and many of the birth siblings reported feelings and experiences similar to those reported by birth mothers. In many of these reunions, the birth mother was not interested in contact or only had infrequent contact with the adoptee; however, the reunion with a sibling appeared to satisfy many of the adoptees' needs and reduced the impact of the perceived rejection from their birth mother.

It is likely that sibling reunions will continue to increase as siblings register or are found through a search conducted by the registry. It is recommended that reunions between adoptees and birth siblings be encouraged and that these reunions receive pre- and post-reunion counselling. Emphasis should be placed on the impact the reunion may have on others, such as the birth mother or birth father, who may not desire contact and the resultant impact on the adoptee.

### Reunions

Even though the subjects in this study did not feel prepared for the reunion, participants appeared to have

benefitted from the reunion experience. The majority of respondents reported that they were satisfied with the reunion outcomes and had achieved a desired relationship with their reunion partner. In addition, most subjects reported that they felt better about themselves after the reunion. It would seem that for this group of subjects, reunions were able to meet the needs of the majority of participants. Of special interest is the finding that the majority of the subjects reported improved feelings about themselves after the reunion. These feelings were found to be strongly related to satisfaction and closeness.

The adoptees and birth relatives in this study appeared to have high expectations for their reunions. The majority of the subjects wished to achieve some type of personal relationship with their reunion partner. The adoptees did not seem to desire to make contact with a birth relative solely in order to obtain birth history information. It is possible that subjects did not identify the expectations they placed on the reunion until after the relationship was established. It may be difficult to admit to these high expectations initially because one is then faced with the reality of the experience which may not meet one's expectations. Whether this finding is unique to this group of subjects is unknown. This study indicates that the achievement of these expectations is related to satisfaction

with the reunion. In addition, those subjects who were close to their reunion partner tended to report greater satisfaction with the reunion.

In order to be satisfied with the reunion, the reunion also apparently had to meet two further criteria--the reunion partners had to get along well together and the partner had to meet one's expectations. Expectedly these two variables were found to be strongly associated with both satisfaction with the outcome and the closeness of their present relationship.

The reunion cannot be viewed as an end to itself, an isolated event, but as part of the ongoing development of the adoption process. This process includes working out a complex set of relationships between two sets of families after the reunion. As was expected, all of the subjects reported that they encountered problems and difficulties after the initial reunion and that these problems were not resolved. The parties appeared to have difficulty communicating their needs and wants to one another. These problems were unique to each individual relationship. However, they appeared to be related to attempts to determine what role each should play in the other's life. Most subjects reported that they were not fully prepared for the reunion experience and many felt a counselor would have

helped them to resolve some of the difficulties they had experienced after the reunion.

There was a strong relationship between the amount of support for the reunion received from the participant's spouse and satisfaction with the reunion outcome. The respondents who felt their spouses were supportive were more satisfied with the reunion. Spouses and children would likely be extremely affected by a reunion. They would be faced with many of the same tasks as the adoptee and birth relative. One of the problems frequently reported by subjects was jealousy between the adoptee and subsequent children of the birth mothers. In some cases, the birth mother's spouse found it difficult to accept the adoptee. It would appear that if the spouse does not accept the reunion partner, it is difficult for the adoptee or birth relative to pursue the relationship.

Most subjects reported a positive initial response to their reunion partner. This response may have provided the foundation for further development of the relationship. In fact, initial response was found to be significantly related to closeness between the reunion partners and satisfaction with the reunion.

Over 80% of the respondents rated their reunion partner as somewhat or very similar to themselves and most felt these similarities made the reunion process better. These similarities, as with first response or reaction to the reunion partner, likely contributed to the decision to pursue the relationship with the reunion partner. In support of this conclusion, similarity was found to be significantly related to both satisfaction with the reunion outcome and the closeness of the present relationship. The more similar subjects perceived themselves to be to their reunion partner, the more satisfied they were with the reunion and the closer was their present relationship.

This finding is not surprising in that adoptees have frequently reported in studies, and in popular literature, that they hoped to find someone, through a reunion, who looked like them and would provide a link to their biological heritage and a bridge to the future. Also finding a relative with similar interests, values, attitudes or mannerisms would likely increase affiliation and provide a common ground on which to build a relationship. When there is little perceived similarity between reunion partners, it is likely that adoptees may feel the reunion has failed to fulfill their needs.



