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As if born to: The social construction of a deficit identity position for adopted persons

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AS IF BORN TO:

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF A DEFICIT IDENTITY POSITION

FOR ADOPTED PERSONS

By

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Many adopted persons report experiencing ongoing problems with identity, often resulting in feelings of personal deficiency to imprison their sense of self. The dominant position of the literature on adoption individualizes and problematizes "identity" issues by locating the source of difficulties to individual traits of the adopted person and his/her adoptive family. Consequently, the struggle associated with the identity "adopted" is typically constructed as an individual struggle.

Drawing on my own lived experience as an adopted woman, I have been engaged in a critical inquiry of the traditional view of adoption in order to understand the problem of identity not as an individual problem but as a social construction rooted in power. From this critical inquiry, I have developed a post-structuralist framework of adoption which offers a more liberatory interpretation of the adoption experience, in general, and the problem of identity, in particular. This theoretical perspective radically reframes the problem of identity formation within adoption by showing its social origins through the concrete production of difference at the level of the individual.

The purpose of this inquiry is to show the social construction of adoption as a problem of identity and to examine the ideological purposes of that construction. I interviewed eight participants who are self-identified "adoption advocates" and who openly acknowledged having struggled with the identity "adopted". The methodological approach is an in-depth interview study informed by feminist research principles and hermeneutics.

I argue that identity formation is an intersubjective process of construction acquired through shared experiences of recognition. For adopted persons, the template "as if born to" that is active in the formation of identity is problematic because to think and live "as if" something is true when it is not is intolerable and injurious to one's developing view of self. Additionally, I argue that being

produced "adopted" is harmful because potentials are harmed in that process of construction.

In reviewing some of the salient experiences of adoption identified by the participants' stories, as well as my own story, I have selected four sites of injury sustained to our identity formation. Specifically, the four sites of injury selected for discussion include: The Birth Story. . . Living a Pretense; Living Silence. . . Living Silent; The Experience of Being Mothered. . . The Desire to Belong; and Looking for Recognition. . . Claiming our Difference. Generally, my interpretation disputes widely held beliefs that suggest problems of identity in adoption are caused by early attachment disturbance and infant trauma. Instead, following a social construction approach, my different interpretation of adoption claims that the primacy of the biological family as a cultural ideal in Western Society causes harm to adopted persons.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

name, think, and talk about my lived experience of adoption. In particular, I can now refuse the identification of "adopted" as deficient, instead of continually feeling less than, and marginalized for not belonging to the privileged category "biological". I am also learning to embrace and celebrate my difference in ways that did not receive proper recognition when I was a younger person.

Recognizing that my personal journey for information about my birth history continues, I am committed to a sense of justice for all adopted persons who have been repeatedly harmed by the closed system of adoption. My commitment to both the personal and political agendas continually sustain me in my work.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Despite the supposed "special" status attributed to being the "chosen" child, many adopted persons report experiencing problems with identity. I am an adopted woman who has held a view of myself as a struggling "adoptee". The traditional explanation of adoption advances one possibility of experiencing the identity "adopted", that is, the taken-for-granted status of second best. The problem of identity, at best, is assigned individual and familial responsibility. Consequently, the struggle associated with the identity "adopted" is constructed as an individual struggle.

During the past few years, I have been engaged in a critical inquiry of the traditional view of adoption, and in particular, of how the process of adoption established in Western society produces ongoing questions of identity. More specifically, the journey for me has been to understand the problem of identity not as an individual problem but as a social construction rooted in power. From this critical inquiry, I have developed a particular perspective that creates possibilities for a more liberatory lived experience of the process of adoption.

The purpose of this inquiry is to show the social construction of adoption as a problem of identity and to examine the ideological purposes of that construction. I am particularly interested in further understanding how the social privileging of the biological family organizes and governs adopted persons' subjective experience of their identity "adopted", causing feelings of personal deficiency to imprison their sense of self. In order to fully comprehend the problem of identity formation within adoption, it is essential to

critically review certain dominant ideologies responsible for creating the category "adopted" as the negative of the category "biological".

In this regard, I want to show how "adoptees" are constructed rather than natural categories through an examination of the ideological power of the dominant social order. This critical perspective works to radically shift the issue of the problem of identity within adoption from an individualized analysis to a social analysis. Additionally, I want this inquiry to cease to individualize and problematize adopted persons and to develop a social critique so that problems of identity can be more adequately and justly explained. Finally, I am committed to creating an alternative discourse on adoption so that adopted persons, like myself, who have struggled with the identity "adopted", can begin to change our subjective experience and claim our identity "adopted" in a different, more liberatory way.

I am reminded of an earlier period in my life when I set out to make sense of ongoing feelings of personal deficiency (i.e., shame and blame) about my identity "adopted". Following years of struggling with bouts of depression, I recall being unwavering in my determination to discover answers to questions that could begin to account for negative feelings about myself. Drawing from the psychoanalytic literature to inform my subjective experience, the following quote is selected from a paper I wrote in my Master of Social Work program to show how I became imprisoned by the notion that "adoptees" are forever wounded. Additionally, this quote poignantly illustrates the results of an individual analysis of the problem of identity within adoption. I wrote,

... adoption is regarded as the optimal social solution to the problem of parents who are unable to care for their biological children. From a developmental perspective,

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the problems encountered by an adopted child are similar to those of a nonadopted child, but with the additional unique task of working through the issue attributed to the adoptive status. . . . Although there appears to be a consensus that adoption should occur ideally at birth, for primary identification and good object relationships to develop; ". . . psychoanalytic case studies of the pathogenicity surrounding the meaning and experiences of being an adoptee are lacking" (Wieder, 1977, p. 2). In examining the phenomenon of adoption, limited clinical studies have attempted to understand the adverse effects on the adopted child's psychological development. (See Appendix A).

This theoretical framework positions the identity "adopted" as a "problem", a "problem" that is constructed through the biological family as the privileged standard of social organization. Drawing on the only explanation available to "adoptees", I learned to take up problems of identity as being rooted in early attachment disturbance and birth wound discourses. Birth wound discourses are one of the most popular explanations to account for struggles of identity within adoption (Verrier, 1993). This discourse propagates the widely held view that adopted persons sustain irreparable damage to the self following the initial separation from the birth mother.

I concluded that feelings of shame and blame about my identity "adopted" were unavoidable because of my less privileged position "other". I also learned to continually locate the "truth" about what constitutes "normal" identity to the category "biological". Consequently, I inevitably took up the privileged category as "normal" in order to help guide and explain my unending search for a "true" identity. By comparison, however, I always felt

confined to personal feelings of intense shame for being "other", while desperately desiring to be the biological daughter of my adoptive parents.

Bound by an individualized analysis, I looked to either myself or my adoptive family to account for ongoing, and frequently painful, struggles of identity. The following quote is another example of what I wrote to help make sense of my lived experience of adoption, that is, of the "other" experience rooted in "trauma",

> At the age of three years, my adoptive mother informed me that I was `adopted', and especially chosen out of many other children to be her child. . . . In response to this early disclosure, my adoptive mother told me that I was `good' and did not react, or experience separation anxiety to the knowledge of my adoption. However, in view of my current adult behaviour and consideration of the literature, it would seem that I internalized my anxiety and anger, and thereby became the overly compliant, passive `good' girl. This `pleasing behaviour' appears to indicate a defensive response against both the fear of abandonment and rejection by my adoptive mother. . . . Because I did not experience a sense of security, trust and comfort in my relationship with my adoptive mother and with the knowledge of having `another' maternal image, the persistent feeling of ambivalence necessitated the defense mechanism of splitting. Specifically, my adoptive mother became the `good' object representation, whereas, my biological mother signified the `bad' introject. . . . Recapitulated in my adult life are intense fears of rejection should I not comply with meeting the needs of others, poor integration of good/bad self object and denial of bad self by constantly striving to be good. . . . In an attempt to individuate

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myself upon completion of University, I geographically separated from my adoptive family. Fantasies of my imagined real mother have continued to preoccupy my adult life to the extent that I question my biological heritage (See Appendix A).

For the next several years I continued to feel confined by the taken-for-granted notion that "adoptees" are forever wounded and second best to people who belong to the privileged category "biological". Ongoing attempts to understand feelings of personal deficiency only perpetuated a well established pattern of either self-blame for not "getting it right as an adoptee" and/or attributing responsibility to my adoptive family for not being "good enough". In fact, I was overly preoccupied with the popularized notion that most, if not all, "adoptees" endeavour to seek their "true" identity. Clearly feeling like a "whole" person was uppermost in my mind but a feeling I believed could not be fulfilled through my adoptive family relationships.

Undertaking this critical inquiry has opened up transformative possibilities for me to name and talk about the problem of identity within adoption. I also endeavour to unsettle and challenge dominant ideologies so that the discourse on adoption can be changed. Until now, I never once questioned the "fictional" story our culture has produced about the identity "adopted" or what constitutes "normal" social order. However, it is only through understanding this cultural production that we can acquire insight to the ideological purpose of constructing adoption as "other".

In contemporary Western society, children are awarded an important status in the fabric of our familialized culture. In Western culture, the conception of **family** is predicated on the primacy and exclusivity accorded to the biological connection between parent and

child (Miall, 1987). In this regard, the conviction that children "belong" to their families is culturally defined as "natural" and "normal" in our society. Hence, the preferred manner of creating a family is to reproduce children, thereby constituting the normative nuclear family form. One might conclude, from this perspective, that adoption may not be the preferred way of creating a family, but likely a **second** or **unnatural choice** (Benet, 1976; Baran & Pannor, 1990; Cole, 1984; Cole & Donely, 1990; Gediman & Brown, 1989; Miall, 1987; Sachdev, 1984).

Adoption is a widely accepted social arrangement established to meet the needs of the birth parents, usually the birth mother, who is unable or unprepared to care for her biological child, the prospective adoptive parents desirous of a child of their **own**, and the child seen to be in need of a socially approved family. Traditionally, adoption practice has been guided by an underlying philosophy and societal value designed to serve and protect the "best interests" (Goldstein, Freud, & Solnit, 1973) of all parties - the birth mother, the adoptive parents, and the adopted child. Based on the premise of confidentiality, traditional adoption practice developed its closed, secretive model to safeguard the birth parents' right to anonymity. It was also devised to protect the adoptive parents' legal entitlement to parenthood (i.e., to raise the child "as if born" to them); and to honour the prevailing societal stigma of unwed mothers and their "illegitimate" infants. In fact, the traditional model represented an **event** in time, as the original birth certificate and the official adoption records were legally **sealed**, presumably for a lifetime. How, then, has this closed paradigm impacted the "chosen" children who continue to live the legacy of adoption as "chosen" adults?

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As an adopted woman, the knowledge of being adopted has privately governed my self perception for over thirty years. As a child, the adopted status meant being different from other children. As an adult, it means being different from other adults. Why do I feel different, incomplete, and somehow deficient for not being born into my family? My ongoing attempts to understand these strong inner feelings have typically resulted in attributing personal inadequacy to being adopted. Knowing that I was a "chosen" baby, that is, different, which in our familialized culture means being less than "natural" and "normal", came to be a taken-for-granted aspect of my identity. Unquestionably, I assumed complete responsibility for overcoming my ongoing personal struggles with the identity "adopted". However, I discovered that my personal experience of the process of adoption is not atypical, but is consistent with the adoption research and descriptive accounts of other adoption experiences.

As previously mentioned, many adopted persons report experiencing problems with identity. For example, many women and men, adopted as infants twenty, thirty, forty, and even more than fifty years ago, have identified feeling less than whole as persons, without a sense of belonging, a sense of differentness, incompleteness, a historical inner void, as well as feeling a sense of disconnection from humanity, regardless of their adoptive family experiences (Auth & Zaret, 1986; Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Campbell, Silverman, & Patti, 1991; Depp, 1982; Gonyo & Watson, 1988; Kowal & Schilling, 1985; Rosenzweig-Smith, 1988; Sachdev, 1992; Sobol & Cardiff, 1983; Simpson, Timm, & McCubbin, 1981; Sorosky, Baran, & Pannor, 1974; Sorosky et al., 1975; Sorosky et al., 1984; Westhues & Gladstone, 1990). Even the need to seek contact with a birth relative has

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been conceptualized as the "search" for a more "complete" sense of self.

In recent years, an increasing number of adopted persons have undertaken to look for their biological origins, to the extent of advocating for legislative reform and the unsealing of adoption records (Fisher, 1973; Lifton, 1979, 1988; Paton, 1954). The Adoption Disclosure Statute Law, introduced by the Ontario Government on July 1, 1987, permitted adults who were adopted greater access (upon mutual consent with their birth relative), to identifying information in adoption records (Westhues & Gladstone, 1990).

Provincial statistics released through the Adoption Disclosure Register reveal that adults who are adopted want to know about their personal histories. For example, of the total number of applicants (48,741) who registered between June 1979 and December 1995, 59.8% are adopted persons, while the remaining 40.2% are birth relatives, the majority of whom are birth mothers (Adoption Disclosure Register, Personal Communication, January 10, 1997). One way of viewing these statistics could suggest that many individuals who are adopted associate the "search" and "reunion" process with an intense desire to re-claim a missing part of themselves that has been cut off, both legally and historically. This quest, however, is predicated on the fundamental assumption that individuals who are adopted are incomplete and deficient in some way. In this regard, the enduring effect of being adopted is to experience themselves as less than whole.

Until recently, I strongly identified with the popularized notion of the "adoptee's" lifelong search for a "true" identity. This search for a "complete" sense of self became my unique quest predicated on the received knowledge that I was different from people who belonged to the category "biological". For example, unless I acquired knowledge of, or

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initiated personal contact with my biological origins I believed I would be denied the "natural" and "normal" status conferred on others. The constructed meaning associated with the identity "adopted", however, would automatically relegate me to a deficient position regardless of my individual pursuits. Hence, I concluded that my identity would never be complete, causing negative feelings about my self to continually prevail over my lived experience. This is one of the many contradictions that I encounter and struggle with as an adopted person.

My subjective experience as an "adoptee" exemplifies some of the contradictions inherent in the process of adoption which foster ongoing questions about personal identity. For me, one of the major sites of tension has centred on my continuing struggle to reconcile the "special" and "chosen" status assigned to the identity "adopted" with my persistent feelings of shame for being different. Other reasons for the inner turmoil around my identity "adopted" include: the shroud of secrecy within my adoptive family, especially with respect to discussing the circumstances of my adoption or the reality of my birth mother; the knowledge of being adopted and yet being denied a sense of freedom to talk openly about my birth story; the keen interest in acquiring background information about my personal history, while struggling with feelings of disloyalty and ingratitude toward the only parents whom I know as my mother and father; the persistent sense of personal incompleteness, lack of belonging, and a historical inner void despite having obtained non-identifying information; the decision to take a more proactive stance was initially empowering, but left me once again, feeling disempowered; and finally, despite knowing that I am a whole person I continue to experience myself as incomplete. How, then, is the identity "adopted"

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constructed through the process of adoption in ways that continually tie adopted persons to the deficit identity position?

In the dominant discourse, adoption is usually conceptualized as a problematic event requiring a life long process of adjustment for everyone involved. This conceptualization is rooted in dominant ideologies of the "normal" family, child-rearing practices, good mothering, and individualism. From the outset, then, the adoptive family is constituted as different, which means unnatural or second best in our society. This difference, however, is rooted in the valuation of biological determinism (i.e., the birth process) and the normalization of "family life" in our society.

Additionally, adoptive family relationships are premised on loss. This construction of loss is based on the fact that adoptive parents are unable to produce their own biological offspring and, that adopted children are severed from their original biological connection. The established view of adoption advances the notion that adoptive parents and the adopted child are solely responsible for the creation of their own (inter)subjective experience of adoption. The dominant view of adoption advances one possibility of experiencing the identity "adopted", that is, the deficient status of second best. The problem of identity, at best, is assigned individual and familial responsibility, and generally is considered to be indicative of personal inadequacy.

Through undertaking this inquiry, I was challenged to question my acquired framework of adoption, a framework that perpetuated individual pathology and self-blame for being adopted. Rather than focusing on the personal realm, I was encouraged to look to social, historical, and cultural dimensions to understand the multiplicity of factors that have

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produced my social position of "other" and the negative feelings about my identity "adopted". Moreover, it was suggested that my experience of the identity "adopted" is outside of individual control and that, in fact, this identity is a social construction rooted in power. This critical shift in understanding my subjective experience of the adoption process has offered the possibility of constructing a different self perception of my identity "adopted". It is this new perspective that has offered a newfound sense of freedom from the deficit position and it has encouraged me to construct an alternative explanation of my lived experience of adoption.

Within the dominant discourse on adoption certain questions about the social production of meanings cannot be raised. For instance, there is no sense that we, as adopted persons, are positioned as second best, and governed by adoption practices in the interests of maintaining a familialized culture. Consequently, it is assumed that we, as individuals, are self-regulating and the creators of our own personal experience of the process of adoption. Thus, the struggles associated with the identity "adopted" are continually constructed as individual struggles. In my view, this unidimensional perspective on adoption only serves to individualize and pathologize an experience that is embedded in, and organized through, our culture.

Currently, however, there is no conceptualization of the process of adoption that advances other possibilities of understanding or experiencing the identity "adopted". Additionally, there is a major gap in the current adoption literature to adequately account or allow for the creation of different, more positive experiences of adoption from adopted persons, who, like myself, are engaged in establishing a more comprehensive understanding

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of adoption. The theoretical perspective of post-structuralism has helped me to engage in a different inquiry that opens other possibilities for understanding how the experience of adoption can be organized and lived in a more liberatory way.

