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Adoptee Information Seeking: Changes between Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood and the Impact of Adoption Communicative Openness

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Adoptee Information Seeking: Changes between Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood
and the Impact of Adoption Communicative Openness

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Dedication

To Matt, Chase, and my parents who provided me with perspective and

supported me unconditionally throughout this process.

Abstract

This dissertation examined changes in information seeking intentions and behaviors between adolescence and emerging adulthood for a group of adoptees who did not have direct contact with birth relatives in adolescence. Associations between information seeking in emerging adulthood and life cycle events typical of emerging adulthood, gender, and Adoption Communicative Openness were also examined. Data from 119 adoptees and their adoptive mothers were used from Waves 2 (1996-2000) and 3 (2005-2008) of the Minnesota-Texas Adoption Research Project (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998). Degree of information seeking between adolescence (Wave 2) and emerging adulthood (Wave 3) increased for the majority of adoptees (62.2%). Approximately 16% of adoptees experienced no change in information seeking and 22% of adoptees experienced a decrease in information seeking. Females were more likely to exhibit a greater increase in information seeking change between Waves 2 and 3 and information seeking at Wave 3 than males. Life cycle events typical of emerging adulthood including living out of adoptive parents' home, being in a committed romantic relationship, and being a parent were not associated with information seeking in emerging adulthood. Number of life cycle events experienced also was not associated with information seeking in emerging adulthood. Adoption Communicative Openness was positively associated with degree of information seeking in emerging adulthood. Results suggest that adoptee information seeking is a dynamic process that takes place over several life stages and that open communication about adoption within the adoptive family supports adoptee information seeking.

Keywords: adoption, information seeking, gender, adoption communicative openness

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and the Impact of Adoption Communicative Openness

Adoptive families are becoming increasingly prevalent in the United States as the

population of domestically and internationally adopted children continues to grow

(Zamostny, Wiley, O'Brien, Lee, & Baden, 2003). What is unique for adoptees and their

adoptive families is that they are connected to another family—the adoptee's birth

family—about which they may have little or no information. Many adopted individuals

desire to seek unknown information about themselves and their birth families

accordingly. Those who do not have contact with their birth families may also wish to

establish contact and possibly develop relationships with birth family members. Post-

adoption counselors estimate that between 40-50% of adoptees seek background

information about or contact with birth relatives (Feast & Howe, 1997).

Adoptees typically begin thinking about whether or not to seek information or

contact in adolescence; however, most adoptees do not act on their intentions until

adulthood (Howe & Feast, 2001; Pacheco & Eme, 1993; Sachdev, 1992; Wrobel,

Grotevant, & McRoy, 2004). One way in which adoptive parents may support their

adopted child's curiosity about their origins and potential desire to seek information

about or contact with birth relatives is through open communication about adoption-

related issues. The stage of adolescence during which adoptees may begin thinking

about information seeking is a particularly salient time when adoptive parents may

support this aspect of adoptee development through adoption communicative openness

(Brodzinsky, 2005; Brodzinsky, 2006; Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2003).

Several aspects of adoptee information seeking remain unclear even though

information seeking (searching) has been the focus of much previous research (Müller &

Perry, 2001a; Müller & Perry, 2001b). Change in information seeking intentions and behaviors that occur for adoptees as they move from adolescence to emerging adulthood is an understudied area. The degree to which adoption communicative openness is related to information seeking in emerging adulthood when adoptees are more likely to act on their intentions to seek information about their birth families than they were in adolescence is also unknown. The purpose of this paper is to address these gaps in the literature.

This study describes changes in information seeking intentions and behaviors between adolescence and emerging adulthood for a group of adoptees who did not have direct contact with their birth mothers in adolescence. This study also explores associations between life cycle events typical of emerging adulthood and information seeking in emerging adulthood. Finally, the degree to which adoption communicative openness is associated with information seeking outcomes for adoptees in emerging adulthood is examined.

What is Information Seeking?

Information seeking is considered the "gathering of information previously unknown to an adopted person about his or her adoption and birth family" (Wrobel & Dillon, 2009, p. 223). The process of seeking information and/or contact has traditionally been known as "searching" with the understanding that a search for members of the birth family takes place and that the establishment of contact is the ultimate goal of the search. More recently the broader term "information seeking" has been used to acknowledge that adoptees engage in activities other than the traditional search for birth relatives in an attempt to gain information about their backgrounds and themselves (Wrobel, Von Korff, & Grotevant, 2007). Adopted individuals may not wish for the

outcome of their search to yield contact with birth family members but instead only to provide information.

It is important to differentiate information seeking from curiosity. Curiosity is described as a drive for information or knowledge that stimulates exploratory activity (Kashdan et al., 2004; Loewenstein, 1994). When adoptees experience a discrepancy between what they know about themselves and what they desire to know, a state of dissatisfaction or deprivation arises which Loewenstein (1994) identifies as curiosity. The exploratory activity that results from curiosity is likely to include information seeking.

Information seeking has typically been studied retrospectively as a discrete episode with the focus on the outcome of reunions between adopted persons and their birth relatives, most often the birth mother. Adoptees have been asked to reflect on the process of information seeking and reunion which they completed several months to several years prior (Campbell, Silverman, & Patti, 1991; Gladstone & Westhues, 1998; Howe & Feast, 2001; March, 1997; Sachdev, 1992). Retrospective studies have either compared adult adoptees who sought information about or contact with their birth relatives to those who did not or have explored the information seeking behavior of those adoptees who engaged in an active search for information or contact (Aumend & Barrett, 1984; Gladstone & Westhues, 1998; Howe & Feast, 2001; Pacheco & Eme, 1993). No studies have followed a group of adoptees over time that contained both adoptees with intentions to seek information or contact as well as those without intentions to seek information or contact in adolescence to determine the degree to which information seeking intentions and behaviors change between adolescence and emerging adulthood. Bertocci and Schechter (1991) indicate that less is known about the

experiences of non-seeking adoptees than seeking adoptees due to the inaccessibility of non-seeking adoptees.

Information seeking, age, and gender. Existing literature reveals that adoptees may begin experiencing the desire to seek information during adolescence but most do not begin an active search until adulthood (Howe & Feast, 2001; Pacheco & Eme, 1993; Sachdev, 1992; Wrobel, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2004). Feast and Howe (1997) found that only 12% of adoptees sought information about their backgrounds before their 20th birthdays in their analysis of 366 adoptee records. The average age at which most adoptees begin their search for information or contact is 27 (Campbell et al., 1991; Howe & Feast, 2001; Lichtenstein, 1996) and typically ranges from 25-34 (Pacheco & Eme, 1993; Sachdev, 1992). Existing research does not indicate whether desires and intentions (or lack thereof) to seek information or contact in adolescence remain stable into emerging adulthood.

The majority of adult adoptees who have participated in studies on information seeking are women, with participation rates by women ranging from 63% (Howe & Feast, 2001; Simpson, Timm, & McCubbin, 1981) to 90% (Campbell et al., 1991) in studies that used convenience samples. What is unclear is whether the high participation rates among women in these studies is indicative of a difference in rate of information seeking between males and females in the general adoptee population (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991). Wrobel et al. (2004) found that gender was not significantly related to information seeking status among adopted adolescents in the same Minnesota Texas Adoption Research Project (MTARP) subsample on which this paper is based. However, an analysis was done within gender and boys were "disproportionately skewed towards not searching" (Wrobel et al., 2004, p. 141) and girls were more equally divided among

information seeking groups which ranged from "not interested in seeking information" to "actively seeking information". Sobol and Cardiff (1983) also did not find an association between gender and degree of information seeking, although women were more represented at each level of information seeking than were men in their convenience sample.

Information seeking and the adoption life cycle. The adoption life cycle model (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002; Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; Rosenberg, 1992) proposes a psychosocial model of adoption adjustment across the life span. It describes unique developmental tasks and conflicts associated with being adopted in the context of the universal developmental tasks encountered by adoptees and non-adoptees alike. It is likely that the tasks encountered by adoptees during adolescence and emerging adulthood and the transition between these developmental stages create "information gaps" (Wrobel & Dillon, 2009). Perceived information gaps exist when the adoption-related information adoptees know does not match the information they desire. Information gaps and the desire for information are likely to be present depending on the developmental transitions and life tasks encountered by adoptees and how adoptees perceive them. Information seeking is conceptualized in this paper as a process (Gonyo & Watson, 1988; Schechter & Bertocci, 1990) unique to adoptees that may be influenced by life cycle transitions and tasks associated with each period and accompanying information gaps.

Major developmental tasks likely to influence adoptees' information seeking processes during adolescence include identity exploration, cognitive advancement, and establishment of independence. The first tentative steps toward the development of an adult identity take place in adolescence (Arnett, 2000). The process of identity

development for adopted adolescents may include connecting adoption to one's sense of identity and exploring the meanings and implications associated with being adopted in addition to the broad identity exploration in which most adolescents engage (Grotevant, 1997). A new phase of cognitive development also begins during adolescence which allows for increased abstract thinking and moral reasoning (Brodzinsky, Singer, & Braff, 1984). This new way of thinking enables adopted adolescents to explore and cope with physical differences from adoptive family members as well as to begin recognizing and coping with adoption-related losses particularly as they relate to the adoptee's sense of self. First attempts at developing independence and autonomy also occur during the stage of adolescence and have unique implications for adoptees (Rosenberg, 1992). The establishment of autonomy and independence may provide an opportunity for or be bolstered by thinking about the possibility of seeking information about or contact with birth family members (Brodzinsky et al., 1992).

The period of emerging adulthood bridges adolescence and young adulthood and contains distinguishing developmental challenges and difficulties (Arnett, 2007). Emerging adulthood spans the late teens and twenties "with a focus on ages 18-25" (Arnett, 2000, p. 469). Identity development may begin in adolescence but identity explorations "become more prominent and serious in emerging adulthood" (Arnett, 2007, p. 24). Emerging adults may experience anxiety over the instability and identity challenges of their lives even as they celebrate their independence. This anxiety may be further complicated for adoptees as they explore their adoptive identity while separating from their adoptive families. Most individuals in the stage of emerging adulthood have left their families of origin but they have not yet established families of their own. This period may therefore be "self-focused in the sense that it is a time of life when people

have the most opportunity to focus on self-development" (Arnett, 2007, p. 26). The intensive identity exploration, focus on the development of self, and individuation and separation from adoptive families that occur during this period may encourage adopted emerging adults to learn more about themselves by seeking information about their birth families. The transition from emerging adulthood to young adulthood "intensifies in the late twenties and is reached by age 30" (Arnett, 2000, p. 477).

Emerging adults, particularly women, increasingly see themselves in relation to others. For adopted emerging adult women this new sense of self in relation to others may reveal itself in an attempt to seek contact with and develop relationships with birth family as they begin to see themselves in the larger context of the adoption kinship network. Adopted emerging adults will likely begin exploring the implications of adoption "as it relates to the growth of the self and the development of intimacy" (Brodzinsky et al., 1992, p. 16).

Entry into emerging adulthood enables additional cognitive advancements such as the increased ability to engage in a dialectical thinking style. The dialectical thinking style allows for the recognition and enjoyment of "the dynamic tension of apparent contradictions" (Brodzinsky et al., 1992, p. 127) which may be particularly helpful to adopted emerging adults who live with potential feelings of incongruity, ambivalence, and disequilibrium about being adopted. Some emerging adult adoptees may wish to relieve the feelings mentioned above by seeking information about or contact with their birth families and thereby have questions answered and fill in pieces of their lives they may consider missing. Other adoptees may be more comfortable with the ambiguity caused by lack of information about birth families or they may feel that the experience of seeking information would prove to be more negative than positive. Regardless of

whether an adoptee chooses to seek information, the ability to engage in dialectical thinking allows the adoptee to acknowledge and accept the incongruity inherent in being adopted and consider whether or not to seek additional information about or contact with birth family.

Information seeking and life cycle events typical of emerging adulthood. The accomplishment of life cycle events typical during emerging adulthood may lead to information gaps and pose implications for development specific to adopted emerging adults, such as facing an unknown genetic heritage when considering having biological children and adjusting to parenthood in the context of one's own placement for adoption, which in turn may activate information seeking about birth family (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002; Brodzinsky et al., 1992; Feast & Howe, 1997; Rosenberg, 1992). Adoptees seek information for a variety of reasons; however, the occurrence of life cycle events typical of emerging adulthood has been cited as a common catalyst for requesting background information (March, 1995b; Sobol & Cardiff, 1983; Sorosky, Baran, & Pannor, 1974). Specifically, the life cycle events of pregnancy or birth (Pacheco & Eme, 1993; Sachdev, 1992) and marriage or establishment of a committed relationship (Campbell et al., 1991; Sorosky et al., 1974) frequently precipitate the desire for more information. Living outside of adoptive parents' homes is also suggested as a possible life cycle event that may catalyze adoptees to seek information.