It would appear that positive reunion outcomes for these subjects were dependent on what occurred during the reunion process, on the subjects expectations for the reunion and perceived similarities. While outcomes can not be separated from previous life experiences, this study found no significant relationships between outcomes and the adoption and relinquishment experiences, the reasons for the reunion, or fears about the reunion. It would seem that reunions are very dependent on how the two participants interact and react to one another. Subjects appeared to feel more confident and comfortable with the reunion process if they felt supported by a spouse. If their expectations coincide and if they feel a common bond, possibly based on perceived similarities between them, participants were more likely to be satisfied with the reunion experience. An important outcome of a satisfactory reunion experience appeared to be an increase in positive feelings about themselves.

Based on the above conclusions, the following recommendations are presented:

(1) Reunion counselors should be aware of the high expectations that many adoptees and birth relatives may place on the reunion. Pre-reunion counselling should help clients focus on these expectations and consider other

possible outcomes. Counselling should assist clients in not depending on the reunions to provide a relationship, but in viewing the reunion as an opportunity to learn more about themselves and achieve a more complete sense of identity.

(2) Group counselling may be the most helpful choice of intervention. It would also benefit clients to have a mixture of pre-reunion and post-reunion clients in the group.

(3) Reunions should be considered as part of an ongoing process and services should be developed for these clients as part of post-adoption services. Hopefully, as clients begin to view adoption from its unique status, clients will come to consider reunion services as part of ongoing services developed to meet their needs.

(4) Post-reunion counselling may be helpful to reunion participants in order to assist them in determining how they wish to proceed with the relationship. A knowledge of similarities between reunion partners may help participants determine if they have a basis for pursuing a close relationship. In addition, an initial negative response to the reunion partner, may be an indication that closeness may be a difficult goal to achieve.

(5) Pre-reunion counselling should focus on exchanging information between parties. Part of this exchange should include values, attitudes and life styles and an assessment of similarities between participants. It may be helpful for the parties to exchange video tapes or pictures prior to the reunion.

(6) Staffing be increased in order to reduce the time between registration, search and reunion. Long waits are extremely frustrating to the clients, make adoptees and birth relatives angry and hostile toward the agency and may reduce the likelihood that they will accept services from the agency. A long delay may also propel clients into pursuing the search on their own, without the benefit of agency support and counselling.

(7) Post-reunion counselling should focus on improving communication skills between the participants.

(8) Counselling services should be extended to the birth mother's present family members.

#### Recommendation for Research

The following recommendations are made for future research:

(1) That similar studies to the present one be carried out with a larger sample.

(2) That a longitudinal study be conducted on reunion outcomes and post-reunion adjustment.

(3) That a needs assessment be completed for adoptees and birth relatives as it relates to pre and post-reunion counselling.

(4) That studies focus on the impact of reunions or extended family members, especially spouses and children. In addition, a needs assessment should be completed for extended family members in order to determine if counselling or other services may be required.

(5) That a study which includes a pre- and post-test of adoptees and birth relatives on variables such as expectations, feelings about self, relationship with adoptive parents, reasons for searching, fears, and family support be conducted.

(6) That a survey be undertaken to determine why adoptees, birth relatives and adoptive parents are not taking advantage of the reunion counselling services which are available on a limited basis.

(7) That a study be undertaken of birth mothers who refuse requests for a reunion. In addition, the effects of a birth sibling reunion on such birth mothers and their families should be determined.

(8) That an assessment be conducted of the reasons birth mothers and especially birth fathers are not registering for reunions.

(9) That an exploratory study be conducted on differences in reunion outcomes between adoptees and three distinct sets of birth relative relationships - the unmarried mother, the protection client and the birth mother who subsequently marries the father of the relinquished child.

(10) That a longitudinal study of open adoptions be conducted.

(11) That the issue of differences between males and females in frequency of search and reunions be explored in future studies.