During this inquiry, I have been engaged in a critical examination of the conventional view of adoption, and in particular, of how the process of adoption develops into an ongoing question of identity. In this regard, I have developed an alternative framework that creates possibilities for a more liberatory experience of the process of adoption. On a personal level, I am now beginning to experience myself in a more positive way. I believe it is critical to produce other ways of understanding our experience of adoption in order that we, as adopted persons, can think about, talk about, and experience our lives differently than is currently structured within the dominant discourse on adoption. We, as adopted persons, cannot change our subject positioning (i.e., as second best) without the production of different discourses in which to read our actions, and to produce different actions, and different subjectivities (Walkerdine, 1990, p. 9).

As previously mentioned, the purpose of this inquiry is to demonstrate the problem of identity within adoption as a social construction by showing the ideological power of that construction. Drawing upon my own lived experience and intellectual framework of post-structuralism, I will use the participants' stories to further interrogate my critical perspective on adoption. The principal aims of this inquiry are twofold: to understand how adopted persons make sense of their lived experience of adoption; and to investigate what meanings adopted persons attribute to their identity formation, with particular focus on how they reconcile their struggles ascribed to the identity "adopted".

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This inquiry is premised on specific fundamental assumptions about how the identity "adopted" is constructed in our society. Specifically, it is understood that all individuals who are adopted (i.e., wo/men, girls and boys) are positioned as **second best**. Additionally, the formed identity "adopted" and the resultant subject position that defines the "self" as deficient is structured by the language of adoption, as well as governed by adoption practices. From this perspective, it is not the purpose of this inquiry to prove the dominant claim that adopted persons are "equal but different". Rather, the aim of this inquiry is to further comprehend the concrete dimensions, operations, and effects of the production of difference on adopted persons through an in-depth investigation of their lived experience of adoption.

Engaging with other adopted persons who struggle with issues of identity will provide further insight into how the "problem of identity" is constructed. It will also demonstrate how we, as adopted persons, live, re-organize, and/or re-produce the deficit identity position in ways that are injurious. The political intent of my work is to unsettle the dominant explanation of adoption so that other, more just possibilities can be created. The production of counter discourses works not only to disrupt the conventional view of adoption, but opens the possibility for the creation of other readings that offer adopted persons a different, more positive view of self. Additionally, it is my hope that the different experiences of other adopted persons can help to further interrogate my own particular perspective through critical reflection, scrutiny, and further revision.

The thesis is organized in the following format. Chapter Two will address the dominant position of the literature on adoption. The primary focus of this inquiry is directed

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to infant, nonrelative, voluntary adoption placements of adopted persons that occurred under the closed paradigm. The sociocultural context of adoption is also restricted to Western society, in general, and the province of Ontario, in particular, which reflects my lived experience (i.e., middle class, white, and closed practices) of adoption. All of the participants are adopted in Ontario. The theoretical framework, presented in Chapter Three, will focus on a post-structuralist perspective on adoption which reads the experience of adoption differently. However, for the purpose of this inquiry my theoretical perspective is most closely aligned with the work of Chris Weedon (1987) who advances a politically-motivated, feminist post-structuralist analysis. This theoretical perspective radically reframes the problem of identity formation within adoption by showing its social origins through the concrete production of difference. Chapter Four presents the method that I used to explore a post-structuralist framework of the experience of adoption in order to further understand how adopted persons made sense of their subjective experience, especially concerning struggles of identity and potential sites of pain.

I will then present the analysis in the following four chapters; each chapter is designed to demonstrate a specific **site of injury** to the adopted person's identity. These **sites of injury** emerged from the participants' stories but also spoke to my own subjective experience of being harmed through the adoption process. Each site of injury will include two sections: to show how the category "adopted" is produced discursively, as well as to demonstrate how "adopted" is taken up as a problem of identity. The four **sites of injury** to be discussed include: Chapter Five, The First Site of Injury: The Birth Story. . . Living a Pretense; Chapter Six, The Second Site of Injury: Living Silence. . . Living Silent;

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Chapter Seven, The Third Site of Injury: The Experience of Being Mothered. . . The Desire

to Belong;   and Chapter Eight, The Fourth Site of Injury: Looking for Recognition . . .

Claiming our Difference.   Generally, my interpretation disputes widely held beliefs that

suggest problems of identity in adoption are caused by early attachment disturbance.

Instead, following a social construction approach, my different interpretation of adoption

claims that the primacy of the biological family as a cultural ideal causes harm to adopted

persons.

Finally, Chapter Nine offers some post-inquiry reflections and implications of my

alternative perspective on the problem of identity within adoption. In particular, I will make

some suggestions for adopted persons with regard to how they might think differently about

their lives as a result of this work. I will then put forth some suggestions about further

research and action. My personal struggles involving problems of identity and sites of pain

are used extensively in the work of this thesis to demonstrate poignant examples of the

concrete effects of the production of difference.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DOMINANT POSITION OF THE LITERATURE ON ADOPTION

A review of both the massive body of adoption literature and the research on the search and reunion process reveals significant gaps in our understanding of the complex issues surrounding identity formation within the adoption process. Overall, the dominant position of the literature individualizes and often problematizes the adoption experience. The following presentation of the conventional literature on adoption demonstrates how the dominant explanations individualize problems of identity by locating the source of difficulties to individual traits of the adopted person and his/her adoptive family.

The conventional view of adoption can be represented through four dominant themes: contextualizing adoption; adoptive family relationships; conceptualizing identity formation; and explaining the search for a "complete" sense of self. I will then provide a brief critique of the dominant understanding of adoption focusing on how it informs the popular explanation of the problem of identity formation for adopted persons.

CONTEXTUALIZING ADOPTION

The practice of adoption is defined and shaped through historical, social, cultural, and political processes (Benet, 1976; Garber, 1985; Hartman & Laird, 1990; Sorosky, Baran, & Pannor, 1984). It is only from this broader perspective that the struggles associated with the identity "adopted" can be thoroughly understood.

The traditional model of adoption has been governed by unexamined "truths", many

of which underlie current adoption practice (Winkler, Brown, Van Keppel & Blanchard, 1988), and reflect a philosophical, value-laden perspective on society, and in particular, on the ideal family (Benet, 1976; Cole & Donley, 1990; Hartman & Laird, 1990).

A number of values have shaped adoption practice with a view to safeguard the rights of children, as well as preserve the ideology associated with the normative nuclear family form (Cole & Donley, 1990). There is general consensus amongst several authors that the well-being of the child is the primary consideration of sound adoption practice (Brodzinsky, 1987; Cole & Donley, 1990; Goldstein, Freud, & Solnit, 1973; Kadushin, 1984; Winkler et al., 1988). Therefore, should the biological parent, primarily the birth mother, be unable or unwilling to assume responsibility for the child's welfare, an alternate or substitute family is regarded as the preferred social arrangement (Cole & Donley, 1990; Goldstein et al., 1973; Kadushin, 1984). Goldstein and his associates (1973) support this position and contend that familial membership for every child is essential in providing a safe and nurturing home environment wherein parenting is ensured by at least one stable adult figure.

In our familialized culture, a permanent family is believed to be in the best interests of the child, who "belongs" to their parents (Cole & Donley, 1990; Hartman & Laird, 1990). Adoptable children are often referred to in the context of "supply and demand" (Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978), (e.g., who is entitled to this child?), thereby resulting in objectification of the child. Hartman & Laird (1990) assert that, "Children's rights have been sharply limited by the conception of the parent-child relationship" (p. 221). For example, parents not only have the right to "give their children away" (Hartman & Laird, 1990), but may also withhold the fact of his/her adoptive status from their child or knowledge of their

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biological origins. Based on her experience as a birth mother, Wells (1990) challenges this notion of children as possessions, asserting that this only serves to " cloud the basic issue - that all children have a fundamental right to know their origins and that they are not adults' **property**" [my emphasis] (p. 31).

One of the most significant values that governs adoption is the normative status accorded to the traditional nuclear biological family (Hartman & Laird, 1990; Kirk, 1964). This perspective has resulted in the adoptive family being ". . . defined at best as substitute and at worst as deviant or deficient" (Hartman & Laird, 1990, p. 221). For example, the traditional model of adoption practice prided itself on mirroring the process of creating a biological family by matching the child to the prospective adoptive parents in terms of physical and cultural characteristics. Once the adopted child entered the substitute family, the traditional philosophy of adoption encouraged adoptive parents to regard the child "as if born to" them. For this reason, postadoption services were not developed, reflecting the belief that the process of "normalizing" the adoptive family was of paramount importance (Cole & Donley, 1990). Unequivocally, the ideal of the nuclear biological family exists as the most dramatic reminder that the adoptive family is indeed different (Hartman & Laird, 1990).

From this philosophical perspective embedded in Western culture, the traditional practice of adoption necessitated a closed system premised on secrecy, anonymity, mystique, and the illusion of normalcy (Baran & Pannor, 1990; Hartman & Laird, 1990; Sorosky et al., 1978, 1984; Winkler et al., 1988). Essentially, it was assumed that this closed, secretive process protected the "best interests" of all parties involved, namely, the birth mother, the

adoptive parents, and the adopted child (Sorich & Siebert, 1982; Sorosky et al., 1984).

Reasons for maintaining this aura of secrecy were threefold (Winkler et al., 1988). First, it was argued that the birth mother would likely wish to forget the relinquishment of her child born `out of wedlock', determined to "put the experience behind her" (Brodzinksy, 1990). In fact, it was assumed that her decision to relinquish her child was irrevocable. Second, adoptive parents were supported by the adoption practitioners and the larger community in believing that the security of their parent-child relationship was rooted in raising the adopted child "as if born to" them. Moreover, this promise of confidentiality prohibited the possibility of future intrusion from the birth mother. Finally, it was believed that the welfare of the adopted child would be secured within this substitute family, thereby eliminating his/her illegitimate status and consequent societal stigma.

The traditional model of adoption invariably severed the relationship between the birth parents, primarily the birth mother and the child, to allow for the legal termination and permanent transferral of parental rights accorded to the prospective adoptive parents (Baran et al., 1974; Cole & Donley, 1990; Sorosky et al., 1978; Winkler et al., 1988). To safeguard the "best interests" of the adopted child, his/her original birth certificate and official adoption records were sealed, and an amended birth certificate to legitimize his/her legal status as a child belonging to the adoptive family was reissued. From a legal perspective, the newly formed adoptive family was perceived "as if" they were a biological family when they were not.

Adoption legislation was enacted to govern the basic tenets of traditional adoption policies and procedures. Winkler and his associates (1988) point out that the primary

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justification of these laws was to legitimize adoption as an established social-legal arrangement.

> The major rationale for these laws was to recognize adoption as a legitimate social practice and to regulate it in order to prevent what were seen as excesses and ambiguities. . . . a desire to protect the interests of adoptive parents, a desire to protect the good name of the birth mother, and, finally, a desire to protect the interests of the child (p. 16).

An important question to consider, however, is the extent to which adoption laws have the potential to obliterate the fact of being adopted, the knowledge of having another set of parents, or the plausible uncertainties and fears of adoptive parents for not being a "natural" and "normal" family.

Adoption agencies have been created to perform a societal responsibility, giving precedence to the "best interests of the child" philosophy. The mandate of the adoption agency has served to fulfil the role of intermediary between the birth parents and the adoptive parents (Sachdev, 1984). It was of fundamental importance to determine which prospective adoptive parents were `entitled' to assume this societal responsibility. Moreover, beyond protecting the identities of both the birth parents and the adoptive parents, the traditional adoption practice authorized the transmission of very limited and selected information to adoptive parents with respect to the child's biological origins. These adoption practices reflected the values consistent with Western society and venerated the premises of secrecy, anonymity, mystique, and the illusion of normalcy governing the closed model of adoption. It is evident that every effort was made to model adoption after biological parenting

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(Hartman & Laird, 1990).

With regard to the "problem of identity" associated with the adopted status, I believe that these unresolved issues are rooted in the vestiges of traditional adoption practices. Winker and his associates (1988) poignantly reveal the complexity of historical and socio-cultural factors that have impacted on the lives of wo/men who are adopted.

Raising the child **as if born to** [my emphasis] the adoptive parents requires that the adoptee and adoptive parents be **cut off** [my emphasis] from the birth parents and that the adoptee be **cut off** from his or her biological origins. The sole relationships that remain are those within the adoptive parents' extended family. . . . Although the curtailment of relationships is not primarily based on this argument, it is frequently argued that a child cannot have two sets of parents; in this case, the adoptive parents and the birth parents. Such a situation is felt to be unnatural, confusing, and destructive to the child, as well as confusing and destructive to the parents. It is also felt to be confusing legally. **Yet these arguments are embedded in an ideology which gives primacy to the nuclear family. . . . [in our society] we have failed to accommodate the realities of the child's multiple family membership** [my emphasis]. (p. 10-11).

The dominant position of the literature suggests that the desire to know about one's biological origins is a near universal phenomenon in personality development (Lifton, 1979, 1988; Sachdev, 1984; Sorosky et al., 1975, 1984; Triseliotis, 1973). With respect to adopted persons, Sorosky and his associates (1975) have identified this phenomenon as the

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"identity lacunae". With regard to the process of identity formation, Sachdev (1984) points out that is it "natural" to be curious about one's heritage. Moreover, to achieve positive identification with one's past, concomitant with a sense of continuity, he suggests that it is essential to incorporate historical knowledge (i.e., biological and cultural origins) into one's developing personality.

Reasons for complications emerging in the process of identity formation are generally attributed to the fact that adopted persons are **cut off** from knowing this information (Winkler et al., 1988). A further confounding factor in personality development and the struggle to achieve a positive sense of identity may be the need to integrate two sets of parents (Sachdev, 1984); the "real" adoptive parents, and the "fantasized" birth parents. Lifton (1988), a well-known activist of adoption reform and writer, has strongly challenged the sanctity of the traditional sealed record agreement. Specifically, she contends that, "Secrecy, as the adoptee well knows, produces feelings of isolation and despair in the very person whom it is meant to protect" (Lifton, 1988, p. xii). Kirk (1981) substantiates this position to the extent of acknowledging socio-cultural influences, (e.g., the ideology of the biological family), that have constructed the institution of adoption, and in particular, the adoptive kinship.

The controversial issue of whether the original adoption records should remain sealed has received considerable debate as an emerging trend toward open adoption practices is established (Berry, 1991; Dukette, 1984; Garber, 1985; Sachdev, 1989, 1991; Westhues & Gladstone, 1990). The strongest advocates for more liberal disclosure policies have been adopted persons who remain committed to legitimizing their birth rights. For example, in

Ontario, Elizabeth Ferguson is documented as the first adopted person who applied to the Court to have the identity of her birth parents released (Garber, 1985). Her request was denied on the basis of insufficient cause. Adoption activist rights groups such as Orphan Voyage and Adoptees' Liberty Movement Association in the United States and Parents Finders in Canada (Garber, 1985; Gonyo & Watson, 1988; Westhues & Gladstone, 1990) advocate for greater access in adoption practice. "These groups see the sealed records as an affront to human dignity and to civil rights" (Sachdev, 1984, p. 147). Moreover, the perspective of the adopted person is further revealed in the recent proliferation of published accounts of the adoption experience, which emphasize, notably, the "search for self" (Allen, 1992; Brodzinsky et al., 1992; Dean, 1991; Gediman & Brown, 1989; Lifton, 1975, 1979, 1988, 1994; Maxtone-Graham, 1983; McColm, 1993).

Increasingly, traditional assumptions that governed the closed, secretive system of adoption are being seriously challenged by adults who want to know about their biological origins. Winkler and his associates (1988) write that, "There does remain an aftermath from past attitudes and practices which continues to affect, very deeply, the adult lives of those touched by adoption" (p.18). Traditional adoption values contradict the adopted person's basic right to openness, honesty, and freedom to access complete information about their biological origins. Currently, the power to `know' is relegated to the institution of adoption, thereby relegating the adopted person to an `unknowing' passive position.

ADOPTIVE FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

An estimated 10 to 15 % of all couples who desire to have children will have

difficulty achieving this normative expectation of parenthood entrenched in Western society (Hepworth, 1980). For most couples who adopted during the traditional era of adoption, infertility is most likely the reason for pursuing adoptive parenthood (Daly, 1988, 1990; Kirk, 1964; Miall, 1987). Experts in the field of adoption (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Hartman & Laird, 1990; Kirk, 1964, 1984; Maguire-Pavao, 1991; Sorosky et al., 1978, 1984; Winkler et al., 1988) acknowledge that in Western society, adoption, which is inherently different from biological parenthood, is the "second best route to parenthood" (Brodzinsky, 1987).

In light of this perspective, much of the theoretical and empirical literature constructs adoptive relationships and adoptive parenthood, in particular, as a problematic event premised on loss and life-long adjustment to a **unique** status (Brodzinsky, 1987; Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Daly, 1988, 1990; Hartman & Laird, 1990; Kaye, 1990; Kaye & Warren, 1988; Kirk, 1964, 1984; Sorosky et al., 1978, 1984). Adoption adjustment, then, is determined by the extent to which the unique challenges associated with adoptive family relationships are appropriately acknowledged by adoptive parents (Brodzinsky, 1987; Kirk, 1964, 1984). The welfare of the adopted child and his/her psychological development, in particular, is believed to occur within this familial context.