Most studies emphasize the birth of children or pregnancy as the most common reason for seeking information, particularly for female adoptees (Campbell et al., 1991; Kowal & Schilling, 1985; Feast & Howe, 1997; March, 1995b; Pacheco & Eme, 1993). The experience of pregnancy and childbirth may intensify women's desires to seek information by heightening awareness of genealogical continuity (Sorosky et al., 1974).

Similarly, the birth of children may precipitate the desire for medical histories and information regarding potential genetic problems (Kowal & Schilling, 1985; Müller & Perry, 2001a). The desire to seek information due to child birth may also activate interest in what it means to be a mother (Wrobel, Ayers-Lopez, Grotevant, McRoy, & Friedrick, 1996) and awareness of the birth mother and her feelings (Campbell et al., 1991).

Getting married or establishing a committed relationship has also been cited as a catalyst for information seeking (March, 1995b; Sorosky et al., 1974). The influence of significant others may be a motivating factor in the decision to seek information (March, 1995b; Simpson et al., 1981). Adoptees' significant others may provide support, encouragement, and acceptance of information seeking. Consequently, significant others often play a salient role in adoptees' decisions to seek information (Kowal & Schilling, 1985; March, 1995b). The majority of adoptees who seek information are married (Campbell et al., 1991; Gladstone & Westhues, 1998; Pacheco & Eme, 1993; Sachdev, 1992).

Even less is known about the impact of moving out of adoptive parents' homes on adoptees' decisions to seek information or contact with their birth families. Several researchers have cited adoptees' desire not to hurt or upset adoptive parents as complicating or preventing information seeking (Campbell et al., 1991; Gladstone & Westhues, 1998; March, 1995b; Sachdev, 1992; Simpson et al., 1981; Sorosky et al., 1974; Triseliotis, Feast, & Kyle, 2005). Many adoptees choose not to discuss their information seeking process with their adoptive parents for fear of hurting them (Feast & Howe, 1997; Simpson et al., 1981). Adoptees' perceptions of the possibility of hurting their parents are not unfounded. Adoptive parents in a study by Petta and Steed (2005) expressed the concern that reunions between their adopted children and their children's

birth mothers would "mark the end of their parent-child relationship with the adoptee" (p. 233). Adoptive parents might also indicate to adoptees that they do not want them to seek information (Triseliotis et al., 2005; Sachdev, 1992). It is possible that living outside of adoptive parents' homes may make it easier for adoptees who are concerned about hurting their parents or are aware of their parents' negative feelings regarding information seeking to seek information.

Finally, it is worth exploring whether the number of life cycle events experienced by adoptees impact information seeking intentions and behaviors. Sobol and Cardiff (1983) found that the number of stressful life events experienced by adult adoptees was positively related to degree of information seeking. It is therefore possible that the number of life cycle events experienced by adoptees has a cumulative effect on information seeking so that adoptees who have experienced a greater number of transitions are more likely to seek information about or contact with birth mothers.

Adoption Communicative Openness and Information Seeking

The creation of an "open, honest, nondefensive, and emotionally attuned family dialogue" (Brodzinsky, 2005, p. 151) regarding adoption issues is referred to as Adoption Communicative Openness (ACO). Open communication in the adoptive family is associated with several aspects of adaptive adoptee development, including the desire for information about one's background (Brodzinsky, 2005; Brodzinsky, 2006; Kirk, 1964; Wrobel et al., 1996; Wrobel et al., 2003). Findings by Campbell et al. (1991) indicate that it may be easier for adoptees to initiate information seeking "if family members are more open and able to modify the way they talk about adoption" (p. 331). Conversely, lack of open communication in the adoptive family regarding adoption-related issues is thought to negatively impact children's development (Kirk, 1964). Parents who are uncomfortable

acknowledging with their children the ways in which their families are different from non-adoptive families may create a stifled communicative environment surrounding adoption issues. Children may have difficulty expressing their curiosity, their parents may feel threatened by questions regarding adoption, and family relationships could be subsequently adversely affected (McRoy, Grotevant, Ayers-Lopez, & Furuta, 1990; Kirk, 1964). Parents who are able to acknowledge yet not insist upon differences between their adoptive family and non-adoptive families will create an open, non-defensive atmosphere that supports the adopted child's curiosity and maintains communicative openness regarding adoption-related issues (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002; Kirk, 1964).

Adoptive families are thought to encounter three phases of communication about adoption over the course of their family life cycles (Wrobel et al., 2003). First, adoptive parents may provide unsolicited information to their child about his or her adoption and birth family. They may then address their child's growing curiosity by responding to questions the child may have. Finally, the adopted child may begin seeking information independently of his or her parents.

As adoptees enter subsequent developmental stages and cognitively mature they develop a greater understanding of adoption and may become more curious about their own situations. This curiosity is likely to emerge around the age of six and continue into adolescence in the form of increased questioning of adoptive parents regarding biological origins and birth family members (Bernstein & Cowan, 1975; Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Brodzinsky, 1986; Brodzinsky et al., 1984; Newman, Roberts, & Syre, 1993). Adoptees' increased need for communication is considered a normative aspect of the adoption adjustment process. An open, interactive communicative process over the

course of a family's life cycle focused on the adopted child's evolving needs is believed to support healthy individual and family adjustment (Brodzinsky, 2005). The degree to which adoption communicative openness during adolescence supports later information seeking in emerging adulthood, however, is unknown.

Study Research Questions

Much research has already been done on adoptee information seeking. Due to its multifaceted nature, however, several aspects of information seeking remain obscured. The current study seeks to respond to the following unanswered questions regarding adoptee information seeking:

1. *What changes occur for adoptees in information seeking intentions and behaviors between adolescence and emerging adulthood?*

2. *Is gender associated with change in information seeking?*

3. *Is information seeking in emerging adulthood associated with the life cycle events of being in a committed romantic relationship, being a parent, and living outside of adoptive parents' home?*

4. *Are the number of life cycle events encountered by adoptees in emerging adulthood associated with information seeking?*

5. *Is adoption communicative openness significantly associated with information seeking in emerging adulthood?*

Methods

Participants

Data used for this paper come from a sub-sample of 119 adoptees who participated at Waves 2 (1995-2000) and 3 (2006-2007) of the Minnesota-Texas Adoption Research Project (MTARP) (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998). Data used in the

present paper were gathered from participants when they were adolescents (Wave 2) and again when they were in the phase of emerging adulthood (Wave 3). This paper explores changes in information seeking intentions and behaviors between adolescence and emerging adulthood for adoptees who had no direct contact with birth family members at adolescence. Those participants who had contact with and already knew a member of their birth family at adolescence were not included in the study. Adoption communicative openness was coded from adoptive mother Wave 2 interviews. Therefore data collected at Wave 2 from adoptive mothers of the adopted participants in the sub-sample were also included.

At Wave 1 of MTARP (1987-1992) participants were recruited through 35 adoption agencies in 23 states from all regions of the United States. They included adoptive families with at least one adopted child who was between the ages of 4 and 12 (M = 7.8 years) at the start of Wave 1 and who was adopted before he or she was one year old via a private adoption agency. Agency personnel identified families that fit these criteria and then sampled families with varying levels of contact between adoptive and birth family members until a pre-determined number of adoptive families and birth mothers willing to participate were identified. A small number of families (6.3%) were recruited through newspaper and periodical advertisements. Exclusion criteria for the sample included adoptive families with children who were adopted transracially, internationally, or were considered special needs. The Wave 1 sample included both parents in 190 adoptive families and at least one adopted child in 171 of the families.

The full Wave 2 sample included 173 adoptive mothers, 162 adoptive fathers, and 156 adopted adolescents from 177 adoptive families. Age range of the adopted adolescents was between 11 and 20 (M = 15.7 years); 75 were males and 81 were

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females. Age of mothers in the full Wave 2 sample ranged from 40 to 57 (mean = 47.4). The full Wave 3 sample included 150 adoptive mothers, 133 adoptive fathers, and 169 adopted emerging adults. The adopted emerging adults were between the ages of 21 and 30 (mean = 25.0); 87 were males and 82 were females.

The adoptees included in the sub-sample in this paper included 59 males and 60 females. At Wave 2 they were between the ages of 11.9 and 20.8 (mean = 15.9). At Wave 3, range in age was 21 to 29.5 (mean = 25.2). Participants in the sample are therefore distinctly within the stage of emerging adulthood which spans the late teens and twenties and is reached by age 30 (Arnett, 2000). The majority of emerging adults identified as White; four identified as Hispanic/Mexican American and one identified as Black/African American. Approximately 20% of the adopted emerging adults were married and 20% had children. Fifty percent had earned at most a high school diploma, GED, or high school equivalency degree, about 14% had earned at most an associate or junior college degree, about 33% had earned at most a bachelor's degree, and almost 3% had earned at most a master's degree. Twenty-one percent were attending school full-time and about 7% were attending school part-time. The majority of participants (80%) reported living in their own place (e.g. apartment, house, etc.) and paying all or more than half of their housing expenses (60%).

Age at Wave 2 of the adoptive mothers for whom data were used in this paper ranged from 40 to 55 (mean = 47.2). Ninety-five percent were married, 4% were divorced, and 1% was separated. The majority of mothers were White; the remaining mothers included one Black/African American mother, one Hispanic/Mexican American mother, and one Native American mother. Twenty-five percent of mothers had

completed high school and approximately 50% had completed between 1 and 4 years of college. Almost 17% had completed some graduate school.

Procedures

      Wave 2. Adoptive families were seen in their homes during a single session lasting between 4 and 5 hours. The visit included separate semi-structured interviews with each adoptive parent and the adopted adolescent, administration of questionnaires, and administration of a family interaction task. Family members who were not present for the session (e.g. living away from home) were interviewed by telephone and were mailed questionnaires.

      Wave 3. Adopted emerging adults completed interviews via secure, password-protected internet chat-sites and were administered online questionnaires protected by secure socket layer web technology. Participants used unique user names and passwords to log in to a secure main menu page from which they had access to the questionnaires and chat sites in which their interviews were conducted. Participants first completed the online interviews which were conducted by trained graduate level or mature undergraduate interviewers. They were then able to complete the online questionnaires. Participants were able to enter, save, and edit their responses on the questionnaires until they were ready to submit their final responses. Paper-and-pencil measures and telephone interviews were made available to participants who did not have internet access or who had disabilities that precluded their use of the internet.

Measures

      Adopted adolescent interview (Wave 2). The adolescent interview included questions about general adoption issues as well as issues specific to the level of openness in the adolescent's adoption intended to elicit open discussion of the

adolescent's experiences, feelings, knowledge, and attitudes about his or her adoption, adoptive identity, adoptive family situation, and birth parents. Adolescent interviews typically lasted between 1 and 2 hours.

Adoptive parent interview (Wave 2). The adoptive parent interview consisted of questions that covered a range of adoption-related topics including experiences of being a member of an adoptive family in society, the relationship with the child, views about the family's experiences with contact or lack thereof with birth family, views about the different structural openness arrangements in adoption openness (the degree of contact between adoptive and birth families), and desires for the future regarding relationships with birth family members.

Adopted emerging adult interview (Wave 3). The emerging adult interview was divided into three different sections. Data used in this paper come from the first section of the interview. The first section was about adoption and included questions about information seeking intentions and behavior. The second section of the interview was about the emerging adult's current, closest relationship. The third section of the interview consisted of a sub-set of questions regarding spirituality, morality, and religion and another sub-set of questions regarding educational and occupational experiences. The entire interview typically lasted between 3 and 6 hours.

Coding

Coding schemes were developed to assess information seeking in adolescence, information seeking in emerging adulthood, and adoption communicative openness. Ratings for all variables were based on the entire interview transcript at the relevant wave. All transcripts were coded by mature undergraduates, graduate students, or the principal investigators because judgments required moderate to high levels of inference.

Coders were required to attain percent agreement of .80 or better on at least two transcripts before coding independently. At least 50% of all transcripts were coded independently by two coders for Wave 3 information seeking in emerging adulthood (weighted kappa was $\kappa_w = .87$) and 45% were coded independently by two coders for Wave 2 adoption communicative openness (weighted kappas ranged from $\kappa_w = .42$ to $\kappa_w = .65$ with a mean $\kappa_w = .58$); the remaining transcripts were coded by one coder. All transcripts were coded independently by two coders for Wave 2 information seeking in adolescence. Kappa coefficients below .41 are considered fair, coefficients between .41 to .60 are considered moderate, and .61 and higher are considered substantive (Landis & Koch, 1977). Weighted kappas fully correct for chance agreement while also adjusting for the degree of disagreement between coders (Cohen, 1968). Coders met to compare ratings and resolve disagreements through discussion for the transcripts that were double-coded. A final rating was chosen based on consensus between the two coders.