The following hypotheses are suggested for future research:

(1) Birth mothers who participate in some type of open adoption will likely experience greater resolution of the relinquishment than birth mothers who relinquish through more traditional methods. The present study indicated that birth mothers had difficulty resolving the relinquishment of the child and worried about the child over the years.

(2) Birth sibling reunions are more likely to have positive outcomes than reunions with birth mothers. Birth siblings, in this study, appeared to have less anxiety and fewer fears regarding the reunion than birth mothers.

(3) Birth mothers who have told their present spouse about the relinquished child are more likely to agree to a reunion when contacted by the Registry than birth mothers who have not told their spouse. Spousal support in this study, was found to be strongly associated with the closeness of the present relationship between reunion partners.

(4) There is no relationship between the desire to search and the success of one's adoption. The research in this area has been contradictory. However, this study supported the conclusion that adoptees desired to search regardless of the success of their adoption.

(5) There is no relationship between an adoptees' desire to search and the amount of birth history information received. There is some indication in previous studies that adoptees who received very little birth history information were more likely to search than adoptees who had received a great deal of birth history information.

(6) Adoptees who have received complete birth history information from adoptive parents will have a more fully developed sense of personal identity. There is some indication in the literature that adoptees search for a birth relative because they feel incomplete.

(7) Birth mothers who receive personal counselling after they are located through a Registry search, will be more likely to agree to a reunion than birth mothers who do not receive such counselling. The Adoption Disclosure Registry has indicated that some birth mothers, when contacted, will not agree to a reunion. However, these birth mothers do not receive counselling and it is possible they may change their decision when they are given the opportunity to discuss their relinquishment of the child and to learn more about the reasons adoptees search and the positive outcomes many participants experience.

(8) Reunions are likely to improve an adoptee's relationship with adoptive parents. The studies on this issue show that the adoptees' relationship with their adoptive parents does not change or it improves after the reunion experience.

(9) Reunions between adoptees and protection families have poorer outcomes than reunions with mothers who were unmarried at the time of placement. The literature indicates that there are differences between birth mothers in terms of reasons for relinquishment and searching and hopes and expectations for the reunion.

(10) There are differences between adoptees who have had good and poor adoption experiences in terms of reasons for searching and hopes and expectations for the reunion. While there is some indication in the literature that the desire to search is not related to adoption outcomes, it is likely that there are differences between searches on variables such as reasons and expectations for the reunion.

(11) Adoptees and birth relatives who report more similarities between them, will be more satisfied with their reunion outcomes. In this study, participants reported a great deal of similarity to their reunion partner which was



found to be related to satisfaction with the outcome and the closeness of their relationship.

### Summary

This chapter contained the summary of the findings and the conclusions and recommendations for practice and future research. Recommendations for practice were offered regarding the role of the placement agency in obtaining detailed birth history information, recruiting and preparing adoptive applicants, and the necessity to develop post adoption services for adoptive families. Based on the present study and literature regarding birth mothers, it was recommended that some form of open adoption be considered for agency placements. In addition, it was recommended that birth mothers receive counseling prior to making their decision about whether or not to proceed with a reunion.

Regarding reunions, it was recommended that counseling focus on expectations, communication difficulties and assisting participants in determining how they wish to proceed with the relationship after the reunion. Counselling services should be offered to members of the participants' extended families.

Appendix  
Data Collection Instrument

## CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in the research project conducted by Shari Schneider on reunions between adult adoptees and birth relatives. I understand the purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of reunions in order to improve the process and services for those who will participate in a reunion in the future.

I agree to have a personal interview with Shari Schneider. I understand that my confidentiality will be assured and that any information gathered during this research project will be reported as grouped data and that my individual identity will not be revealed.

---

Signature

---

Date

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status: married   single   never married   divorced  
                  separated   widowed   common-law-union  
                  remarried

Length of Marriage: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Children: \_\_\_\_\_

Ages: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: \_\_\_\_\_

Adopted or biological: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years of education completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Diplomas, degrees or certificates received: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Your age at adoption (or birth of child): \_\_\_\_\_

Placement agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of children in adoptive family: \_\_\_\_\_

Ages & sex: \_\_\_\_\_

Adopted or biological: \_\_\_\_\_

Who initiated the reunion: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of time since reunion: \_\_\_\_\_

RELINQUISHMENT

1. Why did you decide to place your child in an adoptive home?

External factors: family pressure,  
no money,  
no job.