Adoptive families are typically conceptualized as follows:

Adoptive families are structured out of loss. Infertile couples lose the

fulfillment reproduction normally brings, as well as the fantasy of biological

reproduction. This is a loss of both status and self-esteem at a time when it

seems that all other adults can reproduce. For all adoptive parents there is a

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symbolic loss, in that the child they adopt can never be the child they would have produced biologically. The emotional effects of infertility are often devastating to the couple. When poorly resolved, these losses can have potentially negative effects upon adoptive family structure. . . . With each loss comes a need to grieve and to work through the associated pain and suffering. Both parents and children of adoption lack the opportunity to grieve their losses because those losses have largely gone unrecognized by themselves and others. Instead, children of adoption and their parents are caught in another myth; that adoption is a panacea (Small, 1987, pp. 34, 36).

H. David Kirk (1964), author of Shared Fate: A Theory of Adoption and Mental Health, considered to be a classic in the field of adoption, established the foreground in developing a theoretical framework of adoptive relationships. In fact, Kirk's sociological examination represented the first major attempt to conceptualize adoptive family life (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990). Central to this theory (Kirk, 1964) was the assumption that adoptive parents are confronted with distinct challenges, dilemmas, and parenting tasks that require effective resolution before satisfactory adjustment can be attained (Kirk, 1964). For example, how successful have adoptive parents been in making the transition to adoptive parenthood? Do adoptive parents distinguish their role from biologically formed families? Are these differences of adoptive family life acknowledged to the adopted child, such as the revelation of his/her adoptive status, or are these differences minimized or rejected? And finally, how comfortable are adoptive parents in discussing the adoption experience, notably,

the adopted child's biological origins? (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Kirk, 1964).

Kirk (1964) argued that adoptive parents and adopted children experience a **shared fate**, which is essentially rooted in a mutual sense of loss and differentness associated with their unique, albeit atypical status. By acknowledging the cultural distinctions between adoptive and biological parenthood, the loss of fecundity, and the consequent loss of social status, adoptive parents are typically seen to determine the overall quality of adoptive relationships achieved with their child.

Because of the essential differences between adoptive and biological parenthood, and a lack of cultural role models, Kirk (1964) claimed that adoptive parents are rendered a "role handicap". Kirk (1964) investigated different coping methods employed by adoptive parents in order to understand the long-term patterns of adjustment within the adoptive parent-child relationship. Specifically, Kirk (1964) distinguished two alternative coping strategies utilized by adoptive parents, namely, "acknowledgement of difference", and "rejection of difference". To this end, Kirk (1964) emphasized that if adoptive parents acknowledged their differences with biological parents, rather than downplayed or rejected their differences, improved communication about, and positive adjustment to, the adoption experience would be promoted. Although these two coping patterns are not mutually exclusive, Kirk (1964) noted that one pattern tends to predominate as the primary coping strategy. The psychological risks associated with adoption (Brodzinsky, 1987) have been substantiated in the literature. Several authors have suggested that the adopted child's adjustment to his/her adoptive status is significantly enhanced if these risks are minimized (Brodzinsky, 1987; Kirk, 1964).

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Further contributions toward understanding adoptive family relationships have been advanced in recent years. Based upon extensive clinical experience, Brodzinsky (1987) described a psychosocial model of adoption adjustment adapted from Erikson's conceptualization of psychosocial development throughout the life cycle (Erikson, 1968). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine Erikson's model in depth. However, briefly, Erikson (1968) established specific psychosocial crises extending from infancy to old age that he believed required successful resolution before proceeding to the next stage of development. This family life-cycle perspective on adoption experience is further substantiated by other clinical and empirical literature (Brodzinsky et al., 1992; Hajal & Rosenberg, 1991; Hartman & Laird, 1990; Kent & Richie, 1976; LeVine & Sallee, 1990; Winkler et al., 1988).

With regard to adoptive family relationships, Brodzinsky (1987) premised his model of adoption adjustment on the major assumption that distinct and complex parenting (psychosocial) tasks confront adoptive parents. In this regard, he argues that adoptive family life may be further complicated by the degree to which these tasks are recognized, understood, and openly addressed. For example, many authors believe that effective resolution of infertility issues can have a profound impact on the couple's transition to adoptive parenthood, as well as directly affect their acceptance of the adopted child "as if born to" them (Brodzinsky, 1987; Daly, 1988; Kirk, 1964). Additional complicating factors that potentially may compound this transitional process are as follows: an intense evaluation process, followed by an indefinite time period before receiving their adopted child; the absence of appropriate role models of substitute parenthood; the societal stigma

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and different status conferred to adoptive parenthood; and finally, whether or not the timing

of the adoption process occurs within the first six months of life or later (Brodzinsky, 1987;

Kirk, 1964).

Of fundamental importance, as suggested by Brodzinsky (1987), is to advance current

understanding of possible psychological risks associated with adoption that ultimately may

affect the adjustment of the adopted child/adult. To this end, Brodzinsky (1987) asserts that,

"the degree to which adoptive parents and their children acknowledge the unique challenges

in their life, and the way in which they attempt to cope with them, largely determines their

pattern of adjustment" (Brodzinsky, 1987, p. 30).

In examining distinct patterns of coping in adoptive families, Brodzinsky (1987)

critiques Kirk's theory, as previously identified, from several aspects. First, Brodzinsky

(1987) challenges the original assumption, upon which the "rejection of difference" coping

pattern is employed by adoptive parents, postulated on the following reasons.

> Basically, **it is because they have confused the concept of difference with the**
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> **concept of deficit** [my emphasis]. To be different means to be distinct, dissimilar,
>
> or unlike someone else in form, quality, amount, or manner. It does not necessarily
>
> mean, however, that one is of **poorer** form, quality, amount, or manner. In other
>
> words, being different has no inherent value judgement attached to it. Some
>
> differences are adaptive; others are not. Some are adaptive in certain contexts, but
>
> maladaptive in other situations (Brodzinsky, 1987, p. 41).

Second, Brodzinsky (1987) contends that Kirk's model of coping suggests not only a

simplistic, linear relationship between "acknowledgement of differences" versus "rejection

of differences", but that it is "essentially static" (p. 42). One of the major weaknesses, according to Brodzinsky (1987), is failing to incorporate a more complex, life-long perspective on adoptive family life and any consequent changes in coping strategies. What he suggests is a "curvilinear" (Brodzinsky, 1987, p. 43) relationship between parental attitudes and adjustment patterns. Brodzinsky (1987) found that adoptive parents utilized the "rejection of difference" pattern during the formative years, while the "acknowledgement of difference" pattern emerged with an increased acceptance of the differences inherent in adoptive family life. Finally, Brodzinsky (1987) identified an additional coping pattern to which he referred as "insistence of difference" (p. 42). Specifically, he found that adoptive parents who emphasized their differences as the major focus of their familial relationships employed this coping pattern. These families were distinguished from other adoptive families in that their crises were of a more serious nature (i.e., problematic behaviour on the part of the child, stealing, school truancy, and so on).

One recent study (Kaye & Warren, 1988) which examined the discourse of adoption in adoptive families, presented findings that further questioned Kirk's (1964) original hypothesis regarding "acknowledgement versus rejection" of differences. Unlike Kirk (1964), who conceptualized the two coping patterns unidimensionally, Kaye and Warren (1988) observed the process of family discourse, distinguishing between high versus low in the occurrence of "acknowledgement versus rejection" of differences. Based on forty semistructured interviews in which adopted teenagers and their parents discussed their feelings and experiences of adoption, Kaye and Warren (1988) reached several conclusions. First, they found that the original dimensions of "acknowledgement of differences" versus

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"rejection of differences" continue to be important toward understanding the adoptive family, particularly in relation to the subject of adoption. Second, these authors found no evidence to substantiate that low distinguishing was analogous to rejection of difference. In fact, Kaye and Warren (1988) contend that adopted adolescents may be revealing the truth when they deny feelings of difference. Third, to "acknowledge differences" tended to be employed as a coping strategy, which Kaye and Warren (1988) recognized as a healthy and accurate response to the adoptive status. Fourth, the authors found no evidence to support the claim that the two coping patterns employed by adoptive parents are indeed a "unidimensional, pervasive coping strategy" (p. 429). Rather, this study presents empirical support for a "curvilinear" model (Kaye & Warren, 1988), substantiating the findings of Brodzinsky (1987). Therefore, to suggest that denial of differences results in adjustment problems was not substantiated (Kaye & Warren, 1987). Finally, it was found that adoptive families require long-term support.

Adoptive family relationships are primarily understood from a psychosocial, life-cycle perspective. The underlying assumption is that adoptive parenthood is inherently different from biological parenthood, thereby resulting in more complex and unique parenting tasks. Several authors (Brodzinsky, 1987; Kirk, 1964; Kaye & Warren, 1988) have emphasized the association between parental coping strategies and children's psychological adjustment to his/her adopted status. From this conceptual framework, parental attitudes, beliefs, successful adaptation, and effective coping abilities are awarded fundamental importance toward mastering adoptive parenthood. Within this familial context, the identity formation of the adopted child/adult is examined.

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CONCEPTUALIZING IDENTITY FORMATION

Much of the theoretical, empirical, and clinical literature acknowledges identity discontinuity as a potential conflict associated with the adoptive status (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; Hoopes, 1990; Kowal & Schilling, 1985; Sobol & Cardiff, 1983; Sorosky, Baran, & Pannor, 1975; Stein & Hoopes, 1985; Winkler, Brown, van Keppel, & Blanchard, 1988). Research findings indicate that adopted persons are subject to increased vulnerability to develop "identity problems", which are generally attributed to the unique psychological experience of the adoption process (Brodzinsky, 1987; Sorosky et al., 1975). Moreover, several authors (Brodzinsky et al., 1992; Kowal & Schilling, 1985; Sobol & Cardiff, 1983; Schoborg-Winterberg & Shannon, 1988; Simpson, Timm, & McCubbin, 1981; Sorosky et al., 1975) point to the fact that most adopted persons' desire to understand the genesis of their biological origins reflects a fundamental interest in reclaiming a missing part of themselves. What is evident, however, is the extent to which feelings of **differentness** pervade the personal experience of adoption, often resulting in a pervasive sense of incompleteness (Allen, 1992; Brodzinsky et al., 1992; Dean, 1991; Gediman & Brown, 1989; Lifton, 1988; Maxtone-Graham, 1983).

Identity formation figures prominently in understanding the meaning and implications of being adopted. Recognized as a dynamic, complex, and lifelong process, the experience of the adoption process raises distinct questions regarding the formation of a sense of self specific to the adopted person. For example, **how does the adopted child/adult incorporate the knowledge of being adopted?** and, **how does the adopted child/adult integrate the fact of having two sets of parents?** Several aspects of identity

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formation have been examined in the conventional literature on adoption: (1) disclosure of adoptive status; (2) birth parent romance fantasies; (3) genealogical bewilderment; and (4) disturbances in early object relationships.

The adoption story, classically known as **The Chosen Baby** (1939), is fundamental to the personal experience of adoption. The knowledge of being especially "chosen" out of many other children to be the "special" child is usually imparted at an early age to the adopted child. The disclosure of the adoptive status, therefore, conveys to the adopted child the fact that s/he is different. Brodzinsky and his associates (1984) suggest definite developmental changes in children's understanding of the nature of the adoptive family relationships, and the underlying reasons for their adoption. Results of an earlier study showed that with increasing age, adopted children's knowledge of adoption reflected more negative beliefs (Singer, Brodzinsky, & Braff, 1982).

From a psychoanalytic perspective, the unique meaning attributed to the adoptive status is believed to be a critical issue in the subsequent personality development of the adopted child (Blum, 1983; Brinich, 1980, 1990; Wieder, 1978). Specifically, considerable debate has evolved regarding the issue of developmental timing and the effects of early disclosure of the adoptive status on the adopted child. Traditional adoption practice encouraged early disclosure, usually during the preschool years. Conversely, some authors recommended that knowledge of the adoptive status should not be disclosed until resolution of the oedipal stage (Brinich, 1980; Schechter, 1960; Wieder, 1978). Sorosky and his associates (1975) claim that resolution of the oedipal complex is compounded because of the psychological difficulties related to the adoptive status.

In recent years, the importance of open communication regarding adoption has been well documented (Brodzinsky, 1987; Hartman & Laird, 1990; Kaye, 1990). As Hartman and Laird (1990) assert;

> Adopted children become empowered as they are given permission to be interested in or curious about their backgrounds and as the fact of their existence prior to placement is validated. . . . that can lead to mastery and consolidation of the adoptee's identity (p. 228-229).

Despite this recommendation, traditionally, only restricted background information was disclosed to the adoptive family regarding their child's biological history. Consequently, many individuals adopted during this era have been denied access to complete information.

The development of "birthparent romances" (Rosenberg & Horner, 1991) is recognized as a normative, albeit adaptive, aspect of identity formation in adopted children. This feature is likely to extend well into adulthood. Several authors (Chapman, Dorner, Silber, & Winterberg, 1987; Kowal & Schilling, 1985; Rosenberg & Horner, 1991; Sorosky et al., 1985) point to the fact that in an attempt to compensate for the dearth of biological information, considerable energy is expended in fantasy by adopted persons in search of answers to their historical void.

Freud (1909, 1959) is recognized for describing the concept of "family romance", a universal phenomenon of identity formation in childhood. Freud (1909, 1959) believed that children utilize the "family romance" in an attempt to deal with intense ambivalent feelings toward their parents. For example, non-adopted children would fantasize that they were adopted. Their fantasized parents were idealized, while their biological parents were

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depreciated. These "family romances" serve an adaptive and transitory function in childhood development (Freud, 1909, 1959).

The "family romance" facilitates a different, lifelong function for the adopted person, whose prolonged fantasy incorporates the existence of his/her biological parents (Rosenberg & Horner, 1991; Sorosky et al., 1975). Unlike the romantic and joyful quality of children's fantasies living with biological parents, an interplay of fact and fantasy characterize fantasies of origin among adopted children/adults. The nature of these potentially conflicted fantasies involve personal reflection with respect to reasons why they were relinquished, and what the birth parents, particularly the birth mother, is like.

Rosenberg and Horner (1991) suggest that adopted children utilize fantasy as a means to explain, understand, and integrate their adoptive status to **themselves**. Additional reasons for developing family romances have been delineated: (1) to defend against painful affect associated with the fact of being unwanted or unable to live with one's biological parents; (2) to attempt to understand the reason for the adoption, an `event' which often results in themes of abandonment and rejection; (3) to struggle to undo the "implied abandonment" within adoption, including the struggle to understand the wish for, and fear of, the biological parents who may return to reclaim him/her; (4) to serve the need of positive identification for the emerging sense of self; and, (5) in adulthood, to achieve satisfactory integration of one's biological origins, together with his/her adoptive status (Rosenberg & Horner, 1991).

With regard to identity formation, the phenomenon of "genealogical bewilderment" (Sants, 1964) is central to understanding the impact of the adoptive status on the adopted person. Having coined the concept in 1964, H.J. Sants described a state of confusion and

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uncertainty in a child who either has no knowledge of his/her biological parents or only uncertain knowledge of them (Sants, 1964). According to Sants (1964), the lack of a biological connection has the potential to severely undermine the adopted child's sense of belonging, self-esteem, and identification with adoptive parents. Consequently, a confused sense of identity is formed.

Others (Chapman et al., 1987; Kowal & Schilling, 1985; Sobol & Cardiff, 1983; Sorosky et al., 1975) support this position, suggesting that identity conflicts typically manifest themselves in a preoccupation with genealogical concerns or a desire to search for the birth parent. Many of these genealogical issues and the consequent feelings of confusion and uncertainty are often reawakened during significant life events (Sorosky et al., 1975). Marriage, the birth of a first child, or the death of one or both adoptive parents may precipitate an extreme sense of genealogical bewilderment and a compelling need for historical continuity. Typical questions include: **Who do I look like?**; and, **Why was I given away?** (Chapman et al., 1987).

Finally, Sorosky and associates (1975) identify disturbances in early object relationships as a contributing factor in the development of psychological difficulties related to identity conflicts. The quality of the mother-child relationship, especially the subsequent attachment, may be adversely affected because of the adoption process. Some authors (Daly, 1988; Goldstein et al., 1973; Kirk, 1964) have pointed out that the transition to adoptive parenthood (i.e., infertility resolution) and the timing of placement could cause undue stress and feelings of insecurity in the adoptive parents. Others examining the quality of attachment relationships have accorded primary importance to the association between

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biological connection and secure attachment (Bowlby, 1988; Schneider, 1991).

For the adopted person, the process of identity formation is conceptualized as complex and possibly conflict-ridden, leaving him/her more vulnerable to achieving a cohesive sense of self (Sorosky et al., 1975). Several authors (Kowal & Schilling, 1985; Rosenberg & Horner, 1991; Sobol & Cardiff, 1983; Sorosky et al., 1975) indicate that self-formation may be complicated by the degree to which the adopted person integrates the knowledge of his/her biological origins. Hence, it is imperative that the adoptive status be fully accepted. As Rosenberg and Horner (1991) contend, "The degree to which adult adoptees are able to achieve a cohesive integration of self-dynamics may depend on how well they are able to accept the facts as simply facts and to tolerate the ambiguity of their origins" (p. 76).

Identity discontinuity and the consequent feelings of loss, shame, isolation, alienation, personal incompleteness, along with a pervasive sense of not belonging are believed to be rooted predominantly in adoptive family relationships. Poor adoption adjustment and ineffective coping strategies on the part of adoptive parents are cited as popular explanations for adopted persons' struggles with identity. Additionally, despite not having access to complete background information concerning one's origins, the feelings about and meanings ascribed to the identity "adopted" are conceptualized as originating from within the adopted person. Consequently, the process of achieving a strong (i.e., "complete") sense of self is primarily understood within the context of personal strength or personal inadequacy. A critical question remains, how does the process of adoption develop into the search for a "complete" sense of self?