Variables

   Adolescent information seeking (Wave 2). Adolescent information seeking was coded from the adolescent interview at Wave 2. Adolescents were categorized into five different groups based on the degree to which they were seeking information about or contact with their birth parents. Adolescents in Group 1 (will not seek information) made strong statements that they would not seek information in the future. Those in Group 2 (weak interest) stated they most likely would not seek information or contact but left open the slight possibility. Those in Group 3 (moderate interest) said they might seek information about or search for birth relatives in the future and included those adolescents who left open the possibility of information seeking but expressed ambivalence about it. Adolescents in Group 4 (strong interest) said they would definitely

seek information or search for birth parents in the future. Those in Group 5 (actively seeking) had already taken some action toward obtaining information or contact with birth relatives.

Emerging adult information seeking (Wave 3). Emerging adult information seeking was coded from the emerging adult interview at Wave 3. Emerging adults were categorized into six different groups based on the degree to which they were seeking information about or contact with their birth mothers. Groups 1 through 5 were the same as the adolescent information seeking groups at Wave 2. Group 6 included emerging adults who sought and obtained their desired information or contact between Waves 2 and 3.

Information seeking over time. To determine changes in information seeking between Waves 2 and 3, information seeking difference scores were calculated by subtracting the five-level Wave 2 information seeking group number from the six-level Wave 3 information seeking group number for each adoptee who participated at both waves. At Wave 2, the group number into which participants were categorized was based on birth parents together while the Wave 3 group number was separated into information seeking about birth mother and information seeking about birth father. The information seeking group number for birth mothers at Wave 3 was used to calculate information seeking over time for all participants. The rationale behind this decision is that participants tend to discuss birth mothers more than their birth fathers (Wrobel & Dillon, 2009). The Wave 2 scores are therefore more reflective of information seeking intentions regarding birth mothers than birth fathers. Possible difference scores ranged from -4 to +5 with negative scores indicating a greater degree of information seeking at Wave 2 than at Wave 3. Positive scores indicated greater degree of information seeking

at Wave 3 than at Wave 2. Score of zero indicated no change in information seeking between Waves 2 and 3.

Life cycle events. Life cycle events were developed using demographic information reported by the emerging adult adoptees at Wave 3. Three life cycle event variables are included in this paper: 1) Committed romantic relationship: Adoptees who reported they had ever been engaged, lived with a partner, or married were classified as having been in a committed romantic relationship. Adoptees who reported they had only ever dated or "other" (had not ever been engaged, lived with a partner, or married) were classified as not having ever been in a committed romantic relationship; 2) Parenting: Adoptees were classified as parents or not parents based on whether they reported they have children or do not have children. Adoptees were considered parents if they indicated they had biological children, had adopted children, or were parenting partners' children who were not their biological children; 3) Living arrangement: Adoptees were classified into two groups based on whether they indicated they live at their parents' home or do not live at their parents' home.

Adoption communicative openness (Wave 2). Degree of ACO was rated from adoptive mother interviews using a coding scheme developed by Neil, Grotevant, and Young (2006). The rationale behind using mothers' data is that no children reported asking questions about birth parents only of their adoptive fathers in a study of 59 children from the MTARP sample (Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 1998). If adolescents reported asking questions of their adoptive fathers they also asked questions of their adoptive mothers, whereas the reverse was not true. The ACO coding system includes five sub-scales: 1) Communication with the child about adoption, 2) promotion of the child's dual connection to two families, 3) empathy with and tolerance of

the child's feelings about adoption, 4) communication with the birth family, and 5) empathy for birth relatives.

   Communication with the child about adoption describes the adoptive mother's willingness to talk about adoption related issues with the child and the extent to which she promotes a climate of openness about adoption related issues within the adoptive family. *Promotion of the child's dual connection to two families* is about the extent to which the adoptive mother feels personally comfortable with the reality that her child has another family (birth family) and that even though her child is a member of the adoptive family he or she still has a lifelong connection to the birth family both in terms of genetic relatedness but also in terms of the child's actual or potential desire to know and have feelings about his or her birth family. *Empathy with and tolerance of the child's feelings about adoption* is about the extent to which the adoptive mother is willing to consider and is comfortable with the full range of the child's feelings about being adopted, including those feelings in the child that are experienced as negative or threatening to the parent. *Communication with the birth family* reflects the adoptive mother's attitude toward communication and contact with the birth family, regardless of whether communication is actually occurring, and when communication is occurring, how the adoptive mother behaves and feels about this communication. *Empathy for birth relatives* reflects the adoptive mother's capacity to non-judgmentally take the perspective of the birth relative, including the ability to think about the reasons why the child needed to be adopted, the ability to think about the birth relative's current position and behavior in relation to contact, and the ability to think about how the birth relative may feel about the adoption. A score of 1 to 5 was provided on each sub-scale with 1 = low and 5 = high, resulting in

a total score between 5 and 25. The total score was used because correlations between subscales ranged from .57 to .81 with half of them being higher than .70.

Data Analysis Plan

Mplus version 5.1 was used to conduct statistical analyses for the present study (Muthén & Muthén, 2008). Data were screened for normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, outliers, ill-scaling, and multicollinearity prior to conducting analyses (Kline, 2005). Robust maximum likelihood (MLR), which provides standard errors and a chi-square test statistic robust to non-normality, was used to estimate parameters. Goodness of fit was evaluated using four indices (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The chi square statistic should be relatively low compared to the degrees of freedom (Kline, 2005). The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) should be between .05 and .08 for an acceptable fit and .05 or less for a good fit (McDonald & Ho, 2002). The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI; non-normed fit index (NNFI)), should be .90 or greater for acceptable fit and .95 or greater for good fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

Missing Values Analysis

Data from 119 cases were available for Mplus analyses. Complete data were available for at least 80 cases for all analyses. Missing data at Wave 3 on information seeking were not associated with Wave 2 information seeking scores. According to Schafer and Graham (2002), it is preferable to use a reliable estimation procedure rather than case deletion to recover missing data when missing data are unrelated to the study outcome. Each analysis was conducted with and without listwise deletion of missing data in order to examine whether the results might be biased by missing data. Findings were similar for each analysis. Results of Mplus analyses reported in the present paper used full-information maximum-likelihood.

To address missing data, Mplus adjusts model parameter estimates using full-information maximum-likelihood (FIML; Muthen & Shedden, 1999; Schafer & Graham, 2002). The proportion of data available for each variable and between each pair of variables must be at least .10 to obtain reliable estimates in Mplus. These proportions were all above .69 and the majority was above .80 in the current study. Therefore, FIML was used to address missing data.

<div align="center">Results</div>

Research Question 1: What changes have occurred in information seeking intentions and behaviors between adolescence and emerging adulthood for a group of emerging adult adoptees?

The purpose of this analysis was to describe changes in information seeking intentions and behaviors between Wave 2 (adolescence) and Wave 3 (emerging adulthood). Difference scores between -3 and 5 were represented; the only difference score not represented was -4. The mean was .93 and the mode was 1. See Table 1 for cross-tabulation of Wave 2 by Wave 3 information seeking scores. Degree of information seeking between Wave 2 and Wave 3 increased for the majority of adoptees; 62.2% (n = 51) of adoptees received a difference score between 1 and 5. Slightly over 20% (n = 17) of adoptees received a difference score of zero indicating no change in information seeking between Wave 2 and Wave 3. Information seeking intentions decreased for 17% (n = 14) of adoptees who received scores between -1 and -3. Almost 60% (n = 49) of adoptees received difference scores of -1, 1, or 2. A difference score of -1 indicates an information seeking decrease of one level between Waves 2 and 3. A score of 1 indicates an increase of one level. A score of 2 indicates an increase of two levels. An increase or decrease of one level or an increase of two levels could have meant

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movement at the lower end of information seeking interest (e.g. from a 1 (will not seek) to a 2 (weak interest)), movement in the middle (e.g. from a 4 (strong interest) to a 3 (moderate interest)), or movement at the higher end of information seeking (e.g. from a 4 (strong interest) to a 6 (sought desired information)). Difference scores do not necessarily indicate where on the information seeking spectrum change in information seeking between Waves 2 and 3 actually took place. Refer to Table 2 for the number of adoptees who received each difference score and Table 3 for the number of adoptees who received each Wave 2 and Wave 3 information seeking score.

Research question 2: Is gender associated with change in information seeking?

The purpose of this analysis was to determine whether gender was associated with change in information seeking between Wave 2 (adolescence) and Wave 3 (emerging adulthood), controlling for age at Wave 3. Standardized estimates and t-values for the estimated structural model are shown in Figure 1. The structural model showed a good fit to the data χ^2 (2) = 9.59; $p < .01$; RMSEA < .001, CFI = 1.00, and TLI = 1.00 (fit statistics are shown in Table 4). The model accounted for 13% of variability in information seeking change between adolescence and emerging adulthood. There was a significant association between gender and change in information seeking score between adolescence and emerging adulthood, $\beta = .33$, ($t = 3.31$[1]), with females experiencing greater increase in information seeking change between Waves 2 and 3 than males. There was no significant association between age in emerging adulthood and information seeking change, $\beta = -.13$, ($t = -1.08$). Correlations between change in information seeking (difference scores) and age and gender are shown in Table 5. See appendix for explanation regarding differing total numbers across tables.

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[1] A significant coefficient is indicated when t ≥1.96.

Research question 3: Is information seeking in emerging adulthood associated with the life cycle events of being in a committed romantic relationship, parenting, and living arrangement?

The purpose of this analysis was to test whether three life cycle events typical of emerging adulthood are associated with degree of information seeking at Wave 3, controlling for age at Wave 3 and gender. Standardized estimates and t-values for the estimated structural model are shown in Figure 2. The hypothesized structural model showed a good fit to the data χ^2 (5) = 9.82; p = .08; RMSEA < .001, CFI = 1.00, and TLI = 1.00 (fit statistics are shown in Table 4). The model accounted for 15% of variability in information seeking in emerging adulthood. A significant association was found between gender and information seeking, β = .28, (t = 2.74), with females having higher levels of information seeking in emerging adulthood than males. Significant associations were also found between parenting and committed romantic relationship, β = .29, (t = 3.47), parenting and living arrangement, β = .16, (t = 4.55), age and parenting, β = .21, (t = 1.96), and age and committed romantic relationship, β = .34, (t = 4.01). Interactions between gender and the life cycle events of parenting and committed romantic relationship were also tested and were not significant. Correlations between life cycle event variables and information seeking are shown in Table 5. Refer to Table 6 for frequencies of life cycle events. All adoptees had turned 18 between Waves 2 and 3.

Research Question 4: Are the number of life cycle events encountered by adoptees in emerging adulthood associated with information seeking?

The purpose of this analysis was to test whether the number of life cycle events typical of emerging adulthood that participants indicated they had experienced was associated with degree of information seeking at Wave 3, controlling for Wave 3 age and

gender. Standardized estimates and t-values for the estimated structural model are

shown in Figure 3. The hypothesized structural model showed a good fit to the data

χ^2 (3) = 16.92; $p < .01$; RMSEA < .001, CFI = 1.00, and TLI = 1.00 (fit statistics are

shown in Table 4). The model accounted for 15% of variability in information seeking in

emerging adulthood. Results revealed significant associations between gender and

information seeking, $\beta = .36$, ($t = 4.14$), with females having higher levels of information

seeking in emerging adulthood than males, and between number of life cycle events

experienced and age, $\beta = .34$, ($t = 3.53$).

Research question 5: Is adoption communicative openness significantly associated with

information seeking in emerging adulthood?

The purpose of this analysis was to test whether adoption communicative

openness (ACO) at Wave 2 when adoptees were adolescents is significantly associated

with information seeking at Wave 3 when the adoptees were emerging adults, controlling

for Wave 2 information seeking, Wave 3 age, and gender. Standardized estimates and t-

values for the estimated structural model are shown in Figure 4. The hypothesized

structural model showed a good fit to the data χ^2 (4) = 38.10; $p < .01$; RMSEA < .001,

CFI = 1.00, and TLI = 1.00 (fit statistics shown in Table 4). The model accounted for

almost 39% of variability in information seeking at Wave 3. There were significant

associations between Wave 3 information seeking and ACO $\beta = .27$, ($t = 3.17$), Wave 2

information seeking and ACO $\beta = .26$, ($t = 2.76$), and Wave 2 information seeking and

Wave 3 information seeking $\beta = .37$, ($t = 3.50$). Higher levels of ACO and information

seeking at Wave 2 were associated with higher levels of information seeking at Wave 3.