Personal factors: too young to parent,  
wanted to finish school,  
C.A.S. removed child-protection issue.

2. Did you ever worry or think about child--wonder if you made the right decision?

1	2	3	4	5
never thought about it	seldom thought about it	neither thought or didn't	thought about it some	thought about alot

3. Did you tell your present family about the child?

When?

What was their reaction?

4. Did your child ask you why you placed him/her in an adoptive home?

How did you reply?

Do you feel your child had a right to ask you that question?

1	2	3	4	5
definitely does not have right	does not have the right	neither has right nor doesn't have right	somewhat has the right	definitely has right

5. How would you describe your feelings about placing your child in an adoptive home?

painful,  
depressed,  
anger,  
shame,  
sorrow/regret,  
acceptance--felt I did the right thing.

6. How would you describe your feelings about your child's adoptive home?

1	2	3	4	5
extremely	somewhat	neither	somewhat	definitely
negative	negative	positive	positive	positive
		nor		
		negative		

#### RELATIONSHIP TO ADOPTIVE FAMILY

1. How old were you when you learned you were adopted?
2. How did you find out?
3. How old were you when you realized what being adopted meant?
4. How did you feel when you realized what being adopted meant?
5. Did being adopted effect your teen years in any way?

Probe for identity issues:-

Probe for parent/child conflict

6. How often did you and your adoptive parents discuss adoption?
7. What were you told about your birth family?
8. Did you feel you were told everything your adoptive parents knew?
9. How would you rate the success of your adoption on a scale from 1-5 with 1 being very unsuccessful and 5 being extremely successful.

1	2	3	4	5
very	somewhat	neither	somewhat	extremely
unsuccessful	unsuccessful	successful	successful	successful
		nor		
		unsuccessful		

10. How would you rate your closeness to your adoptive family on a scale from 1-5 with 1 being very distant and 5 being very close?

1	2	3	4	5
very	somewhat	neither	somewhat	very
distant	distant	distant	close	close
		nor		
		close		

11. Has your relationship with your adoptive parents (or family) changed since the reunion?

1	2	3	4	5
definitely	somewhat	no change	somewhat	greatly
worse	worse		improved	improved

#### REASONS FOR SEARCHING - ADOPTEE

1. Why did you decide to try and find your birth relative at this time?

##### Probe for:

1. To find out who I looked like.
2. To find out why I was placed in a adoptive home.
3. To find out who I am--personal identity and fulfillment.
4. Curiosity.
5. My adoptive parent(s) died.
6. Changes in my life: marriage, birth, death, divorce.
7. To understand myself better.
8. Discover roots--ethnic heritage/ancestors.
9. To obtain medical information.

##### For birth relative:

1. To explain to child reasons for relinquishment.
2. So child would know I still cared.
3. So child could see I was a normal, well-adjusted person.
4. Peace of mind--to find out if I made the right decision.
5. To see how adoptee turned out.
6. Child now 18.
7. To know - it's my right.

Probe for: Did birth parent ever resolve the relinquishment of the child?

2. Why didn't you search before this time?

1. I have been thinking about it for \_\_\_\_\_ months/years.
2. I was afraid of what I might find.
3. I didn't want to intrude on their life.
4. Afraid of having to be responsible for parent/child.
5. Afraid of getting involved in a relationship I might not want.
6. Afraid of rejection.

### EXPECTATIONS

1. Did you anticipate or prepare for any negative consequences of the reunion?
2. What were your expectations for the reunion?

Hopes:

Fears:

Fantasy:

### SUPPORT

1. Was your adoptive family (present family) supportive of your decision to search for your birth relative (child)?

Did they try to discourage you?

What was their attitude toward your desire to search?

Hurt,  
Did not understand your reasons,  
Felt rejected,  
Treated it as normal and natural.



2. How would you rate your families support of your decision to locate your birth relative (child) on a scale from 1-5 with 1 being completely unsupportive and 5 being extremely supportive?