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EXPLAINING THE SEARCH FOR A "COMPLETE" SENSE OF SELF

The motivation to search for and reunite with the birth parent is usually conceptualized as a need to "complete" a true sense of identity, as well as the need to experience human connectedness. For most individuals adopted within the traditional paradigm an official policy of secrecy governed adoption practices. As Silverman and associates (1988) contend, " it was assumed that adoptees and birth parents would never need to know each other, that adoptees would never ask why they were surrendered, and that birth parents would not be concerned about their child's subsequent development". (p. 523). As previously indicated, current statistics of the Adoption Disclosure Register point to the fact that historical perspectives of secrecy do not accurately reflect the present needs of those involved in the adoption experience (Adoption Disclosure Register, Personal Communication, January 10, 1997). In fact, an increasing number of search requests strongly suggest that the aura of secrecy and mystique has had an enormous impact on how the adopted person eventually feels about him/her self. For this reason, exploring the significance of the search and reunion process may broaden our current understanding of the extent to which traditional adoption practices continue to influence the adopted adult's view of self.

Several empirical studies challenge prevalent assumptions that birth mothers have forgotten their relinquished child. Sorosky and associates (1978) found that 82% of birth parents, the majority of whom were birth mothers (95%), expressed an interest in meeting their child. In this study of 38 birth parents, 82% admitted to persistent feelings and fantasies about their child's well-being, while 95% stated they would update their personal

information contained in the adoption files. Silverman and associates (1988) report that birth parents often felt pressured to surrender their baby, which contributed to a delayed grief reaction occurring several years later (Deykin et al., 1984). Further studies (Campbell, 1991; Churchman, 1986; and Inglis, 1984) consistently reveal the enduring need of birth parents to know what happened to the child they relinquished.

The adopted person's motivation to search is well documented in several empirical studies (Aumend & Barrett, 1983; Auth & Zaret, 1986; Campbell, Silverman & Patti, 1991; Gonyo & Watson, 1988; Kowal & Schilling, 1985; Rosenzweig-Smith, 1988; Sachdev, 1992; Simpson et al., 1981; Sobol & Cardiff, 1983; Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1974; Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1975; Triseliotis, 1973). The major research findings point to the fact that it is predominantly female adults who search for their birth parents (Campbell et al., 1991; Kowal & Schilling, 1985; Rosenzweig-Smith, 1988; Simpson et al., 1981; Silverman et al., 1988; Sobol & Cardiff, 1983; Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978). Silverman and associates (1988) reported an average age of twenty-seven (27) for those interested in reunification, while a recent study by Campbell and associates (1991) found that adopted persons interested in reunification were considerably older (32.8 years).

There is very little known regarding the search and reunion experiences of men. Generally, men represent a relatively small proportion of respondents in research studies. A study by Sorosky and associates (1978) found that men were less likely to search for their biological (birth) parents. This trend has remained relatively unchanged. In a recent study (Campbell et al., 1991), adopted women respondents outnumbered adopted men respondents at an estimated ratio of 9 to 1. However, all the male respondents initiated the search for the

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birth parent. Despite the apparent discrepancies in the proportion of male and female respondents in research studies, a recent study by Sachdev (1992) indicates that women and men share similarities with regard to their desire to know of their unknown past and motivation to search.

Current research consistently documents the motivation to search from the primary perspective of identity formation (Aumend & Barrett, 1983; Auth & Zaret, 1986; Campbell et al., 1991; Silverman et al., 1988; Sorosky et al., 1975). For example, the search in adoption is usually conceptualized as a developmental process toward further consolidation of a "complete" identity or a search for a sense of self (Auth & Zaret, 1986; Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Depp, 1982; Gonyo & Watson, 1988; Partridge, 1991; Sachdev, 1992; Sobol & Cardiff, 1983). Sobol and Cardiff (1983) point to the fact that the motivation to search is prompted by the adopted person's sense of personal incompleteness, the need to understand his/her birth origins, and the desire to enhance his/her personal feelings of completeness.

Other reasons cited for the adopted person's commitment to search include: the desire for background/medical information, to obtain information to pass on to future generations, curiosity, the quest for increased self-understanding in relation to the unknown past, and the need to fill a void arising from confusion and a sense of emptiness (Campbell et al., 1991; Kowal & Schilling, 1985; Rosenzweig-Smith, 1988; Simpson et al., 1981). The need to further develop and complete a more cohesive identity, to satisfy an existential need to know one's ancestry propelled by feelings of alienation and loneliness, and to obtain a sense of belonging, the need for which is often stimulated by a life cycle transition, such as marriage,

pregnancy, birth of a child, and the death of an adoptive parent have also been cited as reasons for the adopted person's impetus and commitment to search for his/her biological parents (Campbell et al., 1991; Kowal & Schilling, 1985; Sachdev, 1992; Simpson et al., 1981; Sorosky et al., 1974; Sorosky et al., 1975). As well, some adopted persons cite the wish for a relationship with the birth parent (Campbell et al., 1991; Sobol & Cardiff, 1983) and a desire to establish a sense of historical continuity (Auth & Zaret, 1986).

Bertocci and Schechter (1991) and Partridge (1991) identify several challenges to identity formation experienced by the adopted person: loss and reparation, body image and sexuality, envy and jealousy, possessiveness, locus of control, internal sense of human connectedness (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991) unacknowledged losses, lack of groundedness in reality, tension and secrecy, being loved, wanted or good enough, invisibility and mirroring, divided identity, and a sense of differentness (Partridge, 1991). These challenges, however, attribute personal responsibility for ongoing questions about identity. It is evident that the impact of sociocultural, historical, and political factors on identity formation within the adoption process has been largely overlooked and therefore, warrants further consideration.

The current state of knowledge in the area of search and reunion research reveals a consistent view that the experience of adoption has significant implications for the individual's evolving sense of identity. Earlier studies claimed that adopted persons who searched had very little information concerning their biological origins (Kowal & Schilling, 1985; Sobol & Cardiff, 1983), were unhappy with their adoptive parents, and had poorer self-concepts (Aumend & Barrett, 1983). However, Campbell and associates (1991) found

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that the process of searching may be easier with the additional support of the adoptive family. In fact, Campbell et al. (1991) found that most adopted persons were not unhappy with the way adoption was addressed in their adoptive family. This finding contradicts earlier conclusions which suggest some dissatisfaction with adoptive relationships (Aumend & Barrett, 1984; Triseliotis, 1973).

Because search and reunions between adopted persons and birth parents are a relatively recent phenomenon to which professionals have only begun to direct their attention, few research studies have been completed. Three studies were located that have studied this issue.

Campbell et al. (1991) studied 114 adults who initiated reunions with their birth parents within one month following the initial correspondence. Of those 114 individuals, 69% made contact with their birth mothers, who were generally receptive to the reunion. As a consequence of the reunion, the majority of adopted persons experienced enhanced self-esteem and more positive relationships with their adoptive parents. In fact, all participants stated they would initiate the search again.

Silverman, Campbell, Patti, and Style (1988) interviewed 170 birth parents, 79% of whom had initiated reunions with their relinquished child. The remaining 21% were found by their adult son or daughter who sought them out. The central finding of this study reveals that 98% of both searching and nonsearching birth parents said they would still have a reunion. Moreover, many birth mothers would undertake the search if they had another opportunity to do so. Regardless of the reunion outcome, the birth mothers described the reunion as a healing and positive experience.

Rosenzweig-Smith (1988) tested three hypotheses regarding the success of reunions with a sample of 31 adopted persons and their birth mothers. Her findings suggest that more successful reunions occur among younger individuals and among those who felt that the birth father was responsible for the relinquishment decision.

Much of the current research and theoretical literature (primarily derived from clinical experience) is premised on the underlying assumption that many individuals seek to resolve questions about personal identity, questions that are considered to be a "normal" and "natural" adjustment to the adoption process. Even the need to seek contact with a birth relative has been conceptualized as the search for a more "complete" sense of self. One recent study (Campbell et al., 1991) poignantly reveals that adopted persons " seem to need to bring the two parts of themselves together so that they can build a sense of self that feels complete to them" (p. 334). For some individuals, this further development of a more cohesive identity is believed to occur within the search and reunion process. This quest for a "complete" sense of self, however, is predicated on the fundamental assumption that individuals who are adopted are incomplete and deficient in some way.

Most of what is currently known about adoption tends to be inadequately conceptualized from a theoretical perspective, clinical in orientation, and primarily derived from quantitative studies with pre-selected populations. In-depth interview studies in the adoption research are currently nonexistent. Many of these studies employing quantitative research designs focused on specific outcomes (e.g., "degree of success") with respect to the adoption experience. Many studies viewed adoption as a potentially problematic event requiring a lifelong process of adjustment for everyone involved. The result is an emphasis

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on the seemingly `private' and individualized reactions to the adoption experience, an experience that excludes consideration of both sociocultural and historical factors.

Identity formation within the adoption process is a complex issue and influenced by a multitude of factors. For the individual who is adopted, the knowledge of adoption inevitably shapes his/her subjective experience of an "in/complete" identity. The current state of knowledge in the area of adoption recognizes the desire to search as a near universal phenomenon (Sachdev, 1992).

Being adopted bears significant meaning for individuals who are prohibited access to full knowledge of their biological origins. The salient themes of identity discontinuity include: experiencing a sense of personal incompleteness, a sense of disconnection from oneself and others, a sense of not belonging, and diminished self-esteem. Studies have consistently shown that the intense desire to achieve a historical sense of self is uppermost for many adopted persons, and is particularly salient throughout adulthood. It is evident, however, that many individuals who are adopted seem committed to transform their personal experience of the adoption process and of themselves as people. "The search for origins is much more complex than a simple search for an idealized "happy reunion" with a "lost" parent (Picton, 1982, p. 50). I believe it is imperative to further understand how the process of adoption develops into a problem of identity, why individuals "search and reunite", and in particular, how adopted persons reconcile the sites of tension in a culture that privileges the biological family.

DOMINANT UNDERSTANDING OF ADOPTION

The institution of adoption, in contemporary Western society, is a widely accepted social arrangement established to meet the needs of the birth parent, the prospective adoptive parents, and the child seen to be in need of a socially approved family. The established view of adoption, however, is typically conceptualized as a **problematic event**, indicating that adoption inevitably means **coping with failure**. Such `failures' tend to denote pathology on the part of adoptive parents who are unable to fulfil the normative expectations of either biological parenthood or acceptable family life.

Based on this unidimensional perspective, the adoption experience is unquestionably rooted in differentness, requiring lifelong adjustment, for all involved, to a unique familial status. Clearly, the current state of knowledge in the field of adoption rests on several unchallenged assumptions about what constitutes "normal" and "natural" behaviour.

The social arrangement of adoption is established on certain ideologies which give primacy to the biological family, biological parenthood, and a distinct form of kinship structure that values the ownership of children while disavowing the reality of multiple family membership. It is within this societal context that adoption is associated with individual failure; the birth mother who conceives out of wedlock; the adoptive parents who are unable to conceive in wedlock; and finally, the infant, born within these sociocultural and historical circumstances, who becomes the property of the institution of adoption because of his/her "illegitimate" status. Thus, to preserve the structure and functioning of the dominant social order, it seems that every effort has been made to model adoption on the privileged category "biological". From the outset, then, the adoptive family

is perceived as "other", and thus produced discursively as different.

The traditional paradigm of adoption established practices to safeguard the secrecy, anonymity, mystique, and the illusion of normalcy. It is evident, however, that the adoption process has been organized through dominant ideologies that propagate the normalization of family life and the valorization of biological connectedness. Established adoption practices, (i.e., complete severance of the birth parent from the adoptive family, together with the **sealed** record agreement) are practices that begin to take on a radically different meaning when challenged against dominant ideologies and the interests of maintaining the category "biological" as the privileged standard of social organization.

The dominant understanding of adoption starts from the premise that the adoption experience necessitates psychological, lifelong adjustment for members of the adoptive family. Specifically, adoptive family relationships are premised on loss, while the adopted person is confronted with integrating the knowledge of having two sets of parents. This view of adoption advances the notion that adoptive parents and the adopted child are solely responsible for the creation of their own subjective experience of adoption. One author claims that adoptive parents "have confused the concept of difference with the concept of deficit" and further, that, "being different has no inherent value judgement attached to it" (Brodzinsky, 1987, p. 41). In my view, this perspective of adoption only serves to individualize and pathologize an experience that is embedded in, organized through, and attributed meaning in our culture.

At the individual level, one might wonder how feelings of shame, inadequacy, and disloyalty become internalized into one's developing sense of self. Additionally, how can

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the adopted person be openly curious about his/her biological origins without suggesting that the adoptive parents have in some way "failed". Lifton (1988) queries, "Is genetic relatedness necessary to form an authentic sense of self?" (p. xiii). From the dominant perspective, it is evident that being the child of a biological connection is a critical characteristic of defining and forming one's "complete" identity.

Current conceptualizations of identity formation within the adoption process tend to advance an individualistic, deterministic, and ahistorical perspective rather than one contextualized in nature. Individualistic perspectives are based on the underlying assumption that adopted persons are autonomous, self-correcting, and coherent individuals who are predominantly controlled by internal dynamics. What is largely overlooked, however, is the intersubjective context of the individual's subjective experience of the adoption process. For example, how does the template "as if born to" become productive of the adopted person's identity formation, causing ongoing struggles of identity to ensue?

Much of the literature that examines adoption has developed out of a psychosocial framework. The perspective emphasized within this framework has been on the psychological adaptation to the adoptive status of all those involved in the adoption process. The result is an emphasis on the degree of ease or difficulty with which the adoptive family and the individual members achieve an optimal level of adjustment. What this perspective minimizes is the multiple influences of the social environment which are necessary to understand the total experience of the individual as constituted within his/her cultural context. Rather, the individual tends to be perceived as a distinct entity whose experience transcends historical, societal, and cultural context. Consequently, theoretical paradigms

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(i.e., psychology and sociology) tend to premise the understanding of human behaviour from either an individualistic or a social perspective (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984; Weedon, 1987).

The current state of knowledge in the area of adoption reveals a consistent view of the autonomous, rational, and self-directed adopted person in the context of his/her private adoptive familial relationships. However, despite the sociological perspective advanced by Kirk (1964), as well as the psychosocial model adapted from Erikson (Brodzinsky, 1992), little insight is provided into how cultural values and beliefs have created and produced the adoption experience. Even the psychoanalytic perspective accounts for problems of identity by internal dynamics, especially rooted in early life experiences. Typically, current explanation focuses predominantly on individualistic theories of psychological adaptation for the adopted person, as well as on individualistic ideologies in the form of biologism in addressing conceptions of the family and motherhood. More specifically, current theoretical understandings offer "single cause deterministic explanations" (Gavey, 1989) of self-identity formation of the adopted person. The current focus is helpful, but needs to be supplemented with increased insight into understanding how the process of adoption develops into an ongoing and problematic question of identity.

Although the dominant perspective is useful, reasons for the problem of identity formation within the adoption process remain unexplained and poorly conceptualized in the research and adoption literature. The problem of identity is typically assigned individual and familial responsibility and generally is considered to be indicative of personal deficiency. How the sociocultural, historical, and political factors organize and regulate the identity

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"adopted" have been largely devalued and therefore, necessitate further consideration.

Consistent with Social Work values, the political intent of my work is to bypass the individual-social distinction that is propagated in the conventional literature on adoption. Specifically, the work of both Kirk (1964) and Brodzinsky (1992), is problematic because it positions the problem of identity within the adopted person, as well as individualizes the adoption experience. Kirk (1964), in particular, fails to challenge the biological family as the privileged standard of social organization. Instead, his work re-inscribes the biological family as "normal", and thus re-produces the identity "adopted" as "other" by proposing "coping strategies" for adoptive parents to employ in their lifelong process of "adoption adjustment". Brodzinsky's (1992) explanation of "psychosocial tasks" also functions to re-produce the "fictional" story of adoption, rather than challenge dominant assumptions about the "normal" social order. The work of Kirk (1964) and Brodzinsky (1992) exemplify how the individual-social distinction is continually perpetuated through the dominant position of the literature on adoption. Hence, the "problem of identity" is re-inscribed as the sole responsibility of the adopted person and his/her adoptive family.

One of the most fundamental values governing adoption is the normative status accorded to the family structure formed through biological connections. Being adopted, then, is unnatural and second best to those who belong to the category "biological". Ultimately, women and men who are adopted may need to know that their feelings of differentness and personal deficiency are produced and re-produced within a socio-cultural context that repudiates difference.

CHAPTER THREE

A POST-STRUCTURALIST PERSPECTIVE ON ADOPTION:

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

. . . our society and other societies are unable to encompass difference, indeed, to
value and cherish difference as the source of hope and growth for all of us.
Difference comes to mean "better" and "worse".   . . . We all have a long history
of learning to fear difference. Difference has been made to be the source of power
for some and the source of destruction for others. Further, particular characteristics
such as those based on class, race, gender, or even an individual ability (such as an
ability which may allow access to a profession), have been used to define the total
person. This fear of difference springs from the dominant - subordinate tradition in
which **difference means deficiency** [my emphasis] - and deficiency is the organizing
principle. As subordinates we are told that we are deficient - a falsity. Then, the
alleged deficiencies are used against us. Meanwhile, dominants uphold the pretense
that they do not have deficiencies - another falsity. Everyone becomes terrified of
difference because it means deficiency (Baker-Miller, 1986, p. 136-37).