Higher levels of ACO were also associated with higher levels of information seeking at

Wave 2. The association between Wave 3 information seeking and gender was also significant $\beta = .28$, ($t = 3.43$) with females having higher levels of information seeking at Wave 3 than males. Correlations between ACO, Wave 2 information seeking, and Wave 3 information seeking are shown in Table 5.

Discussion

This dissertation examined whether adoptees' information seeking intentions change between adolescence and emerging adulthood and also whether information seeking in emerging adulthood is associated with adoption communicative openness during adolescence and life cycle events in emerging adulthood using data from a national sample (n = 119 adoptive families) of adoptees and adoptive mothers (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998). Adoptees were interviewed during adolescence when they typically begin thinking about seeking information about or contact with birth family members. They were interviewed again as emerging adults when most adoptees who have chosen to seek information or contact act on their intentions (Howe & Feast, 2001; Pacheco & Eme, 1993; Sachdev, 1992; Wrobel et al., 2004). Adoptive mothers completed interviews when their children were adolescents.

Information Seeking Change

Most adoptees begin considering whether or not to seek information in adolescence, but those who search typically do not do so until emerging adulthood. Desire to seek information about or contact with birth family may increase, decrease, or remain constant between adolescence and emerging adulthood. Regardless of the direction of change or whether change occurs, many adoptees likely engage in considerable thought about the amount of desire they have for information about their birth families and whether to act on that desire.

Change in information seeking over time was measured using a difference score which was the result of an adoptee's Wave 2 information seeking score subtracted from his or her Wave 3 information seeking score. Difference scores capture movement (or lack of movement) in information seeking between adolescence and emerging adulthood. However, they mask where movement takes place on the information seeking spectrum. For example, a difference score of 1 which indicates a one level increase in information seeking between Waves 2 and 3 does not reveal whether movement took place between scores of 1 (will not seek) and 2 (weak intent to seek) or between scores of 5 (in the process of seeking information) and 6 (obtained desired information). The impact of information seeking change may be quite different psychologically depending on where it takes place on the information seeking spectrum. In other words, a difference score of 1 encompasses several possible different experiences based on the levels (or scores) between which information seeking change occurred. The psychological experience of moving from seeking information or contact in adolescence to obtaining desired information about or contact with birth parents in emerging adulthood likely has very different consequences than the movement from not seeking information in adolescence to endorsing a weak interest in seeking information in emerging adulthood. Adoptees who move from seeking to obtaining information or contact may acquire new information about themselves and their families that provides answers to long-held questions and they may experience the establishment of contact with birth family which introduces adoptees to new family members and broadens the adoption kinship network. The changes associated with movement from seeking information or contact to obtaining information or contact might significantly impact several areas of adoptees' lives such as relationships with adoptive parents and siblings

and identity exploration. Conversely, the movement from no to weak intent to seek information is likely not accompanied by such significant changes. Therefore, it is important to recognize that a difference score may mean very different things for adoptees depending on where the change occurred on the information seeking spectrum.

Results confirmed that information seeking intentions in adolescence do not remain static for the majority of adoptees. Most adoptees experienced either an increase or a decrease in information seeking intention between adolescence and emerging adulthood. Of those adoptees whose intentions changed between Waves 2 and 3, the majority received difference scores of -1, 1, or 2 indicating that for most adoptees who experienced change in intentions (either increase or decrease) it was only one or two levels. In other words, most change was not dramatic and instead reflected a modest change in intentions. This finding suggests that most adoptees whose intentions change over time experience a gradual information seeking process that includes contemplation and careful consideration of options. Information seeking appears to be a thoughtful process for most adoptees about which they are deliberate rather than spontaneous. Tentative steps in either direction on the information seeking spectrum point to adoptees' awareness of the potentially sensitive nature of information seeking and the choices they make about whether or not to search which likely includes consideration of other individuals in the adoption kinship network on whom those choices will have an impact. On the other hand, several emerging adults who were actively seeking or had obtained information or contact at Wave 3 had indicated in adolescence that they would not seek information in the future. This finding indicates that it is possible for intentions to change

quite drastically between adolescence and emerging adulthood, even though the majority of adoptees experience more subtle changes.

A sizable minority of adoptees experienced no change in information seeking intentions between adolescence and emerging adulthood. The information seeking scores represented among those adoptees whose intentions did not change ranged from 4 (strong interest) to 1 (will not seek information) with two adoptees receiving 4s (strong interest), six adoptees receiving 3s (moderate interest), two adoptees receiving 2s (weak interest), and three adoptees receiving 1s (will not seek) at each wave. Lack of change in intentions for this group perhaps suggests that they had a clearer sense of their desire or lack of desire and reasons for seeking or not seeking in adolescence than did adoptees' whose intentions changed between adolescence and emerging adulthood. It is possible that adoptees whose intentions did not change had experienced more advanced identity development as adolescents than those whose intentions changed which allowed them to have a stronger sense about the role they wished birth family to play in their lives and the degree to which they were willing to search to obtain birth family information or contact. It is also possible that adoptees whose intentions did not change were not presented with opportunities for reconsidering their intention to seek information similar to those of adoptees whose intentions changed. For example, an adoptee whose intention to seek information changed from being "weak" in adolescence to "strong" (or vice versa) in emerging adulthood may have been presented with information about birth family by his or her adoptive parents that made a search seem more (or less) plausible, whereas an adoptee whose intention to seek remained "weak" from Wave 2 to Wave 3 may not have had the same opportunities for additional information and reflection on that information.

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Half of all emerging adults had taken action on their intentions to seek information by initiating a search or obtaining the information or contact they desired. This finding is consistent with previous research that indicates adoptees who choose to search for information about or contact with birth family typically do not do so until emerging adulthood (Howe & Feast, 2001; Pacheco & Eme, 1993; Sachdev, 1992; Wrobel et al., 2004). On the other hand, a significant number of participants made strong statements that they would not seek information or contact at each wave. Most research about adoptee information seeking focuses on the experience of adoptees who have searched for information or contact and the benefits of searching for those adoptees. However, a handful of studies have also explored the characteristics of non-searchers (Aumend & Barrett, 1984; Borders, Penny, & Portnoy, 2000; Cubito & Obremski Brandon, 2000; Howe & Feast, 2000; Sobol & Cardiff, 1983). These studies have found that non-seekers are just as, if not more, well-adjusted than adoptees who seek information about or contact with birth family (Cubito & Obremski Brandon, 2000). Findings indicate that non-seekers have more positive self-concepts and higher self-esteem (Aumend & Barrett, 1984; Borders et al., 2000) and have more positive attitudes toward their adoptive parents and adoption than seekers (Aumend & Barrett, 1984; Howe & Feast, 2000; Sobol & Cardiff, 1983). In sum, it is important to reiterate that all information seeking levels, ranging from no intention to seek information to actively searching (or searched and gained desired information or contact) continued to be represented at Wave 3 as they were at Wave 2, illustrating diversity in desire to seek information in emerging adulthood. Ultimately, the choice whether or not to seek is a highly individualized one and has different ramifications for different adoptees. Positive

or negative antecedents and consequences associated with seeking or not seeking may not be generalized to all adoptees who do or do not seek.

The changes in information seeking that occurred for adoptees between Waves 2 and 3 are not surprising given the maturation process that takes place between the life stages of adolescence and emerging adulthood. Information seeking may be considered an internal process (Schechter & Bertocci, 1990) impacted by developmental changes that occur as adoptees move from adolescence to emerging adulthood that may or may not result in an actual search for contact or information. Adolescence is characterized by the increased ability to engage in abstract thinking and moral reasoning which enables adoptees to begin considering the more nuanced and complex aspects of their adoption experiences. Identity development also begins in adolescence which may include exploring how one's adoption contributes to one's sense of identity (Grotevant, 1997). The cognitive and identity developments taking place in adolescence may encourage adoptees to begin thinking more seriously about how their birth families fit into their lives and whether or not they would like additional information about or contact with birth family members.

Whereas the developmental processes that occur in adolescence encourage adoptees to begin thinking about whether they would like additional information or contact with birth family members, the cognitive and identity developments that occur during the stage of emerging adulthood likely crystallize adoptees' movement toward seeking or not seeking. Identity development during this period becomes more intense than it was in adolescence (Arnett, 2007). A wide range of possibilities in work, love, and worldviews coupled with increased responsibility for oneself and independent decision-making encourage a time of life to focus on self-development. This self-development and

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identity exploration may include exploring one's "roots" and seeking information about

birth family members in an effort to gain a greater sense of self or it may allow adoptees

to feel more secure in their decision not to search and instead focus on other aspects of

self-development such as career and romantic relationships. The dialectical thinking

style present during emerging adulthood also supports the increased ability to think more

abstractly about family and adoption, perhaps enabling adopted adults to consider their

adoption from perspectives of others in the adoption kinship network. This development

may offer adoptees the cognitive flexibility needed to begin undertaking an active search

for information about or contact with birth family. The cognitive advancements that take

place between adolescence and emerging adulthood also provide adoptees with

increased awareness of what is unknown about their adoptions therefore creating

information gaps that encourage adoptees to consider how important it is to them to

seek unknown information.

In addition to the developmental achievements that are made during the

transition between adolescence and emerging adulthood, adoptees also reach the age

of 18 at which point they may independently seek information about or contact with birth

family. Turning 18 therefore serves as a major milestone for those adoptees who wish to

search. At Wave 2 when the participants were adolescents, age differed significantly as

a function of information seeking score. The mean age of adolescents who received a

score of 5 (actively seeking; mean age = 18.71, SD = .91) was significantly higher than

adolescents receiving information seeking scores between 1 and 4 (Wrobel et al., 2004).

The mean ages of adoptees who were not seeking information ranged from 15.36 to

15.95 indicating that having reached the age of majority made it more possible for

adoptees to engage in an active search (Wrobel et al., 2004). All adoptees in the sample

had reached age 18 by Wave 3. It is possible that turning 18 facilitated obtaining desired information or contact by Wave 3 for some adoptees. Age likely influences information seeking behavior by allowing many adoptees to search after reaching the age of majority. It certainly does not impede other adoptees from engaging in an active search prior to age 18 however (Wrobel et al., 2004). Given that information seeking was not significantly associated with life cycle events, it appears that the developmental milestones that occur between adolescence and emerging adulthood, including turning 18, may be more influential in the decision to undertake an active search in emerging adulthood than are specific life cycle events typical of that life stage.

Information Seeking and Gender

Research question 2 explored whether gender was associated with changes in information seeking intentions and behaviors between adolescence and emerging adulthood. Previous research using this same sample concluded that gender was not significantly associated with information seeking intentions and behavior for this group when they were adolescents (Wrobel et al., 2004). However, when analyses were conducted within gender it was revealed that boys were "disproportionately skewed toward not searching" and girls were spread more evenly across the range of information seeking intentions (Wrobel et al., 2004, p. 141). Adolescent girls in the MTARP sample were also found to be more preoccupied with their adoptions and birth parents than adolescent boys (Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2002).

Results from the current study confirmed this trend. Analyses for research question 3 revealed a significant association between gender and information seeking in emerging adulthood with females endorsing greater information seeking intentions and behaviors than males. It appears that females in this sample had already begun moving

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toward increased information seeking as adolescents whereas the majority of adolescent males expressed moderate or no interest in information seeking (Wrobel et al., 2004). As emerging adult adoptees, women continued to endorse greater degrees of information seeking intent and behavior than males. Previous studies on information seeking have relied on predominantly adult female samples therefore it has been unclear whether females are more likely to seek information or whether they are just more likely to participate in studies on information seeking. The results of the current study indicate that adult female adoptees not only are more likely to seek information in emerging adulthood but also experience a greater change in intention to seek information between adolescence and emerging adulthood than men.

Prior literature has cited the uniquely female experience of being a mother, particularly the experiences of pregnancy and child birth, as catalysts for adopted women to seek information about their birth mothers and birth family (Campbell et al., 1991; Kowal & Schilling, 1985; March, 1995b; Sorosky et al., 1974). Although the current study found that women are more likely to seek information than men and that women are more likely to be parents than men, results do not support a gender difference in information seeking in emerging adulthood based on the life cycle event of parenting. Women may just be more likely to seek information because they are women, not because they are mothers. Previous research has perhaps confounded the independent findings that women are more likely to be searchers and also are more likely to be parents than are men with the theory that being a mother influences women towards information seeking.