1	2	3	4	5
completely	somewhat	neither	somewhat	extremely
unsupportive	unsupportive	supportive	supportive	supportive
		nor		
		unsupportive		

### REUNION

1. How would you describe your first reaction when you met your birth relative (child) on a scale from 1-5 with 1 being disliked intensely and 5 being liked him/her right away?

1	2	3	4	5
disliked	disliked	neither	liked	liked alot
intensely	somewhat	nor disliked	somewhat	right away

2. Was your birth relative (child) the person you expected him/her to be?

1	2	3	4	5
definitely not	not what	neither	somewhat	very much
at all what I	I expected		liked	like
expected			expected	expected

3. Did the reunion turn out the way you expected it would?

1	2	3	4	5
extremely	somewhat	neither like	somewhat like	exactly
different	different	or unlike	expected	like I
		expected		expected

### SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES between adoptee & birth relative.

1. Did you find any similarities/difference between you and your birth mother (your child)?

What were they? Probe for:

- Values
- Attitudes
- Appearance
- Behavior
- Temperament
- Personality
- Interests
- Taste/style/dress

2. How did these similarities/differences effect your relationship with your birth relative (child)?

Look for:

Made it better  
Made it harder

3. How would you rate the similarity between you and your birth relative on a scale from 1-5 with 5 being very similar and 1 being not similar at all?

1	2	3	4	5
not	not very	neither	somewhat	very
similar at all	similar		similar	similar

#### SATISFACTION WITH OUTCOME

1. How would you rate your satisfaction with the outcome of the reunion with 1 being very dissatisfied and 5 being extremely satisfied?

1	2	3	4	5
very	somewhat	neither	somewhat	extremely
dissatisfied	dissatisfied	satisfied	satisfied	satisfied
		nor		
		dissatisfied		

2. Knowing how it all turned out would you go through the reunion experience again?

1	2	3	4	5
definitely	probably	unsure	probably	definitely
would not	would not		would	would

3. Did the reunion answer your questions about your birth family (history) or child?

Was your birth relative responsive to your questions?

1	2	3	4	5
definitely no	no	not sure	yes	definitely yes

4. Would you recommend reunion to other adoptees (birth relatives)?

1	2	3	4	5
definitely	probably	unsure	probably	definitely
would not	would not		would	would

REUNION OUTCOMES

1. What is your present relationship with your birth relative on a scale from 1 - 5 with 1 being very distant and 5 being very close?

1	2	3	4	5
very	somewhat	neither	somewhat	very
distant	distant	distant/close	close	close

2. How many kilometers away do you live from the other person?

3. Since the reunion, how often do you visit, \_\_\_\_\_, speak on the phone, \_\_\_\_\_, and/or write letters, \_\_\_\_\_?

4. How well have you and your birth relative (child) gotten along since the reunion on a scale from 1-5 with 1 being getting along very poorly and 5 being getting along very well?

1	2	3	4	5
getting	getting	neither	getting	getting
along very	along	poorly nor	along fairly	along very
poorly	poorly	well	well	well

5. Have you met any other members of your biological family (or adoptee's adoptive family) since the reunion?

Who?

What is your present relationship with them?

Do you plan to arrange a meeting between the birth family and adoptive family?

How did you arrive at your decision?

6. What specific problems or difficulties have you and your birth relative (child) experienced with each other since the reunion?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Have you been able to work them out?

Why or why not?

7. Did you feel different about yourself as an adopted person (birth relative) since the reunion?

In what ways?

Probe for positive & negative changes in feelings in:

Self:

Marriage:

Work:

Social Relationships:

8. How would you rate your feelings about yourself since the reunion on a scale from 1-5 with 1 being feel much worse about myself and 5 being feel much better?

1	2	3	4	5
feel much	feel somewhat	no change	feel somewhat	feel
worse	worse		better	much
				better

9. After the initial excitement of the reunion was over how would you describe your feelings on a scale from 1-5 with 1 being very unhappy and 5 being very happy?

1	2	3	4	5
very	somewhat	neither happy	somewhat	very
unhappy	unhappy	nor unhappy	happy	happy

10. What advice do you have for parents/child in preparation for a reunion?

11. What could have been done to make the reunion a better experience for you?

12. Is there anything else you would like to say about your reunion experience or this interview process?

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