Jean Baker-Miller's words strike at the heart of the ideological work adoption
achieves by policing families and producing difference as "other". Through the concrete
production of difference, the biological family is re-produced as "normal" in the interests of

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perpetuating the dominant social order. Hence, the privileged category "biological" is taken up as the natural basis of our culture. The category "adopted" is constituted and subsequently positioned "other" to the biological family.

The theoretical perspective of post-structuralism offers a radically different understanding of the problem of identity within adoption. I am particularly drawn to this intellectual framework because it helps to develop a more liberatory alternative to individualizing discourses that function to continually tie the adopted person to the deficit identity position. As well, post-structuralism works to transcend the individual-social distinction by showing how the adopted person is inextricable from the social context.

As previously mentioned, my theoretical framework is most closely aligned with the work of Chris Weedon (1987) who advances a politically-motivated and feminist post-structuralist analysis. A post-structuralist conceptualization of the issues offers the possibility of choice (or resistance), change, and transformation in the dominant meanings ascribed to adoption. In particular, a post-structuralist perspective proposes new and useful insights into understanding the origins of the adoption experience in subjectivity, suggests reasons for how this experience may be contradictory or inconsistent, and advances an explanation for how differences are produced at the level of the individual. While critically questioning and challenging the received view of adoption this "new reading permits the possibility of struggle to work for transformation of that sociality, those practices, and of the subject-positions produced within them" (Walkerdine, 1985, p. 238). In Western society, the implications of adoption can not be avoided, but alternative meanings of adoption, and in particular, of the "problem of identity", can be cultivated.

I will argue that adoption is a category of discrimination of social organization in our familialized culture. Premised on the underlying assumption that the category "adopted" is socially constructed, the "complex conceptual work up" (Smith, 1979) of the adoption experience as "other" will be critically examined. Central to this critical analysis will be a discussion of structural influences that impact the adopted person, and provide a historical and sociocultural context by which to understand the individual's subjective experience of adoption.

Clearly the meaning of the adopted person's experience can only be understood as it is constituted within history and culture. Post-structuralism advances the notion that it is within the adoptive family (adoptive parents) that the subjective experience of the adopted person is predominantly produced through specific forms of social analysis. Following a brief theoretical overview of post-structuralism, I will present a critical examination of the adoption experience. Specifically, I will demonstrate how the adoptive family functions as a site of social regulation in the interests of policing families and to maintain the ideological power of the biological family. I will then discuss how the identity "adopted" is a social construction, and in particular, how adopted persons are forced to take up the deficit identity position "other".

POST-STRUCTURALISM: A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Post-structuralism developed its conceptual foundations from the contributions of several theorists and perspectives, including post-Saussurean linguistics, Althusser's theory of ideology, psychoanalysis, and the work of Derrida and Foucault, to name only a few

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(Henriques et al., 1984; Weedon, 1987). The term, post-structuralism, does not have one fixed meaning, but necessarily applies to a range of theoretical positions incorporated within this perspective. Thus, the theoretical underpinnings of post-structuralism are "transdisciplinary" in origin, and present a theoretical framework which is conceptually complex, and often discussed in difficult and unfamiliar language (Gavey, 1989). Different forms of post-structuralism, however, share certain fundamental assumptions about major concepts, such as **subjectivity**, **language**, **discourse**, and **power/knowledge** (Weedon, 1987).

Weedon (1987) claimed that post-structuralism offers a useful conceptual framework that accounts for the relationship between the individual and the social. She asserts that post-structuralism advances " a contextualization of experience and an analysis of its constitution and ideological power" (Weedon, 1987, p. 125). Within this framework, the underlying premise that the individual is social, and the social is individual, is of central importance. On the one hand, one can perceive the adopted individual as essentially different from the nonadopted individual. On the other hand, the adopted individual can be perceived as socially constituted as different and subjected to social relations (i.e., social regulative practices and processes) in different ways from the nonadopted individual. Post-structuralism demands attention to this latter viewpoint.

Weedon (1987) described (feminist) post-structuralism as, " a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change" (p. 40-41). In this thesis, it is argued that a post-structuralist perspective would

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propose particularly new and useful insights into understanding the origins of the adoption experience in subjectivity, reasons for why this experience may be contradictory or inconsistent, and advance an explanation for how differences are produced at the level of the individual. While critically questioning and challenging the received view of adoption, "A new reading permits the possibility of struggle to work for transformation of that sociality, those practices, and of the subject-positions produced within them (Walkerdine, 1985, p. 238).

Subjectivity and **subject position** are major concepts of post-structuralist theory. Subjectivity (sense of self) refers to " the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself, and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (Weedon, 1987, p. 32). Post-structuralism critiques the ideology of individualism (unified and rational **self**) in favour of the notion of subjectivities (decentered **subject**) created through language, discourse, and circumscribed meaning within social institutions and practices. Subjectivity, then, is constituted or constructed through language and discourse.

The importance of **language** (and discourse) as a constitutive process of created subjectivities has recently been well documented (Gavey, 1989; Henriques et al., 1984; Steedman, 1987; Walkerdine, 1981, 1986, 1990; Walkerdine & Lucy, 1989; Weedon, 1987). Weedon (1987) points out that, "Language is not the expression of unique individuality; it constructs the individual's subjectivity in ways which are socially specific" (p. 21). From a post-structuralist perspective, individual experience of the world has no essential or fixed interpretation, except as the meaning of experience is constituted through

language and available discourses.

It is important to note, however, that subjectivity is not a unified or fixed process. Post-structuralism challenges the liberal humanist notion of an essential nature within individuals. Rather, subject positions (i.e., ways of being an individual), are described as fragmentary, contradictory, inconsistent, and essentially in process, constantly being reconstituted within a range of discourses (Weedon, 1987). Post-structuralism claims that individuals are the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity which are produced within an historically specific social-cultural context (Weedon, 1987). Consequently, individual subjectivity is socially produced through language and therefore is neither innate nor genetically determined.

The terms **discursive field** and **discourse** are central to post-structuralism, and particularly relevant to its theories of language and subjectivity. Discursive field, a concept articulated by the French theorist Michel Foucault (Weedon, 1987), refers to a particular sphere (e.g., the family) wherein language and social meaning are located and structured. The social institution and practices of the family, for example, are organized by a range of meanings circumscribed through language. Within a discursive field competing discourses are rooted in history; (dominant) discourses that preserve the status quo, or (alternative/marginal) discourses that challenge existing practices. Consistent with a post-structuralist approach, subjectivity and the consequent subject positions (often conflicting and competing), are constituted through language. Discursive practices (i.e., actions and behaviours), evidenced at a particular historical moment and within a particular discourse to which the individual is subjected, form subjectivity.

The concepts of subjectivity, language, and discourse are essential to analyzing the forms, operation, and effects of social power prevalent within the institution of adoption. Social power is not necessarily coercive, but manifests itself through social practices of everyday life and constructs as well as governs the subject position of adopted. This power is regulative and informs self-knowledge. A post-structuralist approach positions the adoption experience within, and constituted by, social and linguistic processes. One might wonder, for example, how adopted persons have been shaped by the belief that they lack something as persons which often results in feelings of personal failure and the conviction that **something may be wrong** with **them**.

This analysis is concerned with understanding the created subject position of "adopted" in Western society, and is particularly concerned with examining the effects of power on the person's subjectivity. A post-structuralist conceptualization of the issues offers the possibility of choice (or resistance), change, and transformation in the meanings ascribed to adoption. In Western society, the implications of adoption can not be avoided, but alternative interpretations (meanings) of adoption can be cultivated.

ADOPTIVE FAMILY AS A SITE OF SOCIAL REGULATION

The institution of adoption is an important site for the analysis of social power because "the most powerful discourses in our society have firm institutional bases" (Weedon, 1987, p. 109). Such forms of power are organized through the discursive field of adoption (i.e., established social practices), and the social relations produced within the discourse of adoption. From a post-structuralist perspective, fixed or universal meanings of

"adopted" cannot be abstracted from history. Rather, meanings of "adopted" are necessarily located in, and defined by, historically specific discourses (Weedon, 1987).

A post-structuralist conceptualization of adoption critically examines the existing relationship between the discursive field of adoption, the forms of subjectivity constituted within adoption, and the operation of power relations. This analysis will specifically examine the adoptive family as a site of social regulation, and as a site for the discursive production of "adopted" as subject position. **What discursive practices organize adoption in our society? How does the adoptive family and the adopted person mediate this experience? How is identity formation of the adopted person socially produced?** In order to re-work the process of identity formation within the experience of adoption, examination of existing institutional practices and processes is required. Essentially, it is through the social practices of daily life (within Western culture) that the meaning of being "adopted" is constructed and subjectivity is formed.

Historically, discourses about adoption organize meanings in terms of secrecy, anonymity, mystique, and the illusion of normalcy. Traditional adoption practices (i.e., closed paradigm), when organized through such discourses, perpetuate closed, secretive, restricted, and regulative practices. Several illustrations of these practices will be discussed below. Such discourses produce social meaning of adoption and of being "adopted". Consequently, the adopted person organizes his/her sense of self (subjectivity), as well as his/her experience of and relation to the world through established discursive practices. Subjective experience of the world, as an adopted person, is rooted in these practices, and permeates his/her ways of being as an individual subject.

Traditional adoption practices incorporate restrictions and regulations that necessarily affect the adopted person's sense of self. From a post-structuralist perspective, the adoptive family is viewed as an important and powerful site of social regulation, as well as the site for discursive production of the meaning of adopted (Weedon, 1987).

Traditionally, adoption practices have been developed on the principle that adoptive families need to be created and governed. Prevailing assumptions about the "normal" family, the "best interests of the child", and the "good" mother, manifest hidden power, re-inscribing the category "biological" and the re-creation of the adoptive family. Dominant cultural meanings deploy power by ascribing specific meanings to practices (i.e., family) as "natural" and others as different or "unnatural". Common sense knowledge, for example, tells us that the adoptive family cannot possibly be the same as, or equal to, the biological family. As a consequence, members of the adoptive family are likely to incorporate their differentness as personal deficiency. Consistent with a post-structuralist approach, I argue that individual experience is highly vulnerable to influence and organization through ideology.

As previously discussed, the social organization of the family is modeled on the biological family. Barrett and McIntosh (1987) argue that the dominant paradigm of the family reciprocally exists, both as a social institution and as an ideological configuration. According to Barrett and McIntosh (1987), understanding the degree to which our society invests in the biological family necessitates recognition of this category of social organization as a social construction.

I have often wondered why those in power are invested in supporting the biological family as the privileged category of social organization. Historically, I believe the state

needed to control "appropriate" sexual norms in order to safeguard the nuclear family form. Enforcing "acceptable" sexual behaviour is particularly relevant in gaining insight to the creation of the closed system of adoption and the need for regulated silence within the adoptive family. For example, birth mothers' personal accounts of relinquishment typically reveal their deep sense of shame for having given birth "outside of wedlock". Often forced to place their baby for adoption because of violating proper sexual mores and being "single" birth mothers, they were also forced to disavow the reality of that birth by agreeing to "go on with their lives". Privileging the biological family also guarantees that individual families care for children. Additionally, privatizing the cost of children firmly establishes a public/private split wherein it is assumed that the state does not have to intervene in the private family unless it is warranted by them. The state will often intervene on behalf of biological parents requesting that their biological child be taken away from the adoptive parents and returned to them. For example, the well-publicized case of Baby Jessica in the United States is a real demonstration that patriarchy exists where parental ownership takes precedence over "other" relationships. I am left wondering what we mean by the "best interests of the child". It strikes me that we have very little, if any, respect for relationships in the face of the ownership of "the family".

These are some of the social practices that develop from the needs of the state. It is only from this broader context that we can begin to understand how the adoptive family is regulated and maintained as "other" in order to reinforce the ideological power of the biological family.

Ideologically, the kinship structure formed through biological connections is socially

constituted as the "ideal" family, and positions "other" family forms outside these normative boundaries. Variations upon the cultural ideal are invariably perceived as unnatural, different, and likely deficient (Barrett & McIntosh, 1987). Consequently, the category of adoption is socially constituted as an unnatural (familial) arrangement predicated on differences from societal expectations of normality. This dichotomy between "natural" and "unnatural" is problematic because, by implication, the biological family is deemed "natural", while diverse family forms assigned to the category "other" are "unnatural". Clearly, "the family" becomes a primary and powerful site of contradictions between biologism and culturalism.

Traditional adoption practices were organized in such a manner to ensure the continuity of this ideal family image, an image that maintains the dominant view of what the family **should** be. Formerly, for example, the adoptive couple and adopted infant were invariably **matched** according to racial, cultural, and physical characteristics in order to emulate the genetic birth experience (Cole & Donley, 1990). Such adoption procedures served to regulate the illusion of normalcy and perpetuate the social meaning of adoption. The subjective experience of the adoptive couple is shaped by the belief that the adopted child is their **own** (as if born to them), and yet, they are positioned as **substitute** (second best) parents.

The universalized model and ideological power of "the family" preserves the notion that children necessarily belong to only one family (Hartman & Laird, 1990). The philosophical view of the "best interests of the child" (Goldstein, Freud, & Solnit, 1973) is operative in adoption practices to ensure proper **ownership** of children as sanctioned in

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Western culture. Consequently, the creation of adoptive families is predicated on the social need to restrict the child's family membership to his/her **real** (legal) family, and thereby legitimize regulative practices that "cut off" (Winkler et al., 1988) all historical connections.

Within the adoption paradigm, children are currently perceived as the private **property** of their parents and as belonging to the adoptive family (Farrell-Smith, 1983; Winkler et al., 1988). This notion of children as **property** of their kinship structures is particularly problematic for adopted persons, who have undeniable biological connections outside of their adoptive family. Based on the ownership model of children (Barrett & McIntosh, 1987), adopted persons are forced to deny the reality of their membership in another family. Adopted persons are compelled to either deny their biological origins, in the interests of preserving the adoptive family, (and maintaining the position "other") or confront their origins while possibly facing feelings of disloyalty, guilt and shame. One might wonder how adopted persons attempt to reconcile contradictory feelings concerning their sense of self in relation to their adoptive family and biological origins.

The conception of "good" mothering practices is fundamental to fully understanding the social meanings ascribed to the adoptive family. The need and desire to mother is socially produced within our culture and viewed as essential for the achievement of womanhood and femininity (Henriques et al., 1984; Weedon, 1987). The implication for adoptive mothers is " that childless women are not quite what they should be [given that] the `essential' biological nature of women guarantees the inevitability that we should fulfill particular economic and social functions" (Weedon, 1987, p. 130). Within the dominant discourse of "good" mothering practices, adoptive mothers necessarily take up the subject

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position "other" in which inhere social meanings of differentness, deficiency, and inadequacy as women.

The ideology of motherhood is pervasive and deeply embedded in Western society, producing normative expectations of "good" mothering. In particular, the "motherhood mandate" (Russo, 1976), requires that all women should be mothers; and that motherhood is a woman's "raison d'etre" (p. 144). In fact, Russo (1976) suggests, that the woman-as-mother assumption is so closely connected to basic values and beliefs about the 'proper and normal' way of life that having no children is still perceived as a deficient condition. By implication, it is likely that women who are unable to reproduce may be perceived and perceive themselves as deficient. For example, Rich (1986) asks how can an adoptive mother be a "good mother" according to the institution of motherhood which values biological over social motherhood?. Clearly the ideology of motherhood functions as a construction of social power which gives form and meaning to the individual experience.

These dominant assumptions of the "normal" family, the "best interests of the child", and the "good" mother manifest one form of social power through ideology to conceptualize the adoptive family, as well as inform the subjective experience of each member. The social position of the adoptive family falls outside the dominant cultural definition. The status of **unnatural, different**, and likely **deficient**, is conferred on the adoptive family. I argue that discursive practices of adoption incorporate these cultural meanings and create certain subject positions for members of the adoptive family. Difference, which usually indicates deficiency in Western society, as well as the typical understanding of adoption premised on loss (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990), are dominant beliefs which necessarily shape the

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subjective experience of all involved. The adoptive family, then, becomes the site of social regulation where meanings about adoption are constructed and re-produced in the interests of propagating the dominant ideology of the "biological" family.

Clearly the adoptive family is seen as "second best" because it constitutes the negative of "biological". Being created "other", however, functions to reinforce the ideological power of "the family" which further secures our knowledge of the privileged category "biological". For example, adoptive parents are forced to subscribe to "as if born to" discourses so that they can function as a "normal" family, and thus demonstrate their "good" parenting skills according to the established discursive rules. Due to the strength of regulation of the biological family adoptive parents are also forced to pretend "as if" they are biological parents when they are not. Hence, the adoptive family is forced to live "as if" something is true when it is not. Positioning the adoptive family as a site of social regulation provides a broader context to understand the ideological work adoption as "other" does by policing families which reproduces "normal".

Several regulative practices operate in the formation of the adoptive family. This analysis will focus on the intense evaluation and selection process of prospective adoptive parents, together with the discursive practices of the adoptive family. Some authors (Donzelot, 1979; Barrett & McIntosh, 1987) claim that social agencies, like adoption, function as part of the social regulatory apparatus whose primary aim is to govern "through the family". Donzelot (1979) refers to this form of social management, which involves increased intervention and supervision of the family, as the "tutelary complex". From a post-structuralist perspective, the adoptive family signifies a fundamentally important site of

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social management.