The difference in information seeking intentions in emerging adulthood among men and women revealed in this study may not be the result of women's role of

mothering and the associated experiences of pregnancy and child birth. Instead, the difference may be associated with different socialization outcomes for men and women that emerge to a greater extent during the stage of emerging adulthood than they did during adolescence. Individuals in the stages of emerging adulthood, particularly women, increasingly see themselves in relation to others (Brodzinsky et al., 1992). Sense of self in relation to others begins developing and is fostered to a greater extent in females than males beginning in early childhood. Parents' socialization of their children likely influences the development of gender-typed personality characteristics with girls receiving more encouragement to show dependency, affectionate behavior, and tender emotions (Ruble & Martin, 1998). Studies show that children rate themselves in terms of gender-typed patterns of traits by age 8 or 9 and that "self-perceptions of instrumental and expressive traits become more gender-typed with age up through early adolescence" (Ruble & Martin, 1998, p. 951). For adopted children, gender-typed traits and their contribution to the development of identity may be revealed in ways specific to adoption. For example, in a study of adoptive identity development in adolescents using data from MTARP, Von Korff (2008) found that "the effect of gender on adolescent adoptive identity appears to operate through adolescent emotion about adoption, with females expressing higher levels of emotion about adoption" after controlling for other factors (p. 26).

As a consequence of the different gender socialization paths of childhood and adolescence, identity development and relationships are experienced differently by men and women. Female identity formation takes place within a context of relationships and becomes intertwined with the experience of attachment whereas male identity development involves greater differentiation from caregivers (Gilligan, 1982). Separation

and individuation may be critical developmental tasks for male identity development whereas feminine identity may not depend as much on the achievement of separation from others; "intimacy goes along with identity as the female comes to know herself as she is known, through her relationships with others" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 12). For adopted emerging adult women, this new sense of self in relation to others may reveal itself in an attempt to seek contact with birth family as they begin to see themselves in the larger context of the adoption kinship network.

Different gender socialization outcomes also appear to influence males' and females' different experiences with and ways of relating to family and kin. Daughters are typically more familistic than sons with daughters showing greater affection for parents and adhering to stronger norms of filial responsibility (Silverstein, Parrott, & Bengtson, 1995). Daughters also appear to be motivated by acts of emotional intimacy whereas sons "require frequent interaction prior to engaging in supportive behavior" (Silverstein et al., 1995, p. 473). Women have also been found to have larger proportions of kin and more types of kin in their social networks then men (Moore, 1990) and are more involved with kin than men (Johnson, 2000). The socialization processes that influence and promote different degrees of kin involvement between women and men likely impact female and male adult adoptee information seeking experiences, with female adoptees being more likely to instigate and invest in kinship connections with birth family than males.

In summary, gender socialization beginning in childhood which emphasizes girls' expression of emotions and connection to others, subsequent female identity development in adolescence and emerging adulthood which takes place in a context of relationships, and females' greater investment in kinship connections as emerging adults

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likely contribute to the disparate information seeking experiences of men and women in emerging adulthood. The specific experience of being a mother may not necessarily serve as a catalyst for information seeking but instead is part of the more general experience of being a woman which is more influential in the process of information seeking when explored based on gender. Information seeking was examined in the current study in relation to gender and the event of parenting rather than the events of pregnancy and childbirth on which previous research has focused. A benefit of using the more general event of being a parent as a variable rather than pregnancy and childbirth is that it is inclusive of those emerging adults who are parenting adopted children or step-children and takes into consideration the non-biological aspects of parenting that may have impacted information seeking. Given what is known about the positive outcomes associated with parenting in biological and non-biological families alike, pregnancy and childbirth are not necessary components of parenting.

Adoption Communicative Openness and Information Seeking

As discussed above, the stage of adolescence is a time when significant cognitive and identity maturation occurs resulting in an adoptee's increased capability of understanding the complexities of adopted family life and increased curiosity and questioning about one's origins. The cognitive and identity advancements taking place during the developmental stage of adolescence make it an opportune time for adoptive parents to engage in open communication about adoption with their children. Parents who are able to acknowledge differences between adoptive and non-adoptive families will foster the development of an open, non-defensive atmosphere that supports adopted children's curiosity and maintains adoption communication openness (ACO) (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002; Kirk, 1964). Open communication in the adoptive family in turn

assists adoptees with the formation of a cohesive sense of self and the ability to feel comfortable with one's adoptive status (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002; McRoy et al., 1990).

The Family Adoption Communication model theorizes that adoptive families encounter three phases of communication about adoption over the course of their family life cycles (Wrobel et al., 2003). Adoptive parents make conscious or unconscious decisions at each phase regarding whether to openly discuss with their child adoption issues in general as well as those adoption issues specific to their child. First, adoptive parents may provide unsolicited information to their children about their adoptions and birth families, typically in childhood. Adoptees' curiosity about their adoptions and birth families begins to emerge around age 6 and increased need for communication and information about adoption typically heightens as adoptees enter adolescence (Bernstein & Cowan, 1975; Brodzinsky et al., 1986; Brodzinsky et al., 1984; Newman et al., 1993). During this phase, adoptive parents may address their child's growing curiosity by responding to questions the child may have. Previous research using data from the sample in this paper (Skinner-Drawz, 2007) as well as analyses conducted for this paper revealed that adoptive mothers' mean ACO scores were positively associated with adoptees' interest in seeking information in adolescence.

In the final phase of the FAC model adoptees are expected to seek information independently of their parents if they so desire it. Results of Research Question 5 in the current study revealed that emerging adults' information seeking intentions are significantly associated with ACO when adoptees were adolescents. It is likely that the adoption communicative openness established by adoptive parents when their adoptees were adolescents provides adoptees with a foundation from which they may explore

their curiosity and intentions to seek information in emerging adulthood if they would like to. Open communication about adoption in the adoptive family offers adoptees an accepting environment in which they may consider their options to seek information or contact with birth family and make decisions about whether they wish to seek information or establish contact. Previous research has indicated that when family members are more open and flexible in the way they talk about adoption, it may be easier for adoptees to initiate information seeking (Campbell, et al., 1991). Adoptees' adaptive individual adjustment, which may or may not include a search for contact or information, is likely facilitated by open, interactive communication with adoptive parents that is focused on adoptees' evolving needs for communication and information. Results from this paper suggest that adolescence is a key time during which adoptive parents may engage in ACO and thus support their children's curiosity and eventual decisions about whether or not to seek information about or contact with birth family.

Data were not available on adoptive parents' ACO ratings when their children were emerging adults; therefore, it was not possible to examine whether ACO in emerging adulthood is associated with information seeking in emerging adulthood. According to the FAC and adoptive family life cycle models, however, emerging adulthood is a time when adoptees have begun independently seeking information about their adoptions and birth families and are less reliant on adoptive parents for fulfilling curiosity and information needs. The majority of emerging adults in the present sample did not live at home and all were older than 18, theoretically allowing them to search independently of their parents if they wished. It is possible that ACO in the adoptive family while adoptees are emerging adults has a less significant impact on information seeking than did ACO while adoptees were adolescents. That is not to say, however,

that continued ACO does not contribute to positive individual and family adjustment across the adoptive family life span or that adoptive families cease having many rich opportunities for adoption communicative openness after adoptees have reached emerging adulthood.

Strengths and Limitations

The sample in the present report does not include families with transracial, international, or special needs adoptions for whom information seeking, life cycle events, and adoption communicative openness may be experienced differently due to the complexity added by these types of adoption. Results were limited to domestic adoptees who were voluntarily placed in infancy making generalization difficult. This sample of adoptees is unique, however, because it includes both adoptees who are interested in seeking information about birth family and adoptees who are not interesting in information seeking about birth family. The inclusion of non-seeking adoptees in the present sample therefore contributes to an understudied sub-sample of the adoptee population (Bertocci &Schechter, 1991).

It is beyond the scope of this study to control for the range of possible individual and family-level variables that likely impact information seeking processes and life cycle experiences among adoptees and adoption communication openness in adoptive families. This paper investigated variables suggested by the literature as potentially having the most influence on information seeking and adoption communicative openness instead.

Significance of this Report

Many adopted persons occupy the unique position of knowing little or nothing about their birth families. Some adoptees choose to seek information about or contact

with birth family in order to fill the "gaps" created by lack of information and other adoptees are satisfied with the amount of information they have, even if that is nothing (Wrobel & Dillon, 2009). Information seeking about and the possible establishment of contact with birth family members are activities in which not all adoptees engage although all adoptees likely consider whether to seek information or contact (Wrobel & Dillon, 2009). In 2001 there were approximately 700,000 adopted children under the age of 18 living in the United States (Kreider & Fields, 2005). Results of this paper indicate that information seeking is an evolving process for adoptees that involves possible change in intentions and behaviors across adolescence and emerging adulthood. Most adoptees begin thinking about whether or not to seek information during adolescence but they do not act on their intentions until after they have reached the age of 18 (Howe & Feast, 2001; Pacheco & Eme, 1993; Sachdev, 1992; Wrobel et al., 2004). Therefore, we may imagine that approximately 700,000 adopted children under 18 living in the United States will at some point contemplate the information they have about their birth families and whether they want more. Of course, the impact of adoptees' choices whether or not to seek information reach beyond adoptees themselves to encompass other members of the adoption kinship network, including adoptive family members and birth family members such as parents, siblings, and grandparents, as well as adoptees' significant others, children, and friends.

This study contributes to better understanding of the information seeking process and various factors that may or may not influence it, including gender, communication in the adoptive family, and life cycle events typical of emerging adulthood. This study is significant for the following reasons. First, most previous research on adoptee information seeking is retrospective in nature (Campbell et al., 1991; Gladstone &

Westhues, 1998; Howe & Feast, 2001; March, 1997; Sachdev, 1992). Previous information seeking research has not explored whether adoptees experience changes in information seeking intentions and behaviors between adolescence and emerging adulthood. This paper is significant in that it examines change in adoptee information seeking intentions and behaviors between adolescence and emerging adulthood and considers information seeking a process rather than a discrete event. Second, as mentioned above, this study is significant because it uses a national sample of adoptees whose intentions to seek information ranged from "no interest" to "actively seeking". Previous research has neglected the study of adoptees who express no or weak interest to seek information and has instead focused on those adoptees who sought information (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991). This study followed a group of adoptees between adolescence and emerging adulthood with a range of information seeking intentions to determine how and whether those intentions change over time, therefore contributing to an understudied area of adoptee experience. Third, this report confirmed the influence of an important family-level variable on an aspect of adoptee development. Adoption communication openness is positively associated with adoptee information seeking, suggesting that communication about adoption within the adoptive family supports adoptees in their attempts to gain information about themselves. Finally, results of this report regarding the relationship between gender, parenting, and information seeking are not consistent with previous research. Prior studies have identified pregnancy and childbirth as catalysts for information seeking for women; however this study found that being a parent did not make men or women more likely to seek information. Women were found to be more likely to seek information than men, but women who were parents were not more likely to seek information than women who were not parents.

Implications for Research and Practice

Results of the current study revealed that most adoptees' information seeking intentions and behaviors change between adolescence and emerging adulthood. Change for most adoptees was modest, increasing or decreasing only a level or two, and yet the information seeking intentions of some adoptees changed drastically or not at all. Information seeking increased for the majority of adoptees. However, adoptees represented the full range of information seeking intentions and behaviors in both adolescence and emerging adulthood.

These findings emphasize the importance of recognizing the dynamic and sometimes unpredictable nature of adoptee information seeking between adolescence and emerging adulthood. Adoption professionals may conceptualize information seeking as an active process rather than a static or singular event. Considering information seeking as a process that occurs over the course of several periods in the life cycle will better enable adoption professionals to provide adoptees with support that is consistent with their developmental stages and their intentions or lack of intentions to seek information. The data provide support for information seeking as a process thus adoption professionals may be more motivated to keep information available for adoptees "by placing updates in files and facilitating contact as desired by members of the adoption kinship network" (Wrobel & Dillon, 2009, p. 242). They will recognize that just because adoptees do not express interest in seeking information as children or adolescents does not mean that they will not reconsider their positions in emerging adulthood or later. Adoption professionals must therefore be able to talk with adoptees about their options for seeking information and to support them in their decisions to seek or not seek at any given point in time. Therapists who work with adopted individuals may also be better

able to understand and assist their clients as they go through the information seeking process themselves. Future adoption researchers interested in information seeking may take into consideration the process through which adoptees progress by pursuing the longitudinal study of information seeking instead of considering information seeking a one-time event studied retrospectively.

This report found that female adoptees are more likely to experience change in information seeking intentions and behaviors between adolescence and emerging adulthood and that they are more likely to seek information once they reach emerging adulthood. Previous research suggested that women seek more often than men however those studies relied heavily on female participants; it seems likely that participation rate may have been confused with rate of information seeking. Results of this study which used a national sample including equal numbers of men and women participants confirm a gender difference in information seeking. Additional research using data from similarly balanced samples that compares rates of information seeking by gender will be helpful in substantiating a gender difference in information seeking in emerging adulthood.