Traditionally, prospective adoptive parents entered the institution of adoption with the requirement that they undergo an extensive evaluation to determine their suitability for, and entitlement, to parenthood. This formal adoption procedure usually involved a home study, in which applicants were required to complete forms and submit to a series of interviews designed to assess their history, values, and beliefs, especially concerning child-rearing practices (Fishman, 1992; Kirk, 1964; Sorosky et al., 1978, 1984). Such procedures, according to Cole & Donley (1990), were **investigative** in nature, and necessarily awarded complete authority to adoption agencies in selecting suitable adoptive parents. In the past, prospective adoptive parents had very little, if any, autonomy in the selection process, where eligibility for parenthood often required documented proof of infertility (Cole & Donley, 1990; Miall, 1986). In fact, even today, social workers (i.e., representatives of the institution of adoption) hold the power to either fulfill, or reject, adoptive parents' formal request and desire to be parents.

These regulating selection requirements produced through the discourse of adoption, invariably position the adoptive couple, from the outset, as "other" (second best) because of their inability to achieve biological parenthood. The adoptive mother, in particular, may fail to fulfill the normative expectations of motherhood through her own "natural" reproductive capacity. Neither the adoptive couple nor the adoptive mother seem to have alternative discourses with which to establish a healthy sense of identity (i.e., of an okay person/parent/mother). In fact, the discourse of adoption creates subject positions for the adoptive couple and adoptive mother premised predominantly on loss, personal failure, and

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shame (Daly, 1988; Miall, 1987).

The participation of the adoptive family, especially the adoptive parents, is governed by their positioning within the discursive practices. Their subject position has been regulated to closely emulate biological parenthood (Hartman & Laird, 1990). Formerly, as stated previously, the closed paradigm of adoption organized social practices to ensure the achievement of secrecy, anonymity, mystique, and the illusion of normalcy for all involved. Once the prospective adoptive parents were approved as suitable parents, several discursive practices further constituted their subjective experience of adoptive parenthood. Clearly, social practices which are structured within the discourse of adoption produce shame for not achieving biological parenthood (Miall, 1987).

The institution of adoption, for example, required a legal contract involving the formal transfer of parental rights from the birth mother to the adoptive parents. This process awarded rightful parenthood to the adoptive parents to whom the adopted infant now belonged. It is at this particular historical moment that the adopted person is **cut off** from his/her biological origins. In order to safeguard the protection of all members of the adoption experience, the original birth certificate (of the adopted infant), together with the adoption records were **sealed**, presumably for a lifetime. **Sealed** adoption records is one form of regulative power deployed by the institution of adoption to govern the **cutting off** process from all historical origins. Adoptive parents are required to comply with this social-legal agreement and pretend "as if" the child is born to them.

Only certain, albeit cursory, information was disclosed to the adoptive parents concerning either the birth mother, or the circumstances of the birth (Sorosky et al., 1978,

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1984). Sorosky and his associates (1978) point out that, "They have been approved as adoptive parents but not trusted with all of the information about the child, about his/her biological background, or about the true circumstances that led to his/her being relinquished for adoption" (p. 84). In fact, the discursive practices regulated adoption as an event in time and discouraged post-adoptive contact (Cole & Donley, 1990; Hartman & Laird, 1990). Essentially, the power to disseminate background information has been awarded to adoption agencies and professionals (i.e., social workers), who assert the power to determine (by screening and censoring) what information adoptive parents should have or not have concerning their adopted child. Ultimately, adoptive parents' ability to be free and open with their adopted child has been predominantly governed by adoption agencies. Hence, although adoptive parents fulfill the role of parenthood, their role, governed through the institution of adoption, lacks true autonomy. One might wonder how adoptive parents mediate their experience of parenthood premised on dishonesty, secrecy, anonymity, and the illusion of normalcy. Moreover, one might question how adoptive parents facilitate the process by which their adopted son or daughter attempts to achieve a sense of mastery concerning their biological origins, especially if they are denied complete information as **substitute** parents (Hartman & Laird, 1990). As one author suggests, " the mysterious presence of the birth mother" (Fishman, 1992) confronts every adoptive family.

The language utilized to describe adoption, and in particular, the adoptive parents, is crucial to understand the discursive process by which their subject position "other" is constructed. Typically, the adoption literature refers to the birth mother as the "real" or "natural" parent. The inference for the adoptive parents is that they are perceived and

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portrayed as neither "real" nor "natural" parents. The discourse of adoption tends to dichotomize parenthood into two distinct and fixed categories and, by default, adoptive parents are relegated to the unnatural (nonbiological) category. Established discourses of adoption premise their understanding of the adoptive family in general on this fixed category of parenthood.

Such discourses (Kirk, 1964; Brodzinsky, 1987, Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990) claim that adoptive families are confronted with a social-cultural role handicap (i.e., social dislocation), together with the distinct psychosocial challenges associated with adoption. Essentially, this current understanding of adoption offers advice (to adoptive parents) on **good adoptive family** practices. For example, Kirk (1964) claimed that effective adjustment was evidenced by adoptive parents who "acknowledged differences" inherent in their adoptive status. From a post-structuralist perspective, these meanings are regulative in nature to the extent that adoptive parents come to understand themselves through available discourses. Adoptive parents, for example, may incorporate the meanings ascribed to **role handicap** or **shared fate** (Kirk, 1964) as part of their self-definition. Moreover, adoptive parents who "reject differences" associated with adoption, may perceive themselves as failing or at best, as less than adequate parents. Consequently, their subjective experience of themselves, of the adoptive family, and of their relation to the world is created through the discursive relations organized through language and socially generated meanings of adoption.

To understand the adoptive parents' degree of investment in the discourse of adoption is a fundamental principle of post-structuralism. It is argued that this investment is produced

through the institution of adoption. This investment rests on the prime assumption that adoptive parents desire a child of their **own**, while having to submit to an intense investigative process to determine their suitability for parenthood. Without this investment, it is possible that adoptive parents could be denied a child.

Discursive practices and the consequent subject position "other" (i.e., substitute and second best parents) in which adoptive parents are positioned, necessarily produce feelings of shame. **For example, how do adoptive mothers mediate the dominant discourse of motherhood given their position of unnatural (nonbiological) parent?** An inquiry of this nature is beyond the scope of this thesis, but raises an important question for future investigation. It is likely that the only possible mediation of the experience of adoptive motherhood is shame, guilt, disappointment, and isolation (Miall, 1987; Sorosky et al., 1978, 1984). To pretend that the adopted child is "as if born" to them may be one way of dealing with the **stigma** (Miall, 1987) and the concomitant range of feelings. This subjective experience (of adoptive parenthood) is constituted and reproduced within the institution of adoption. Social meanings of "adopted" become a part of self-identity and continue to inform further investment in available discourses.

From a post-structuralist viewpoint, the discursive production of the meaning of adopted is governed through the adoptive family. The adoptive parents are positioned as "other" within the discourse of adoption, while their experience of parenthood is socially rooted in a conspiracy of silence and an illusion of normalcy. However, although adoptive parents bear the social meanings of adoption, they are not the authors or the originators of this meaning as they appear to be. Essentially, it is from this subject position that adoptive

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parents re-constitute the meaning of adopted and re-produce "adopted" as subject position.

"ADOPTED" AS SUBJECT POSITION

As previously stated, a post-structuralist approach claims that the subjective experience of being adopted is discursively produced (Henriques et al., 1984; Weedon, 1987). As a result, such historically specific practices construct, as well as govern, the subject position of "adopted" (Weedon, 1987). Within this critical framework, to understand the effects of social power on the adopted person's subjectivity is an underlying premise of conceptualizing individual experience, and in the determination of self-formation. "Adopted" as subject position, then, has been constituted within traditional adoption practices and guaranteed by the social arrangement of the adoptive family.

The discourse of adoption has specific implications for the constitution and governance of the adopted person. Consistent with the life-long perspective on adoption, such implications could possibly be interminable. At the level of the individual, "To speak is to assume a subject position within discourse and to become **subjected** to the power and regulation of the discourse" (Weedon, 1987, p. 119). For the adopted person the subject position "adopted" is taken up at a very early age.

Typically, the adopted child is told of his/her adoptive status at a very early age, a status that invariably distinguishes him/her as different from nonadopted children. The classic adoption story exemplifies the central regulative practice in which the adopted child is positioned and **labeled**, "adopted". In fact, this classic story officially constitutes "adopted" as subject position and begins to govern the subjective investment in his/her

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subject position and in the discourse of adoption in general.

The classic adoption story is imbued with distinctive language. This language is significant in the construction of the adopted person as **other** or **different**. The positive story of being **special** and **chosen** out of many other children to be the child of (new) **adoptive** parents, albeit **not** the **real parents**, is communicated to the adopted child. Typically, the birth mother is portrayed as the **other mother**, who due to personal and situational factors, could neither keep nor raise the child she indeed loved. Little, if any information is revealed concerning the birth father or extended family members. Fundamental to this official disclosure of the adoptive status, however, is the extent to which the institution of adoption has regulated both the content and the release of all background information. Thus, from the outset, the adoption story for both the adoptive parents and adopted child is necessarily incomplete.

Within the existing discourse of adoption, "adopted" as subject position tends to be a fixed category, a category predicated on loss and subsequent adjustment. Discursive practices which are regulated through secrecy, anonymity, mystique, and the illusion of normalcy deny all involved in the adoption experience the opportunity to negotiate their differences (Walkerdine, 1985). For example, how could the adopted child question his/her uniqueness and claim that he/she is not **special**? Moreover, how could the adopted child be curious about his/her biological origins from a subject position which is governed through the closed paradigm of adoption? In fact, there is no available subject position in the discourse of adoption that promotes a sense of curiousness about one's background. It would seem that to achieve a sense of mastery concerning one's personal history is prohibited,

unless formal approval is obtained through practices involving regulation.

The status of being **special** and **chosen** constitutes the specific practice which regulates and positions the adopted person as subject. The subjective experience of the adopted person tends to be principled on the need to disavow his/her personal history **before** the adoption occurred. Walkerdine (1985) points out that such disavowal results in "delusional reality", "A denial of the reality of difference [which] means that the [adopted person] must bear the burden of anxiety herself" (p. 225). It is possible that this anxiety may be internalized and taken up as personal inadequacy or failure. These feelings likely become part of the adopted person's self-definition, rendering him/her powerless and subjected to these regulative practices.

Rather than reducing powerlessness to a feeling state of the adopted person, a post-structuralist perspective claims that power and powerlessness can be understood as effects of regulation organized through social practices (Weedon, 1987). These discursive practices of adoption are regulative in nature because such practices divide the adopted from the nonadopted. Foucault (1982) contends that individuals are made subjects (a process he refers to as "objectivizing the subject"), through "dividing practices"; that is, through individualizing techniques and totalizing procedures. For example, adoption policies and procedures manifest one form of power through which the adopted person is categorized and subjected. In fact, the **label** of "adopted", organized through regulative practices, invariably individualizes and totalizes the adopted person's subjectivity and confines the individual subject to his/her self-identity as adopted (Foucault, 1982).

The historical void confronted by most persons who are adopted may be extremely

difficult to negotiate from the existing subject position, one which is predominantly rooted in silence, secrecy, and a sense of differentness. Within this fixed subject position, identity discontinuity and the consequent feelings of loss, shame, isolation, alienation, personal incompleteness, and a pervasive sense of not belonging organize the adopted person's subjectivity and permeate his/her ways of being as an individual. From a post-structuralist point of view, the permission to speak about, or conversely, the silence (and secrecy) associated with adoption, are considered "objects of regulation" (Walkerdine, 1985). This form of regulative power is operative through both the adoptive family, as well as the institution of adoption.

Limited background information is communicated to the adoptive family which renders them virtually powerless to answer specific questions. Traditionally, the disclosure of the adoptive status was perceived as an event, rather than a process of understanding and consolidation. For the adopted person, access to complete information concerning his/her biological origins is further regulated through modern social apparatuses. Adoption agencies (Children's Aid Society) and the Adoption Central Registry (Adoption Disclosure Register) are two examples of regulative practices that govern the formal release or retention of all adoption information, albeit selected information. Essentially, the adopted person is subject to, and subjected by, his/her sense of historical discontinuity.

The recent proliferation of published accounts of search and reunions, and the upsurge of activistic endeavours advocating legislative reform (i.e., opening sealed records), can be understood as attempts to resist and change the existing social power relations deployed by the institution of adoption. This new form of subjectivity also permits the

power to **speak** from a subject position that values differences. Although these alternative forms of subjectivity may challenge the power of available discourses, they continue to be carefully governed by established practices and procedures (Weedon, 1987). Despite recent legislative changes in Ontario, for example, adopted persons remain subjected to the discursive practices which continue to restrict their freedom and complete access to their personal history.

Social meanings of "adopted" are inscribed in regulative practices and as a consequence, produce the subject position "adopted", and constitute the forms of subjectivity available to the adopted person. One might wonder how the adopted person becomes invested in the adoption discourse, an investment that is initially produced within the adoptive family. Evidence suggests that feelings of gratitude and loyalty, together with guilt and shame, may provide the strength of individual investment in the discourse of adoption. Moreover, anticipated fear of rejection and abandonment by the adoptive family may produce further investment in this discourse. Although adopted as subject position tends to marginalize individuals, no alternative discourse exists in which he/she can establish a sense of self principled on health.

Thus far, a post-structuralist conceptualization of the adoption experience has been discussed. A post-structuralist approach to the adoption experience has privileged the social structure in proposing a different perspective of self-formation, especially concerning **how the process of adoption becomes a problem of identity**. This theoretical perspective offers certain insights toward reconceptualizing the identity formation of the adopted person. Post-structuralism starts from the position that the category of adoption is a social construction

and produces social meanings specific to being adopted. The institution of adoption, in Western society, can be understood as a social arrangement which incorporates dominant societal values. For the purposes of this analysis, four dominant ideologies seemed particularly relevant to understand the received view of adoption: (1) the `normal' family; (2) the **ownership** of children; (3) the `good' mother; and (4) the ideology of **individualism**. Within this framework, the notion of adoption as a category of social discrimination was advanced. From the outset, adoption is **cut out** as different, from what is regarded as "normal", social organization. Finally, I argued that individual experience is highly vulnerable to influence and organization through ideology.

A post-structuralist approach to adoption establishes the meaning of experience within historically specific practices involving regulation. The denial of social responsibility for caring is manifested in adoption procedures which ensure that individual families care. The adoptive family, for example, represents an important site of social regulation wherein the meaning of being adopted is constituted. From this point of view, adoption practices and procedures are produced through dominant discourses of the "normal" family, the "ownership of children", the "good" mother, and "individual" responsibility. For the adoptive family and adopted person, practices which are structured within those discourses necessarily produce feelings of shame for being different. Consequently, the sense of shame and sense of differentness which is rooted in their subject position "other" understandably permeates their experience of themselves and their relation to the world.

A third insight offered by a post-structuralist conceptualization of adoption is the notion of adopted as subject position. From a very early age, the adopted person's sense of

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self is structured through the discourse of adoption, a discourse which perpetuates closed, secretive, restricted, and regulative practices. With regard to identity formation of the adopted person, a post-structuralist approach suggests that individual experience is constituted and governed within a historical, political, and social-cultural context. Essentially, social practices of daily life have the power to determine the meanings of being adopted. A post-structuralist viewpoint advances the notion that the adopted person is the agent of social meaning ascribed to adoption, but not the author of such meaning. In Western culture, "adopted" as subject position means difference and deficiency, which invariably informs one's subjective experience.

A final insight proposed by this broader perspective is the notion that discursive practices produce and regulate the losses involved in the adoption experience. Loss is the predominant theme of adoption. Identity discontinuity and the consequent range of feelings associated with being adopted become part of adopted as subject position. For example, the closed paradigm of adoption legislated the creation of the adoptive family, ensuring that the adopted child belonged to only **one** family. At the level of the individual, the prevailing sense of historical discontinuity (void) has been well documented. Consistent with the dominant view of normality, additional losses experienced by the adoptive family may include infertility, and the loss of biological parenthood.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE METHOD

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I present the method that I used to explore a post-structuralist framework of the adoption experience. In particular, I wanted to develop further insight into how other adopted persons made sense of their subjective experience, especially concerning their perception of the problem of identity within adoption. First, I will provide an overview of the rationale for utilizing an in-depth interview study. Next, I will highlight the philosophical approach that grounded my understanding of the research process. I will then outline the steps taken in the research process including a discussion of my analytic process.

As previously mentioned, the research focus is on understanding the adopted person's perception of how the process of adoption is experienced as a problem of identity. I developed a post-structuralist framework of adoption which offers a more liberatory interpretation of the adoption experience, in general, and the problem of identity, in particular. I then wanted to subject this framework to the lived experience of adopted persons who have struggled with the identity "adopted". Therefore, the best method for achieving this purpose is an in-depth interview study which centres on understanding everyday experience from the perspective of adopted persons. I interviewed eight participants who are self-identified "adoption advocates" and who openly acknowledged having struggled with the identity "adopted".

The rationale for selecting an in-depth interview study as the most suitable for

investigating the problem area included the following:

1. In-depth interviews are useful in understanding complex issues of a person's everyday life. In particular, this approach offers a broader, comprehensive, and contextual exploration of the problem of identity within adoption.

2. Promotes an in-depth exploration of personal experience. It was anticipated that this approach would yield a richer, more detailed understanding of the struggles of identity tied to the category "adopted" through hearing other adopted person's stories.