Contrary to existing research, this paper did not find a relationship between gender, parenting, and information seeking. Previous research suggests that the events of pregnancy and childbirth serve as information seeking catalysts for female adopted emerging adults. However, female participants in this study who identified as parents were no more likely to seek information than females who did not identify as parents. The focus in information seeking research on unique female life events such as pregnancy and childbirth has possibly obscured more profound differences between men and women (such as socialization patterns) and the impact on intentions to seek

information about or contact with birth family. Future research on information seeking and gender will benefit from a broader exploration of how gender interacts with information seeking.

The relationship between adoptee information seeking in emerging adulthood and adoption communicative openness provides information for adoption professionals and adoptive parents about the salience of adoption-related communication in emerging adult adoptees' information seeking process. This finding coupled with previous theoretical and practical research by Kirk (1964) and Brodzinsky (2005) provides professionals and parents with a better idea regarding the degree of communication openness in which parents may engage with their adoptees while they are adolescents in order to support their children's information seeking process into emerging adulthood. According to the Family Adoption Communication Model (Wrobel et al., 2003), adoptive parents lay a foundation for open communication that helps foster their children's natural curiosity about birth family early in their children's lives. Open communication about adoption while adoptees are children and adolescents appears to support the normal adoptee experiences of considering whether to seek information about birth family and the possible actualization of information seeking in emerging adulthood.

Information seeking is a complex process that varies from adoptee to adoptee. Considering whether to seek information and the subsequent decision to seek or not seek are highly individual activities that may take place several times over the course of an adoptee's lifetime. This study focused on information seeking during the developmental periods of adolescence and emerging adulthood. Adoptees' information seeking processes are by no means restricted to these life stages, however. Some adoptees seek information with the assistance of their adoptive parents long before they

reach the age of 18 and other adoptees do not decide to pursue information until mid-life or later if at all. Additional research on adoptees' information seeking processes over the course of the life cycle will only enrich what we know about the multifaceted experience of information seeking.

This study extends existing research and responds to unanswered questions in the areas of adoptee information seeking and adoption communicative openness. Finding that changes in information seeking intentions and behaviors occur between adolescence and emerging adulthood may encourage adoption professionals to conceptualize information seeking as a process that occurs over time rather than as a discrete episode. Findings regarding the impact of adoption communicative openness on adult adoptee information seeking reveals the significance of early adoptive family communication on adoptee adjustment. Ultimately, better understanding of these important constructs will contribute to the development of additional "best practices" by researchers and adoption professionals in their work with and about adoptees and adoptive families.

Table 1. *Cross-tabulation of Wave 2 by Wave 3 Information Seeking Scores*

		Wave 3 Information Seeking Score						
		1 – Will not seek	2 – Weak	3 – Moderate	4 – Strong	5- Seeking	6 – Sought and obtained desired information/ contact	Total
Wave 2 Information Seeking Score	1 – Will not seek	7	4	2	0	5	2	20
	2 – Weak interest	1	2	1	2	1	0	7
	3 – Moderate interest	2	3	6	0	7	4	22
	4 – Strong interest	1	1	6	2	8	7	25
	5 – Seeking	0	0	0	0	0	8	8
	Total	11	10	15	4	21	21	82

Table 2

Information Seeking Difference Scores
(Wave 2 score subtracted from Wave 3 score)

Difference score	N	%
5	2	2.4
4	5	6.1
3	5	6.1
2	18	22.0
1	21	25.6
0	17	15.9
-1	10	15.9
-2	3	3.7
-3	1	1.2
-4	0	1.2
Total	82	100.0

Table 3

Wave 2 and Wave 3 Information Seeking Scores

Information Seeking Score	Wave 2		Wave 3	
	N	%	N	%
1 – Will not seek information/ contact	23	24.2	16	15.1
Male	12	12.6	14	13.2
Female	11	11.6	2	1.9
2 – Weak interest in seeking information/contact	11	11.6	14	13.2
Male	7	7.4	10	9.4
Female	4	4.2	4	3.8
3 – Moderate interest in seeking information/contact	26	27.4	17	16.0
Male	11	11.6	7	6.6
Female	15	15.8	10	9.4
4 – Strong interest in seeking information/contact	26	27.4	6	5.7
Male	10	10.5	3	2.8
Female	16	16.8	3	2.8
5 – Actively seeking information/contact	9	9.5	27	25.5
Male	2	2.1	7	6.6
Female	7	7.4	20	18.9
6 – Sought and obtained desired information/contact	N/A	N/A	26	24.5
Male	N/A	N/A	11	10.4
Female	N/A	N/A	15	14.2
Total	95	100	106	100

Table 4

Fit Statistics for Models by Research Question (RQ)

Model	*df*	χ^2	*p*	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
RQ 2	2	9.59	<.01	1.00	1.00	<.001
RQ 3	5	9.82	.08	1.00	1.00	<.001
RQ 4	3	16.92	<.01	1.00	1.00	<.001
RQ 5	4	38.10	<.01	1.00	1.00	<.001

Note. CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root-mean square error of approximation.

Table 5

Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender[a]	--								
2. Age	-.06	--							
3. Difference	.33**	-.14	--						
4. W2 Info Seeking	.18	.05	-.23*	--					
5. W3 Info Seeking	.37**	-.03	.75**	.48**	--				
6. ACO	.12	-.13	NA	.27**	.39**	--			
7. Living Arrangement	-.02	.07	NA	NA	.04	NA	--		
8. Committed Romantic Relationship	-.07	.33**	NA	NA	-.04	NA	.13	--	
9. Parenting	.14	.18	NA	NA	.06	NA	.19	.29**	--
M	.50	25.22	.86	2.84	3.76	15.57	.13	.62	.20
SD	.50	1.81	1.75	1.32	2.0	5.39	.13	.49	.40

[a]Male = 0; Female = 1.

* $p < .05$, two-tailed. **$p < .01$, two-tailed.

Table 6

Frequencies for Life Cycle Events at Wave 3

Life Cycle Event	n	%
Committed Romantic Relationship		
Ever	55	63.2
Never	32	36.8
Total	87	100
Parenting		
Yes	19[a]	20.2
No	75	79.8
Total	94	100
Living Arrangement		
With adoptive parents	13	12.5
Not living with adoptive parents	91	87.5
Total	104	100

[a]17 emerging adults were parenting biological children, 1 was parenting an adopted child, and 1 was parenting a step-child.

Figure 1. Model of Information Seeking Change from Wave 2 to Wave 3 and adoptee gender, controlling for age at Wave 3.
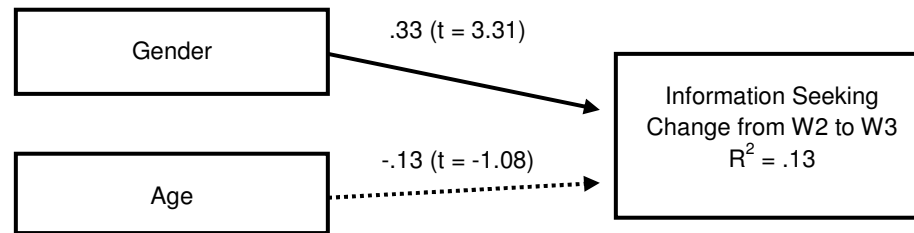
Figure 2. Model of Wave 3 Information Seeking and Life Cycle Events at Wave 3, controlling for adoptee gender and age.
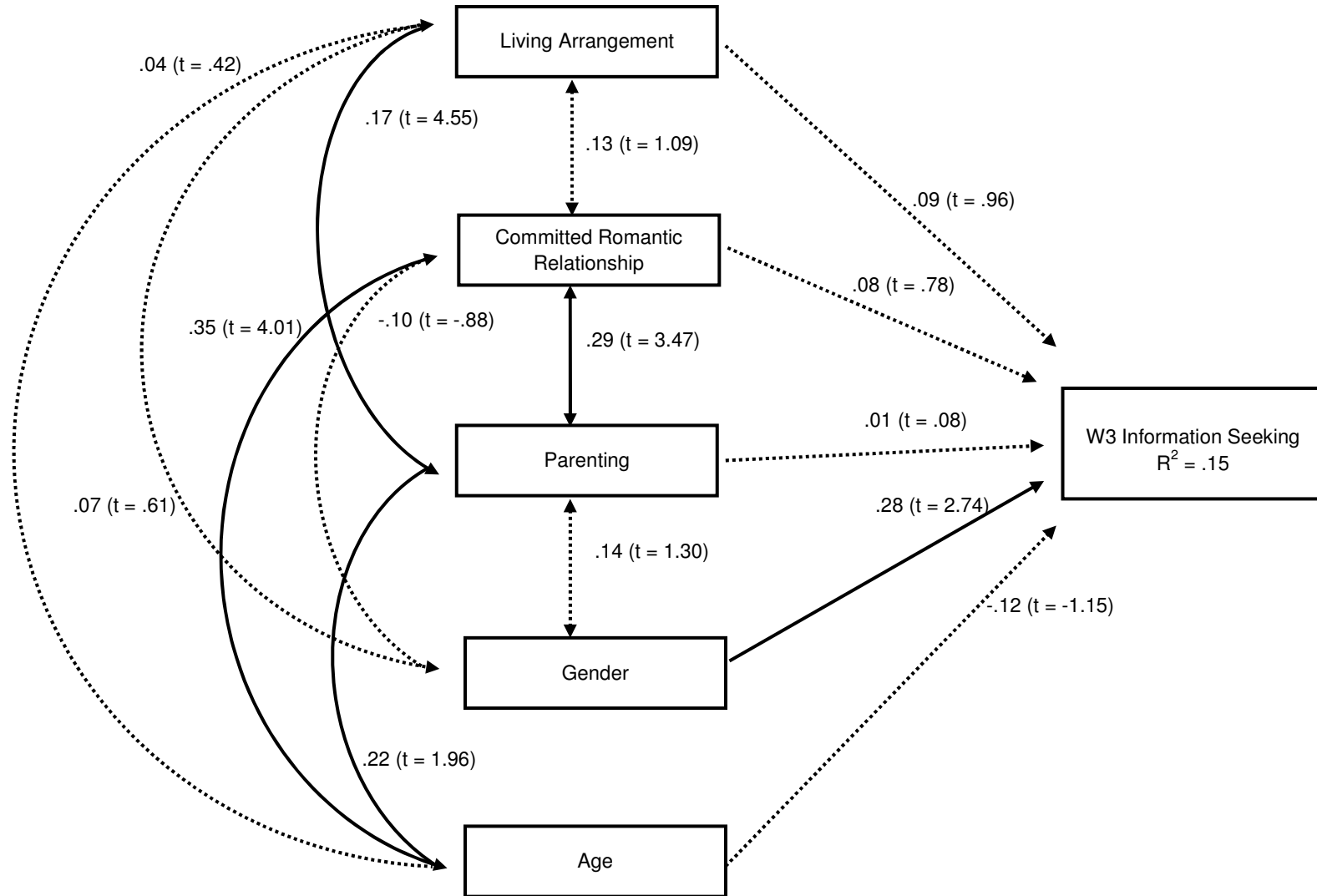
Figure 3. Model of Wave 3 Information Seeking and number of Life Cycle Events experienced, controlling for adoptee and age at Wave 3 and gender.

Life Cycle Events

.07 (t = .68)

.12 (t = .1.14)

Gender

.36 (t = 4.14)

W3 Information Seeking
R^2 = .15

.34 (t = 3.53)

-.06 (t = -.57)

Age

Figure 4. Model of Wave 3 (W3) Information Seeking and Adoption Communicative Openness (ACO), controlling for Wave 2 (W2) Information Seeking, gender, and age.