3. Promotes a research relationship best suited to developing insight to adopted persons' subjective experience. In particular, a sense of mutuality, respect, and empowerment are aspects promoted between researcher and participant.

4. Allows for ongoing dialogue to be developed with each participant in order to acquire a deeper understanding of lived experience and their perception of the problem of identity within adoption.

5. Promotes a more open, holistic exploration of the issues than is currently espoused by the dominant position on identity formation within adoption. Major identity events in adopted persons' lives are developed in this theory.

THE RESEARCH APPROACH

The methodological approach is an in-depth interview study informed by feminist research principles and hermeneutics. In this section, I will briefly discuss how each of these perspectives grounded my philosophical understanding of the research process.

Feminism

Several principles associated with feminist research influenced this project. Specifically, I looked to feminism to inform my position with respect to approaching the construction of knowledge. Donna Haraway (1988) helped to further clarify my intentions within the research relationship on three levels. First, Haraway (1988) argues that, " The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular" (p. 590). She claims that it is the particularity and embodiment of all vision that `locates' our position as researcher. My location as an adopted woman grounded my vision within the research process by acknowledging that there is no "objective" knowledge apart from the knower. In particular, I claimed my identity "adopted" from within this category but also recognized that I am also positioned from a place that tries to stand outside the category "adopted". This location also informed the development of a post-structuralist framework of the adoption experience which grew out of a personal and critical exploration of ongoing problems of identity.

Second, Haraway (1988) presents an argument for feminist objectivity on the claim that all knowledges are `partial' perspectives. She states that, "feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see" (Haraway, 1988,

p. 583). Recognizing my framework as a 'partial' perspective, I then set out to explore how other adopted persons' perceptions of the problem of identity within adoption fit with and/or challenged that framework. This project was developed under the assumption that other people's accounts of lived experience reflect important knowledge to expand upon what is currently known about identity formation within the process of adoption. In this regard, my `located' position as an adopted woman `situated' me in relation to other wo/men who are also `located' within the identity "adopted". Therefore, I fully recognized that each of the participants entered this study with their own `partial' perspective on the adoption experience that would inform and critically revise my `partial' perspective.

Finally, Haraway's (1988) claim that all knowledges are partial perspectives had implications for how I perceived and engaged in the research relationship. Drawing on this claim, I conceptualized the interview relationship as a "partial connection" (Haraway, 1988, p. 586) between two located people, who, informed by their partial perspectives, engaged in a shared conversation. The co-construction of a broader embodied vision between partners in dialogue was the primary aim that informed and guided my participation in the research relationship.

Ending the relations of domination/exploitation and their perpetuation within the research relationship is another feminist principle that guided the research process. Reducing inequities in power between myself, as researcher, and the participants was accomplished in several ways.

1.   The interview process was conducted as a shared conversation in which my primary function was to listen to the   participants' partial perspectives on his/her adoption

experience. As Lorraine Code (1992) writes, "the process of knowing other people requires constant learning: how to be with them, respond to them, act toward them" (p. 39). The challenge of "constant learning" exemplified my central task to promote the creation of a more respectful and mutual research relationship.

2.   As researcher, I worked to maintain an open and questioning position in order to avoid imposing my own partial perspective. Thus, my own horizon of interpretation was continually placed at risk for critical reflection and further expansion. Although I recognized that to be fully open is the 'ideal' achievement of conversation, it was this ideal that guided me throughout the research process.

3.   Participants were encouraged to take control of the interview by the absence of a structured format.

4.   I responded to participants' personal questions about my own adoption experience and research interests openly and honestly.

5.   Interview transcripts were returned to participants and feedback invited regarding the accuracy of transcription and how I understood their everyday experience.

6.   I acknowledged the power of the participants by recognizing their lived experience of adoption as valuable knowledge.

7.   Ongoing communication with the participants has been maintained following the

        interview process so that their involvement in this project would be respected.

        The interpretation of data is another feminist principle that addresses the researcher's

relation to the production of knowledge. According to Stanley & Wise (1980), this critical

debate raises the complex question of power relations in research and writing. As Anne Opie

(1992) writes, "who are we writing for?; what kinds of authority should we claim for our

texts?; and, what kind of texts should we be producing?" (p. 69). I specifically drew from

Anne Opie's (1992) discussion about the "appropriation of the other" to help inform my

relation to the interpretive process of reading and working with the participants' interview

texts.

        Drawing on Edward Said's (1978) definition, "appropriation" is defined "as the

means by which the experiences of the `colonized' are interpreted by a (more) dominant

group to sustain a particular representation or view of the `other' as part of an ideological

stance" (Opie, 1992, p. 55-56). While claiming that textual appropriation of the `other'

cannot be eliminated completely in research, Opie (1992) suggests several ways in which a

non-appropriable stance can be maximized by the researcher. Specifically, she recommends

the following practices to inform the interpretation process conducted by the researcher: to

identify his/her ideological positioning and location with respect to the data; to represent

the multiple realities in the written text and thereby, empower the participants; and finally,

to discuss the ways in which interpretive control can be shared between researcher and

participants.

Committed to promoting a non-appropriable stance, the interpretation of interview texts was approached in the following ways:

1. Participants were apprised of my different interpretation of the adoption experience and location as an adopted woman with respect to the data.

2. Representation of "other" adopted persons' stories was not the intent of this project. Rather, I wanted to explore how a post-structuralist framework of adoption fit with and/or raised questions about other adopted persons' accounts of their everyday experience.

3. The participants' stories, as well as my own story, are used extensively in the written text of the analysis to show the social construction of adoption as a problem of identity and to examine the ideological purposes of that construction.

4. As researcher, I assume complete responsibility for my interpretation of the adoption experience as set out in this thesis. Further dialogue with the participants will be arranged post-defense so that they have an opportunity to provide feedback.

To this point, I have outlined several feminist principles which guided my understanding of the construction of knowledge and of my location in the research relationship. I will now briefly discuss how hermeneutics further informed my philosophical

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approach to the research process.

Hermeneutics

As a philosophical perspective, hermeneutics guided my research process in several important ways. Drawing from the work of Addison (1992), I situated my research approach within the following principles informed by hermeneutics:

1. Immersing oneself in the participants' world in order to understand and interpret the participants' everyday practices.

2. Looking beyond individual actions, events and behaviours to a larger background context.

3. Entering into an active dialogue with the research participant, research colleagues, research critics, the account itself, and one's own values, assumptions, interpretations and understandings.

4. Maintaining a constantly questioning attitude in looking for misunderstandings, incomplete understandings, deeper understandings and alternate explanations.

5. Analyzing in a circular progression between parts and whole, foreground and background, understanding and interpretation, and researcher and narrative account.

6.   Offering a narrative account of the participants' everyday practices that opens new

        possibilities for self-reflection and changed practices.

7.   Addressing the practical concerns of the researcher and the research   participants

        against a larger social cultural, historical, political and economic background.

These principles guided my research process.

        I then looked to Hans-Georg Gadamer's work on hermeneutics to further inform my

philosophical approach to this study. Gadamer (1989) grounded my approach to this study

in three important ways.

        First, hermeneutics provides recognition of understanding as a "historically effected

event" which gives rise to the "logical structure of a question" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 300).

Reflecting upon my own subjective experience of adoption, I identified wanting to explore

how the problem of identity is a social construction rooted in power. Hermeneutics further

sensitizes me to the task of understanding that problem area; "the true historical object is

not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship that constitutes both

the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 299).

I then developed a post-structuralist framework of adoption that needed to be "put at risk"

in order to hear the interpretations of other adopted persons. Therefore, the task of

understanding required suspending my horizon of interpretation so that the interpretations

of others could be openly acknowledged as their `truths' about the adoption experience.

        The second way that hermeneutics informed my work regards its recognition of the

"art of conducting a real dialogue" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 367). My orientation toward the research process embodied an ongoing, open dialogue between me, as researcher, and the participants, with their interview texts, with my framework of adoption and with myself as an adopted woman. As researcher, I am accountable for my own values, assumptions, interpretations, and understandings. Committed to preserving an open, and inquiring stance, I questioned and requestioned both intellectual and emotional responses and understanding of me and the participants. For example, I continually raised questions about birth wound discourses as a plausible explanation for the problem of identity within adoption. I fully recognized, however, that most of the participants looked to those discourses to substantiate their subjective experience of the adoption process. Practicing the art of dialectic grounded my understanding of the research process (Gadamer, 1989).

Finally, hermeneutics emphasizes the importance of the relationship between researcher and participant, in general, and the hermeneutical conversation, in particular. Gadamer (1992) suggests that conversation is a process of coming to an understanding which is concerned with understanding texts (p. 385). During the interview process, I focused on developing insight into how the explanations of other adopted persons informed and/or interrogated my framework of adoption. This focus allowed me the opportunity to understand the participants' everyday experiences through my own horizon of interpretation. Gadamer (1989) calls this process a "fusion of horizons" in which my different reading of adoption is put at risk so that new meaning can emerge from understanding the participants' accounts through my interpretive lens.

Thus far, I have outlined the philosophical approaches which guided my

understanding of the research process. Specifically, I have drawn on feminist research principles and hermeneutics to inform the decisions I have made in carrying out this research study. In the next section I will chronicle the actual research process.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

This was an in-depth interview study. Eight participants were interviewed over an eight month period between April 1994 and November 1994. Participants were interviewed at least twice (See Appendix B). The interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then analyzed by exploring how the participants' accounts fit with a post-structuralist framework of adoption.

Locating Participants

For the purpose of this interview study, the "snowball" sampling technique was employed to locate potential participants. This method of selection involved beginning with one participant followed by another participant who was nominated by the previous participant. Each successive participant was selected for the purpose of teaching me about an alternative explanation of their lived experience of the adoption process. When interest was expressed, potential participants gave permission to the participant (who nominated them) to provide me with their name and telephone number so that I could contact them directly.

Participants were selected based upon meeting the following initial criteria:

1.   S/he is adopted in Ontario. His/her adoption occurred during the era of traditional (i.e., closed) adoption practices. These criteria are based on the assumption that s/he has been prevented from initiating contact with his/her birth relatives, either directly or indirectly, from the time of the initial placement.

2.   S/he acknowledged having struggled with the identity "adopted", a struggle that impelled him/her to question and to challenge the traditional view of adoption. While I recognize that the nature of the struggle necessarily reflected the unique adoption experience of each adopted person, the collective experience revealed a commitment to the creation of a different experience of adoption, for themselves as individuals and the society at large.

3.   S/he was a self-identified adoption advocate, adoption expert, and/or social/political activist who was engaged in some capacity to change the current perception of adoption. Shulamit Reinharz (1992) addresses the criterion of self- identification. In addition to bypassing the danger of applying a fixed definition, she claims that it allows the researcher to go directly to people who take the label themselves. Further, it avoids imposing my personal definition from the standpoint of my adoption experience (p.7).

4.   The adopted person was open to talking about his/her lived experience within the process of adoption, his/her struggles with the identity "adopted", his/her perspective

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on their adoption experience and its impact on his/her view of self.

5.   His/her adoptive family may have had other adopted persons or biological offspring as members of the family.

6.   The participation of both women and men was emphasized during the selection process.

7.   S/he was willing to participate and spoke English.

Consistent with the exploratory nature of this in-depth interview study, eight adopted persons were selected for participation. The purpose of developing an in-depth account of different subjective experiences of adoption, and in particular, of the ways in which these different accounts inform my partial perspective, necessarily guided the total number of participants involved in this study. This intentional approach to the selection of participants is based upon careful determination of theoretical purpose and relevance (Snyder, 1992).

As previously stated, the interview process occurred between April 1994 and November 1994. My initial contact with potential participants was by telephone. During this telephone conversation I explained the purpose of the study and assured individuals that participation was completely voluntary. This study was further introduced to each participant by a Letter of Introduction (See Appendix C). In it, the purpose of the study, and the benefits envisaged were briefly outlined. If s/he was interested and willing a personal

interview was scheduled. Of the nine individuals who were referred to the study, all agreed to participate following this initial telephone contact. Due to scheduling difficulties, however, one woman could not participate and subsequently withdrew from the study.

As a result, eight individuals - four women and four men - participated in this study. Four participants were interviewed twice and four participants were seen three times. The length of each interview varied, ranging from two and a half hours to four hours. Total time spent with each participant ranged from five hours to almost ten hours for those interviewed three times.

As previously mentioned, all of the participants are adopted in Ontario. Their adoption placements occurred through the Children's Aid Society in Ontario. The participants ranged in age between mid-twenties and late thirties and were all Caucasian. The participants included: Steve, Alexandra, Marie, Andrew, Phillip, Liz, John, and Catherine. Please note that all names are fictitious. Each participants' perspective on their lived experience of adoption will be explored in the analysis.

The Interview Process

Positioned as a partner in dialogue, I interviewed eight other adopted wo/men in order to learn how they have questioned and made sense of their lived experience of the adoption process. In this regard, the interview process involved putting my own interpretation of adoption at risk by comparing it to explanations that made sense to adoption advocates who have struggled with the identity "adopted".

The focus of this inquiry required prolonged engagement for in-depth exploration of

the participants' accounts. As previously mentioned, each of the eight participants were interviewed on two separate occasions. A third interview was scheduled for four of the participants in order to generate a fuller account of their subjective experience of adoption. The total number of interviews was twenty. The number of interview hours varied with each participant, but, generally, each interview lasted between two and four hours.

Once consent to participate was obtained with each participant, a first interview was scheduled. Participants were given a choice regarding the location of the personal interview to ensure respect for their individual preference and privacy. Specific options included the participant's home, or his/her place of employment. It was anticipated that participants would likely feel more comfortable and relaxed in the natural setting of either their own home or place of work.

Before proceeding with the first interview, permission was requested of each participant to audiotape our interview and to take notes during this process. Additionally, the Consent to Participate Form (See Appendix D) was discussed with each participant. At that time, further questions or concerns regarding any aspect of the research process were addressed.

The principal aims of this inquiry, as previously stated, included the following: to invite adopted wo/men to talk openly about their personal experience of the process of adoption; to reflect on how they have made sense of their identity "adopted"; to further clarify their thinking about their struggles with identity and sites of pain; and finally, to consider how the process of adoption develops into an ongoing problem of identity.

The initial interview was an unstructured interview and began with a request to "Tell

me about how you have come to a different understanding of your experience of adoption?" This approach to the interview process was particularly relevant to my inquiry because I wanted to develop further insight into how each participant made sense of his/her subjective experience of adoption. I also wanted to explore a post-structuralist framework of adoption through hearing the participants' stories. I was particularly interested in exploring how they understood their identity struggles tied to the category "adopted". As previously mentioned, the in-depth, open-ended, interview format was the most suitable approach to elicit deeper insight into the participants' lived experience. The remainder of the interview involved trying to immerse myself into the participant's experience by listening intently, seeking clarifications, and probing for information regarding their struggles with identity, sites of pain, and how they have attempted to reconcile these particular sites.

The ways in which I engaged in a more participatory and authentic research relationship included the following:

1.   A sense of mutuality and empowerment was promoted by acknowledging the participants' perspectives on their adoption experience as valuable knowledge. In this regard, their position as `knowers' was duly respected.

2.   I communicated a sense of respect to the participants by openly acknowledging the purpose of the research, the potential benefits of their participation, and the anticipated expectations of the research process. The Letter of Introduction (See Appendix C) and the Consent to Participate (See Appendix D) clearly identified the

aims of this inquiry, as well as promoted their direct involvement and opportunity for further discussion.

At the end of the first interview, I invited the participant to provide feedback on his/her experience of the interview process. I then discussed with the participant what my next step would be and provided an approximate time frame for recontacting him/her. Each participant was willing to be interviewed a second time and plans were made for insuring that s/he received a copy of the interview transcript prior to the next interview. The participants were invited to contact me should they think of additional information that they felt I should know. Prior to leaving, I ensured that the participant had regained a sense of comfort in ending the interview.

Approximately four to eight weeks following the first interview, a second interview was scheduled at a mutually convenient time. This interview focused on clarifying and expanding the understanding obtained during the first interview. Generally, it began with comments and/or personal reflections arising from the initial interview transcript. All of the participants had read this transcript. Some of the participants had primarily editorial comments to make, while others remarked on particular themes reflected in their stories. Overall, the transcript provided a stepping stone to further conversation about their subjective experience of adoption.

This second interview was important in promoting deeper insight into the participants' perspectives on adoption, in general, and to their identity struggles arising from being "adopted", in particular. Additionally, I used this interview to elicit personal examples from the participants' lived experiences of being produced "other" so that I could further

understand the process of how the concrete production of difference occurs at the level of the individual. For example, I asked the participants some of the following questions: "Tell me more about what happened to make you feel different"; What experiences grounded you in your investment in the "search" for your birth mother/birth family?"; Can you talk about how being adopted has been wounding for you?"; How was difference handled in your adoptive family?"; and "In what ways has the "reunion" been important to you?" Considering that most of the participants attributed their problems of identity to birth wound discourses (i.e., infant trauma), I purposefully insured that this topic was explored during later interviews.

The need for additional interviews was continually re-evaluated during the research process. More than one interview facilitated the reconstruction of salient identity events within the adoption experience, as well as promoted in-depth exploration of personal meaning and interpretations attributed to those events (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Additionally, prolonged engagement promoted trust and rapport between myself, as researcher, and each participant. This interview study also provided sufficient time for clarification of anticipated moments of 'not knowing'. The value of more than one interview is also recognized by feminist research.