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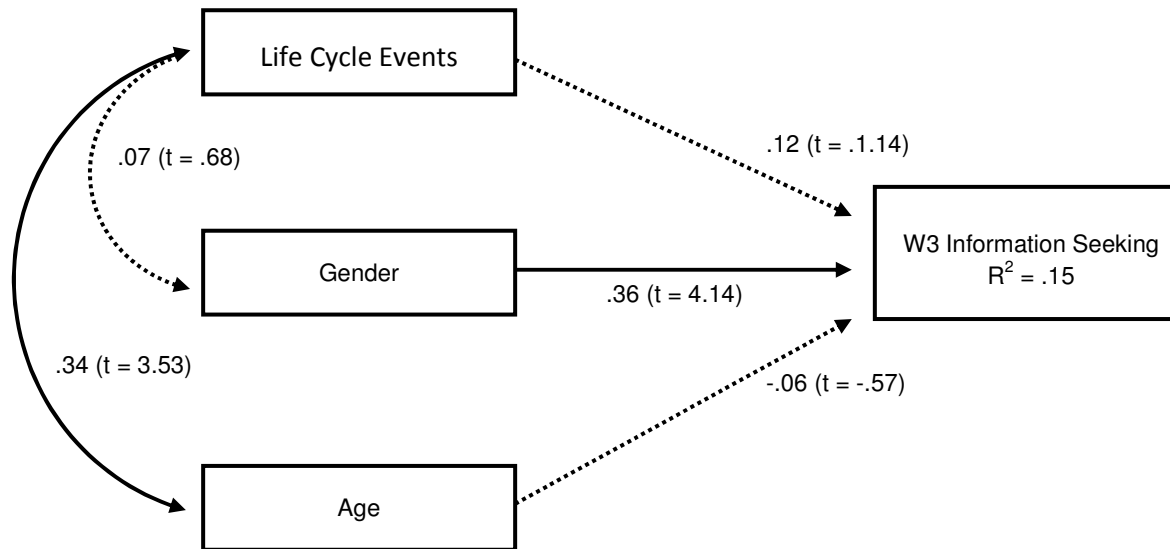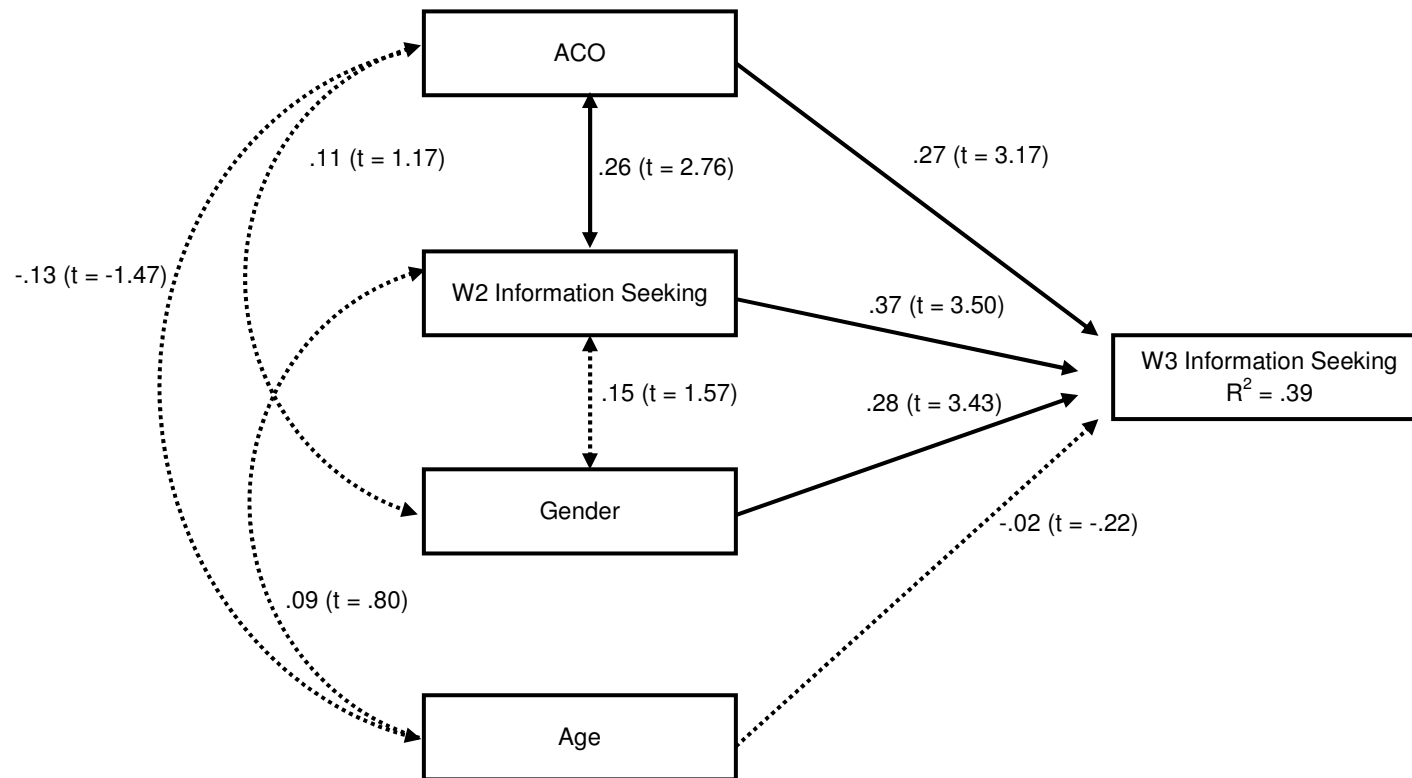
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APPENDIX

Information seeking code

6	Searched and made contact or sought information and gained desired information
5	Sought information/contact or is in the process of seeking information/contact but has not yet obtained desired information/contact
4 Strong	Yes, will definitely seek information/ contact
3 Moderate	Maybe will seek information/contact
2 Weak	Most likely will not seek information/contact but leaves open the slight possibility
1 Will not seek information	Strong statement that will not seek information/contact
7	Not applicable (in this case, person known to be deceased; or the birth relative initiated contact with YA; or the birth parent was not mentioned by the YA)

Explanation regarding Ns in Tables

Table/Source	N	Explanation
Tables 1 and 2	82	Number of participants who have both Wave 2 and Wave 3 information seeking scores and for whom it was therefore possible to calculate "difference scores". The Wave 2 score is subtracted from the Wave 3 score to create a difference score; therefore both scores were needed.
Table 3	95	Number of participants who received Wave 2 information seeking scores.
	106	Number of participants who did not have contact with birth family at Wave 2 and received Wave 3 information seeking scores.
Table 6	87	Number of participants who provided a response to the question regarding relationship status; 32 did not respond to the question or did not complete the questionnaire.
	94	Number of participants who provided a response to the question regarding whether they have children; 25 did not respond to the question or did not complete the questionnaire.
	104	Number of participants who provided a response to the question regarding living arrangement; 15 did not complete the questionnaire.
Total N used in Mplus analyses	119	Total N used for Mplus analyses; 95 participants (see above) + 24 = 119; 24 = Number of Adoptees who did not participate at Wave 2 but who would have received a Wave 2 information seeking score if they had (decision based on data provided by adoptees in their Wave 3 interviews and questionnaires as well as adoptive parent reports of degree of contact with birth family at Wave 2).

Note. Those participants who had contact with and already knew a member of their birth family at adolescence were not included in the study

Case Study 1: Increase in Information Seeking

Jody's profile illustrates an increase in interest in information seeking between adolescence and young adulthood. Jody was 17 and a senior in high school at the time of her Wave 2 interview. She was almost 27 at the time of her Wave 3 interview. Jody expressed a strong intent to seek information about or contact with her birth mother in the future (information seeking score of 4) at her Wave 2 interview and by Wave 3 she had searched and made contact and gained her desired information (information seeking score of 6). At the time of her Wave 2 interview, Jody's adoption was considered "confidential with updates" which means that either Jody's birth family or her adoptive family could update her agency files after her placement, but the information was not necessarily intended for current transmission to the other party. An adoption that is "confidential with updates" includes cases where updated information has not been transmitted to the other party, parties are uncertain about the transmission, or some information may have been transmitted at caseworker discretion. Updates could have been a one-time event, stopped, paused, or ongoing at the time of the Wave 2 interview.

Jody's mother received an Adoption Communicative Openness (ACO) score of 24. The ACO coding system includes five rating scales: 1) Communication with the child about adoption, 2) promotion of the child's dual connection to two families, 3) empathy with and tolerance of the child's feelings about adoption, 4) communication with the birth family, and 5) empathy for birth relatives. A score of 1 to 5 was provided on each dimension with 1 = low and 5 = high, resulting in a total score between 5 and 25. Higher scores are indicated by greater promotion of or engagement in the construct measured by a given scale. For example, Jody's mother received a 5 on the scale "communication with the child about adoption" because, among other things, she evidenced multiple

examples of initiating or being open to conversations with Jody about adoption and she encouraged Jody to read and write about adoption.

At Wave 2, Jody had not received any contact or information from her birth mother. She reflected that receiving contact from her birth mother when she was younger may have been confusing for her, "but if it were to be now I would just feel so good about, you know, I'd just…I would love it. I wouldn't mind at all." Jody's strong interest in seeking information or contact in the future was revealed during her Wave 2 interview when she stated, "I really want to meet her someday which is like my life time dream and so hopefully, whatever happens…" She also said, "All I can think of is if there is any way possible ever to have contact with my birth mother. If I ever knew anybody who could help me with that then I want to know who they are because that's like really important to me…" Jody greatly desired "just a picture or a letter or something" from her birth mother.

Jody was uncertain whether her adoptive parents had disclosed to her all that they knew about her adoption and birth family. During conversations with her adoptive mother she would "talk to her about if she knows anything. I try and push things out of her like, 'Are you sure you don't know anything more?' And I get so mad at her, I'm like, 'Are you sure, are you sure?'" Jody was clearly angered by the idea that her adoptive parents might be gatekeepers of information about her birth family to which she did not have access. Jody's mother was attuned to Jody's anxiety about her lack of information about her birth family but she felt she had no other information with which to provide Jody due to the confidential nature of her adoption and the limited information they had about her birth family. Jody's mother said the following regarding Jody's comfort level with talking about her adoption and the limits of her ability to talk with Jody about the

information she desired: "She's pretty comfortable with it…she's so comfortable sometimes she gets anxious because she- one question leads to another, what if this, what if that, so- I think she's very aware of it but wants answers and sometimes we can't give all the answers because it's unknown."

Jody viewed turning 18 as her opportunity to take control of her search for contact with and information about her birth family. She would say things to her adoptive parents such as, "You know, when I turn eighteen, we are going down to the agency and I'm looking in that file," and "Only a year left until I'm eighteen, you know what that means." Jody's parents were well aware that turning 18 and the subsequent ability to search for birth parents was very important to Jody. Her mother stated, "She's seventeen and she's a year away from eighteen and the issue of search comes up quite a bit for birthparents and that's a big issue for her." Jody seemed to consider the confidential aspect of her adoption as definite until she turned 18 and was able to instigate a search independently. Jody did think about going to the high school she believed her birth mother attended and looking in year books for someone who looked like her, but she also considered these plans to be "little daydreams…that are so dumb" and did not follow through with them.

Jody's mother had believed that a fully-disclosed adoption may have been confusing for Jody as a child, but she was also aware that Jody's family "is bigger than just ours" and at the time of Jody's Wave 2 interview her mother was "very dissatisfied" with the lack of contact Jody had with her birth parents. She said, "To me, it's sad. I think there would be a lot of benefit on both sides of the fence" to having contact. She was attuned to "Jody's temperament and her wanting to belong" and she felt that Jody's lack of contact was "very sad for me because I could see Jody as wanting to know how

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they're doing." These statements are illustrative of the empathy Jody's mother felt for her regarding her desire to have contact with her birth family as well as recognition of her dual connection to her two families.

Jody's parents were also under the impression that direct contact could not be established by either party until Jody was 18 which perhaps helps to explain why they had not helped Jody initiate an active search for her birth parents. Their understanding that direct contact was not possible until Jody reached the age of majority did not prevent Jody's mother from attempting to maintain a connection with Jody's birth family on her behalf. Jody's mother had been sending letters to Jody's adoption agency since she was a young child. The letters were kept in storage and Jody's mother had been told by the agency that if the birth parents contacted the adoption agency and desired contact with Jody she and her adoptive parents would have received that information. Jody's mother described how her letters to the birth family were "kept in storage…and then when there is contact, after the child is eighteen…if there's any contact, even over the years, they contact us. They're kept there until someone says, 'Open it up' but it has be to eighteen, that's the rule, I guess." Jody seemed to be unaware that her parents were "a hundred percent behind" contact with her birth family.

Jody described feeling that she was a "very big part" of her birth mother "even though I don't know her personally". She wondered whether her birth mother thought about her or whether "she just tried to forget" her. She was reassured by her adoptive father who had spoken with other birth parents; Jody remembered him telling her that "ninety-five percent of the people that we've talked with still have never forgotten about their kids, whether they be eighty years old or whether it just happened a week ago". Jody felt "really good knowing that, you know, maybe she is" thinking about her.

Jody expressed interested in knowing several things about her birth mother and birth family. She wanted to know whether she looked like her birth mother and where she was. She would have liked to ask her birth mother about her strongest personality traits, her talents, and her physical characteristics. She also wanted to know what her birth mother would have named her. Regarding her birth family Jody wanted to know "where they are now. Who they are. Who they are is a big deal. If they want to have contact with me. Where they are from. What country…my ancestors are from. How their lives have been. Just growing up. What kind of a lifestyle they had."

Finally, Jody reflected about why she wanted to know who her birth mother was. She said that she had never really gotten along that well with her adoptive mother which was hard on her. She said, "I think the reason why I want to know who my birth mother is, more than anything, is because I'm a girl…I just feel like I'd probably be closer to her. Like I need more of a mother figure or something." Jody mourned the loss of a close mother-daughter relationship with her adoptive mother and thought that perhaps the relationship she could develop with her birth mother would fulfill her yearning for that attachment.

Jody established contact with her birth family two years before her Wave 3 interview. She searched online for her birthparents' names and found them. Jody said during her Wave 3 interview that her adoptive father gave her some paperwork from the adoption agency when she turned 16. The paperwork contained a letter to him about her birth family that he had requested for her as well as the first names of her birth parents and family health and physical descriptions. She also knew that her birthparents were planning on moving to a different state after she was born. It is likely that Jody used the information provided by her adoptive father to locate her birth parents. After finding her

birth parents, Jody wrote them a short thank you note which they received. Jody had spoken with them "every day since they got it." Jody had contact with "parents, siblings, aunts, uncles everyone. We fly back and forth about 5 times a year the last 2 years to see each other."

During her Wave 3 interview Jody disclosed that she believed her birth parents had the option of seeing her while she grew up but they chose not to. Around the time she met her birth family, Jody read an old letter from her birth mother to her birth aunt wherein her birth mother stated she could see Jody whenever she wanted to. However, Jody and her adoptive parents had believed that contact would not and could not happen prior to Jody turning 18. She said, "My adoptive parents always told me they would have had to wait until I was 18 or 21…I will have to ask them about that. I am under the impression it was a closed adoption." Regarding the possibility that her birth parents had the option of seeing her when she was younger but did not, Jody said, "Well, I felt sad if that was true, which I don't know if it was, that they never contacted me. I felt forgotten, but at the same time, I completely understood!"

Establishing contact with her birth mother was incredibly meaningful for Jody. She said, "I went from wondering, daydreaming, and hoping for her, to having her. I never had any expectations of her. Only hoped that she would accept me if I found her. She has, and now I have a lot of my questions answered. I remember I used to be really sad, emotional about the adoption. The unsure feeling, now I feel content. When I say sad, I mean I cried all the time. Low self esteem, balled (sic) like a baby for my birth mom and family. Now, I cry because we all laugh so hard together! I am so grateful for our contact." As an adolescent, Jody did not know what the future held for her in terms of contact with her birth mother and birth family. She could only hope that she would meet

them and be able to ask them the questions she had for them. Her information seeking intent was very strong but it was hard for her to know whether she might be able to find her birth family, and if she did, whether they would want contact with her. Jody reached the age of 18 between Waves 2 and 3 when she would have been able to independently seek information about or contact with her birth parents, and yet she waited until her mid-twenties to pursue her search. She was not disappointed when she did search. After locating her birth parents online she easily established contact with them and they welcomed her into their family.

Jody's only disappointment that she expressed during her Wave 3 interview was that she felt she hadn't "bonded yet" with her birth mother "or that we ever really will". Jody felt that her birth mother pretended they were close when they were not. Even so, Jody expressed satisfaction with her relationship with her birth mother. On a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 is extremely dissatisfied, 5 is neutral, and 10 is extremely satisfied, Jody rated her satisfaction with her current contact arrangements with her birth mother as an 8. She said, "The only reason I don't say 10 is because I wish we could see each other more often, face to face. I think face to face lets people get to know each other on a more personal level than phone or email. I would like to think it would improve our mother/daughter relationship." Jody felt that she had not yet gained the mother-daughter attachment with her birth mother that she believed was lacking with her adoptive mother.

Jody's information seeking progression clearly illustrates movement from a Wave 2 score of 4 (strong interest in seeking) to a Wave 3 score of 6 (gained desired information and/or contact). Her story exemplifies the desire of many adoptees to receive more information about or establish contact with their birth families. It also demonstrates some of the barriers and facilitators to establishing contact that adoptees

may face in their information seeking processes. Jody's lack of information about her birth family and her strong belief that direct contact was simply not possible until she turned 18 were barriers that prevented her from obtaining contact at Wave 2. Reaching the age of majority, use of the internet, and a positive reception from her birth family all facilitated her establishment of contact just a few years before her Wave 3 interview. Jody also experienced open communication within her adoptive family about her birth family and adoption in general, even though Jody may not have felt that the information she was given was sufficient. Jody's mother attempted to facilitate adoption communicative openness for Jody that included empathy for Jody's frustration regarding her lack of contact and the sincere desire for communication with Jody's birth family. Even though Jody was grateful for and happy about the contact she had established with her birth family, she felt that her relationship with her birth mother could be strengthened. Jody had fulfilled her wish for contact and completed her "search" for birth family, thus allowing her to focus on the process of continuing relationship development with them, particularly her birth mother.

Case Study 2: Decrease in Information Seeking

Arnold's profile illustrates a decrease in interest in information seeking between adolescence and young adulthood. Arnold expressed strong interest in seeking information about or contact with his birth mother (information seeking score of 4) at Wave 2. However, at Wave 3, Arnold no longer felt there was any information he would like to know about his birth mother nor did he express the desire to establish contact with her (information seeking score of 1). Arnold was 18 and a half years old and in college at the time of his Wave 2 interview. He was almost 28-years-old at the time of his Wave 3 interview. Arnold's adoption was considered "mediated-stopped" at the time of his Wave

2 interview. A mediated-stopped adoption means that any sharing of information, meetings, and phone calls have stopped for at least 1 year past the point when they should normally have occurred. Before the stop, all contact was conducted through the agency or agency personnel and occurred beyond 6 months after placement. Information shared was intended for the other party and was perceived as received. In a mediated-stopped adoption, however, the mediated contact that was occurring has stopped due to a desire or perceived desire on at least the part of one party that contact be discontinued.

Arnold's mother received an Adoption Communicative Openness (ACO) score of 11. She valued talking about adoption "in a loving manner" when Arnold was a toddler but she came to believe that communication about adoption became "unnecessary" as he grew older. At the time of her Wave 2 interview she reported that conversations about adoption happened "so infrequently that I couldn't tell you. It's not a concern, it's not something we dwell on. I mean…you guys are my kids, that's it, that's understood, who cares?" This statement is also indicative of her lack of promotion of Arnold's dual connection to his adoptive and birth families. She viewed Arnold's connection to his birth family in genetic and hereditary terms and she did not consider that Arnold may still have a relationship with his birth family even though there was no contact. Regarding Arnold's birthmother's relationship with him, she stated, "There never was one…he was given up at birth."

Arnold talked at his Wave 2 interview about receiving photos from his birth mother when he was about 2-years-old. His adoptive parents sent her photographs of Arnold and she reciprocated by sending him photos which included one of her as a baby. Arnold was struck by how much he thought he looked like his birth mother. At

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some point thereafter, the mediated contact Arnold had with his birth mother ended. Communication with Arnold's birth parents had been limited to this one exchange because Arnold's mother believed that birth parents should know "nothing" about their children after they had been placed. She acknowledged she "sent a letter to Arnold's mother when he was two, just stating he was fine, doing well. But I don't think [contact] should be ongoing…no I just don't think it should be." She "never saw the need to have communication."

During his Wave 3 interview Arnold said that all he knew about his adoption before he turned 18 was that he was adopted. When he turned 18 his adoptive parents gave him a file of information about his birth mother that included medical information, birth family names, a photograph of his birth mother when she was two, a photograph of her when she was 16, and a letter she had written to his adoptive parents two years after the adoption. Arnold's adoptive parents gave him this information at that time because "when I was 18 and having some troubled times, my parents thought that the information about my biological mother might be one of the things on my mind…I never asked for the file. My parents thought it might be something that was troubling me—it wasn't." Nonetheless, Arnold said "I'd like to meet her" when asked during his Wave 2 interview how he felt about his birth mother. He reported he was happy he had the photographs of her and he reiterated, "Just want to meet her—just meet her. Find out, you know, what she's like." Arnold's birth mother was amenable to meeting him as well, and although his adoptive parents indicated they would help him initiate contact with her it seems that lack of volition (and Arnold's mother's comfort with lack of contact) prevented Arnold and his adoptive parents from taking any further steps. His mother said, "When we gave him his file, there was a picture of his birth mother and a letter stating she would want to meet

him if he was ever ready. He said he was, I said, 'fine, we'll help you.' And he's never said anything else about it. Anything he wants to know, we're willing to share. But we, you know, we let them come to us."

When asked what more he would like to know about his birth mother he replied, "More I'd like to know? Nothing you can just read. It would have to be—I want to meet my mother, and you know, spend time with her. Find out what she's all about." He did express the desire to know whether he had siblings and whether they were living with his birth mother. He also had interest in meeting some of his birth relatives. Arnold's mother acknowledged that Arnold "had some questions but he didn't want to ask us. And so we just turned his file over to him. And he seemed quite satisfied." Arnold's parents appear not to have encouraged Arnold to ask his questions and therefore open communication about Arnold's adoption was not facilitated to the degree it might have been. Arnold's mother was unsure how comfortable Arnold was talking about his adoption "since he doesn't do it". Her perception was that he "didn't care…he's not particularly concerned" with talking about his adoption. She assumed that Arnold was satisfied with the amount of information he had about his birth parents because "he's never expressed an opinion. He has never expressed that he chose to have anything more with them." Lack of communication about adoption in Arnold's family prevented Arnold from letting his adoptive parents know that was indeed interested in learning more about his birth family and possibly meeting them.

At both his Wave 2 and Wave 3 interviews Arnold talked about having his adoptive parents' support to search for his birth mother if he should ever wish to do that. He said, "My younger brother was also adopted. We were told all our lives about the adoption and let know that when we were 18 we could find out more if we wanted to." He

said his parents offered to help him find his biological mother when he turned 18 and that is when they gave him the file of information about her. Arnold was not bothered that his adoptive parents did not give him the file until he turned 18. He felt sure that if he had wanted it before then they would have provided it for him. Arnold expressed a strong interest in seeking information about and contact with his birth mother at his Wave 2 interview. He had already reached the age of majority and he felt had the support of his adoptive parents. He could have engaged in an active search at any time. Additional communication about Arnold's adoption, birth family, and desire to seek information and contact may have encouraged Arnold's adoptive parents to more actively help him pursue a relationship at that point.

However, Arnold's interest declined between adolescence and young adulthood and by the time he reached his Wave 3 interview he no longer had the same intent to seek information. Some of his statements even contradicted the desire he had expressed in adolescence. Arnold said during his Wave 3 interview that he "never had interest" in searching for more information about or contact with his birth mother. He said, "Internally, in my heart, I've never felt the need for more than what I have been given and I have never wanted to change that." Arnold also commented, "I'm not searching or yearning for anything more. I am very happy and very content with things how they are and don't feel that anything else is truly necessary."

Arnold felt strongly that he already belonged to a loving family. He said, "Who could ask for anything more?" This theme of his adoptive family fulfilling his needs and desires for family attachments was clear in both of Arnold's interviews. Arnold expressed the belief at his Wave 2 interview that his life would not have been any different had he not been adopted. He felt strongly that "adoption doesn't play an issue" in his life.

Regarding his adoptive parents he said, "…they are my parents. They always will be…And, you know, they're there for me—there's no difference between whether I was their child—their real child—or theirs like I am now." At his Wave 3 interview, Arnold made similar statements. He said, "I am very comfortable with my parents and in my mind, they are my parents. I thank my biological mother for doing what was best for me and putting me up for adoption so that I may be brought up in a home with both a mother and a father who were a little more experienced in life than she." Perhaps Arnold's feelings of contentment, security, and fulfillment with his adoptive family had a greater impact on his information seeking interest at Wave 3 than did the curiosity and desire he expressed at Wave 2.

Arnold's information seeking progression illustrates movement from a Wave 2 score of 4 (strong interest in seeking) to a Wave 3 score of 1 (strong statement that will not seek information or contact). Arnold's case also depicts a lower level of Adoption Communication Openness as indicated by his mother's ACO score of 11 and quotes from her interview. Communicative openness about adoption in general and Arnold's specific situation was not highly valued and facilitated by his adoptive mother.

Arnold had the strong desire to meet his birth mother and he was interested in learning more about her and his birth family when he was an adolescent. Several things might have facilitated Arnold's activation of a search, including being over age 18, having adoptive parents' support, and already possessing information about his birth mother. He did not discuss any barriers that might have prevented him from seeking information about or contact with his birth mother. However, Arnold never followed through on his intent to seek information nor did he make use of the facilitators available to him. His interest in meeting his birth mother declined between adolescence and young

adulthood. At the time of his Wave 3 interview Arnold felt satisfied with the amount of information he knew about his birth mother and he no longer felt the desire to establish contact. He was content with the "loving family" he had and he felt that he did not need "anything more".