> Multiple interviews are likely to be more accurate than single interviews because of the opportunity to ask additional questions and to get corrective feedback on previously obtained information. As time passes, the researcher also can see how thoughts are situated in particular circumstance. (Reinharz, 1992, p. 37)

As previously mentioned, four of the participants were seen for a third interview. With two

of the participants, I felt my understanding was incomplete at the end of the second interview that I requested a third interview. Another participant and me decided together that our shared conversation felt unfinished so we scheduled another interview. With another participant, I felt that I needed to better understand his subjective experience of adoption because he identified himself as having no problems of identity. Of particular interest to me was to gain further insight into how his adoption experience may have been structured differently than the other participants.

Following the interview process I sent a letter to each participant which acknowledged my appreciation for their participation and invited him/her to contact me about this project in the future. Since that time, I have corresponded with the participants on a few occasions so that they would be apprised of my progress on this thesis (See Appendix E and F).

Post-Interview Reflections

I initially set out to learn how other adopted persons have challenged the dominant discourse of adoption, but my research question changed following the completion of a few interviews. I realized that the participants had not unsettled the conventional wisdom of adoption but were invested in those discourses in ways that were injurious to them. Revising my focus, I then set out to explore "how adopted persons have developed an understanding of their adoption experience with particular emphasis on their perception of the problem of identity".

The interview process was a powerful experience, especially as it represented the first

time I have openly discussed adoption with other adopted persons. Clearly my position as an "adopted" woman was an important element in the interview relationship in ways that facilitated a deeper level of shared conversation to ensue with each of the participants. In fact, many of them expressed relief and assurance in knowing that I, too, am adopted. Andrew, for example, expressed feeling considerably safer in talking about his private experience of adoption. Knowing that I was an "insider" rather than an "outsider" to the adoption experience allowed Andrew to dialogue more candidly and at times, emotionally, about his life as an adopted person. These sentiments were shared by all of the participants who expressed strong support for adopted persons, like myself, to engage in adoption research of this nature.

THE INTERPRETATION OF INTERVIEW TEXTS

The process of in-depth analysis of the participants' adoption experiences has been invaluable in helping to further reflect upon and critically revise my own interpretation of the adoption experience. Furthermore, the explanations of the participants have helped me to work through my own resistances (i.e., appeal of attraction, appeal of threat), questions, and fears about my adoption experience, guiding me to my current space of understanding.

With regard to textual practices, I have taken great pains to articulate and work with problems of voice and representation in working with the interview texts. For example, my changed notion of "objectivity" claims that there is no objective knowledge apart from the knower. My interpretation of the adoption experience, then, is not a shared interpretation nor is it my representation of "other's" stories. Rather, I have used other people's explanations

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of adoption to help me interrogate and to further develop a post-structuralist framework of adoption. In particular, I looked at how other adopted person's understanding of adoption fits with and/or challenged a post-structuralist perspective on adoption.

Some of the ways in which a non-appropriable stance was maximized included the following research practices:

1.   To be accountable for my location as an adopted woman who is also informed by my situated knowledge, that is, my partial perspective on the adoption experience. Further, to acknowledge the participants' experiences as their partial perspectives on adoption. Hence, my interpretation is one of many interpretations of the adoption experience.

2.   To be clear with the participants about how their interviews will be used.

3.   To approach the reading of the interview texts as an opportunity for other wo/men to teach me about their different adoption experiences. Specifically, in reading the interview texts it was important for me to maintain an open, enquiring stance so that I learned how the participants' experiences were similar and/or different from my own experience.

4.   To produce different accounts of how other adopted wo/men have constructed meaning of their adoption experience. These different accounts, however, were

interpreted through my own   partial perspective, for which I assume full authorship.

5.   To place my alternative explanation of adoption at risk for critical reflection, scrutiny, and further revision. Specifically, my interpretation, informed by post-structuralism, focused on the relationship between power, knowledge, and identity as it related to the adoption experience.

7.   To audiotape and fully transcribe the interviews which allowed for a detailed accessing of the participants' subjective experience.

8.   To present the participants' accounts, as well as my own account, as partial, selective, situated, and self-reflexive, rather than neutral, objective, fixed, and generalized accounts of one "truth". Each reader of the written text, however, will create their own meaning of the text. Additionally, my interpretation necessarily produced a narrative that emphasized particular aspects of the adoption experience while not addressing other elements.

9.   To incorporate the voices (i.e., anecdotes from the   interviews) of the participants in the written text.

10.   Opie (1992) writes that "the writerly intention, then, is not necessarily to achieve a consensus but to highlight the points of difference and the tensions between

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competing accounts as well as shared interpretations" (p. 63). For me, as a researcher, the nature of the interpretive processes specifically involved this intention.

11.   To provide an opportunity to share my interpretation with the participants. It is important to note that although we may agree on specific events (e.g., the telling of the adoption story), the meaning that we ascribe to that event may differ. It is anticipated that this process of sharing and further dialogue will occur following the completion of my doctoral defense. Specifically, I will provide a summary of the interpretation to each of the participants and invite those interested to communicate with me about their response.

Drawing upon this critical perspective on adoption, how do the explanations of the eight participants help to connect my experience to post-structuralism that situates the problem of identity formation within a social context as a site of examination? Reading and working with the participants' interview texts was an ongoing, reflective process. Initially, I thoroughly read each of the participants' interviews while listening to the audiotape in order to ensure accuracy of the transcription process. While reading the interviews, I recorded my impressions, noted shared experiences, and in particular, marked places of difference. Over time, these areas of difference generated critical themes about how our adoption experience is organized and governed. These differences also revealed particular themes concerning the identity "adopted", especially revealing how the participants have made sense of, and lived

with, their identity struggles rooted in being different.

In the next stage of interpretation, I re-read all of the interviews so that I could begin to organize the data according to these critical themes. I utilized Ethnograph (computer assisted qualitative data analysis program) to assist in this process of categorizing the voluminous amount of data. Throughout this process of immersing myself in the data, I continued to reflect upon and write about emerging ideas about re-working the problem of identity within adoption. Regular journal writing offered an invaluable process of tracking my personal reactions to the interview process and of new awarenesses about my own lived experience. It also helped to clarify my own thinking about the problem of identity within adoption.

Ongoing consultations with my supervisor, as well as other Committee members were an invaluable and necessary process particularly at this phase of the inquiry. One of the greatest challenges and insights that has emerged for me is how I get caught up in the dominant discourse of adoption, and thus how I momentarily lose sight of my different reading of the adoption experience. I fully recognize, then, that I am continually impacted by the ideological power of those discourses even while I am working to unsettle and displace them.

Through interpreting the interview texts, I have discovered that we share several places of agreement in our explanations of adoption. For example, many of us have experienced feelings of difference, isolation, disconnection, as well as struggled with ongoing questions about our identity "adopted".

Additionally, I have noticed that I learned considerably more from areas of

disagreement or difference in our explanations of the adoption experience. For example, the explanation of infant trauma (i.e., original trauma sustained as an infant when the biological connection was severed from the birth mother), has helped most of the participants to account for feelings of difference and disconnection. Instead, following a social construction approach, my interpretation claims that privileging of the biological family as a cultural ideal causes identity concerns for adopted persons. This is my truth of the adoption experience that will be further developed in the following chapters.

Writing the analysis has involved several interrelated processes. Regular consultations with my Committee were initially important so that I could organize how I planned to proceed with writing the analysis. I then reviewed the interview texts so that I could organize quotes to incorporate as examples of the participants' concrete experiences of adoption. Recognizing my political intent to reconceptualize identity formation within adoption, I selected four sites of injury as the organizing principle of the analysis. As previously mentioned, these sites of injury to identity emerged from the critical themes but also spoke to my own subjective experience of being harmed through the adoption process. The four sites of injury to be discussed in the analysis include: The Birth Story . . . Living a Pretense; Living Silence . . . Living Silent; The Experience of Being Mothered . . . The Desire to Belong; and Looking for Recognition . . . Claiming our Difference.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FIRST SITE OF INJURY

INTRODUCTION: APPROACH TO THE ANALYSIS

The analysis reveals my changing understanding of the adoption experience; a critical reading that is fully contextualized in history as it is currently known to me. What initially started off as disconnected moments of life imprinted on me are now more connected moments, albeit contradictory, that begin to resonate more of a historical and positive sense of self. Clearly the personal accounts of each participant helped to interrogate my previous interpretation of adoption, creating the possibility for the emergence of new meanings.

I am reminded of Marian McMahon's (1991) words about the importance of telling our personal stories, especially in light of our need to make sense of ourselves to ourselves and to the world. She writes,

> I view the telling of our personal stories of subordination as an **essential political act** [my emphasis] because without our stories recovered the past haunts the present and hopelessly claims the future. The possibility of living here and now is lost to the compulsive need to deny through repetition the past as we live it (p. 33).

This emergent story is an "essential political act" that works to disrupt and displace the grand narrative of adoption. Equally important, it radically reframes the established view of identity formation within a far more convincing and contextualized theoretical framework. This alternative reading of adoption offers a radically different meaning, a meaning that positions me as an embodied knower and permits me to speak about a silenced experience

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without feelings of shame or blame. It also creates the possibility of wholeness and sense of liberation within the experience of the adoption process. For these reasons, it is imperative for me to continue to engage in the process of telling my story because of my need to make sense of myself to myself and to the world.

The telling of my evolving story enters into the private realm of a highly public and publicized social issue. The participants who engaged in dialogue with me about their private experience of adoption helped to cultivate a larger space from which to speak about my perspective on how the identity "adopted" is produced and re-produced. Their personal accounts also helped me to raise questions about and critically challenge dominant discourses on how the "problem of identity" is constructed and maintained through our investment in those discourses.

For many of us the question of how to reconcile the issue of our difference has been at the centre of our identity struggles. In this regard, I developed a strong sense of affiliation to each of the participants, especially in light of our shared struggle to claim our identity "adopted" in a different, more just way. And yet, the overriding struggle that many of us continue to engage in is taking up the dominant meanings ascribed to identity formation so that we continually feel deficient in some way. As an adopted woman, I am committed to working through my own oppression by creating space for other ways of naming and speaking about adoption.

Drawing upon Honneth's (1992) theory of recognition, I argue that identity formation is an intersubjective process of construction acquired through shared experiences of recognition. According to Honneth (1992), the mutual experience of "intersubjective

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recognition" is a critical component in the formation and "safeguarding" of personal identity integrity. In the absence of mutual recognition, Honneth (1992) argues that the person is potentially vulnerable to sustain repeated injury to self, that is, "insult and disrespect" to identity, through the lack of receiving proper recognition. As Honneth (1992) points out, "such behavior is injurious because it impairs these persons in their positive understanding of self - an understanding acquired by intersubjective means. There can be no meaningful use whatsoever of the concepts of "disrespect" or "insult" were it not for the implicit reference to a subject's claim to be granted recognition by others" (p. 189). As well, Honneth (1992) claims that the person owes their potential for developing a positive relationship to self to the experience of mutual recognition.

Honneth's (1992) work supports the following discussion on how the adopted person's identity sustains repeated harm through undergoing systematically distorted recognition. The notion of harm, according to Honneth (1992), specifically refers to ways of harming potentials, as well as limiting choices of the person who is continually located within processes of intersubjective construction. In light of this perspective, I argue that the "template" we use to see people through is productive of the person's identity. For adopted persons, then, the template "as if born to" that is active in the formation of identity is problematic because to think and live "as if" something is true when it is not is intolerable and injurious to one's developing self. Additionally, I argue that being produced "adopted" is harmful because potentials are harmed in that process of construction.

The purpose of the analysis is to deconstruct the category "adopted" through showing how "adoptee" is taken up as a problem of identity, and thus harmful to identity integration.

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The following analysis poignantly demonstrates how particular **sites of injury** to identity are taken up by the participants. The selected sites of injury emerged from the participants' stories, together with my own story, showing concrete experiences of how our need for recognition of difference has been continually thwarted. Instead, our recognition of difference has undergone repeated and systematically distorted recognition, causing ongoing identity struggles to ensue. Further insights to how we get caught up in making the category "adopted" as difference which thereby produces "normal" will also receive critical reflection. Drawing upon my own experience of re-producing the dominant story of "born to", I am especially interested in gaining insight to what stands in the way of adopted persons seeing the "fiction" in the production of the "normal" which produces our difference. Additionally, I set out to further understand how the social privileging of the biological family organizes and governs adopted persons' subjective experience of their identity "adopted", and thus causes difficulty in our attempts to resist taking up the deficit identity position.

In reviewing some of the salient experiences of adoption identified by the participants' stories, as well as my own story, I have selected four **sites of injury** sustained to our identity formation. Specifically, the four sites selected for discussion include: The Birth Story. . . Living a Pretense; Living Silence . . . Living Silent; The Experience of Being Mothered . . . The Desire to Belong; and Looking for Recognition. . . Claiming our Difference.

My discussion of each site of injury will include two sections. Specifically, the purpose of this analytical approach is two-fold: to show how the category "adopted" is

produced discursively, as well as to demonstrate how "adopted" is taken up as a problem of identity. My analysis will show a contextualization of the adoption experience through showing its construction and ideological power in the lives of adopted persons in ways that are harmful to identity formation. As well, being produced "adopted" causes further harm to the person's potential to develop a positive relationship to self through mutual recognition.

The first section will show how the particular site is produced in ways that become injurious to adopted persons. In particular, I will critically reflect upon concrete aspects of either my story or the participants' stories to demonstrate, through a post-structuralist analysis, how we "take up" adoption as a problem of identity. Through my readings of their stories it is evident that many of us become entangled in the "problem of identity" by uncritically "accepting" the taken for granted meanings attributed by the dominant discourse of "born to". Our acceptance of the terms set by the dominant story of the biological family will also show how "normal" is produced as we struggle to counter those discourses. The second section will reveal how the problem of identity is taken up by talking about how each site of injury is lived, re-produced, and/or re-organized by the participants and myself who struggle with those sites.

My position as an adopted woman is critical to this political work. In this regard, I claim my identity "adopted" from within this category and try to talk about what life is like from that position. At the same time, I also acknowledge that the more crucial struggle is at the level of eliminating the category. I fully recognize, then, that I am also positioned from a place that tries to stand outside the category "adopted".

The political intent of this work is to create an analysis of adoption that deconstructs

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the category "adopted" and shows how "adoptees" are constructed rather than natural categories. This alternative account of adoption will necessarily interrupt the conventional wisdom of adoption that is predominantly rooted in "birth wound" discourses. Instead, I will show that the process of construction of "adopted" is a process of harm given the construction of identity through recognition and intersubjectivity.

THE BIRTH STORY. . . . .

Regimes of truth exist in our culture about what "the family" is and what it is not: "truth" which is essential to the structure and functioning of the dominant social order (Foucault, 1984). As previously discussed, the foundation of family organization in Western culture has always been the biological family. The established definition gives privilege to "biological" over alternative family forms that fall outside of this dominant category. The adoptive family, then, is produced as the category "other", which means different and less than because it constitutes the negative of "biological". In the interests of perpetuating the dominant social order, the socially constructed division between the category "biological" and the category "adopted" functions to authorize and propagate our knowledge of the biological family as the natural basis of our culture.

The natural or biological basis of culture has shaped the adoption system. Within the historical context of the closed adoption system, the creation of the adoptive family has been organized by and governed through "as if born to" discourses so that the cultural ideal of the legitimate family form is re-created. However, the discourse of "as if born to" is a pretense that forces the adoptive family, in general, and the adopted person, in particular, to fake it;

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that is, to live "as if" they are a "normal" family when they are socially constructed as different. Hence, adopted persons are forced to fake it and live "as if" they are "born to" the adoptive family. Consequently, the recognition of difference through adoption is rendered insignificant in the interests of maintaining and perpetuating a fixed cultural notion of the "normal" family.

Viewing identity formation as a process of construction through recognition and intersubjectivity suggests that the template used to shape people is productive of the individual. For adopted persons then, the template of "as if", that is active in the formation of identity, is problematic because to believe and live "as if" something is true when it is not is intolerable and injurious to identity formation. Additionally, the process of construction of "adopted" is harmful because potentials are harmed in that social production. The notion of "harm", as mentioned above, refers to specific social processes that harm potentials and limit choices of the person who is continually located within processes of intersubjective construction.

From this perspective, I argue that being produced "adopted" is injurious because our potential to feel like an okay person and to develop authentic relationships within the adoptive family are harmed in the process of construction. More specifically, significant injury to identity is sustained through the lack of recognition attributed to adoption, including our historical origins, which significantly limits and systematically distorts the evolution of our self-view.

In this section, I will show how the "birth story" is produced as a site of injury for adopted persons, like myself, through demonstrating how the participants "take up" the

dominant claims as "truth" about identity formation. This post-structuralist analysis of adoption will specifically consider how dominant discourses, social practices, and institutions organize and govern the creation of the birth story in ways that become injurious to me and other adopted persons.

In particular, the following questions are the basis of my critical thinking about the meaning of the birth story: How is the birth story produced? What are the dominant meanings attributed to the birth story? How do these culturally specific meanings inform the adopted person's identity? What does it mean for adopted persons to think of themselves in these terms? And finally, if the biological family is not in itself a "birth wound", then, what is so important about the meaning of the birth story to adopted persons?

The "chosen" child story exemplifies a "power saturated discourse" (Lather, 1992) in which adopted persons are positioned well before they are informed of their special and chosen status. This classic adoption story is a highly regulative practice in the construction of "adopted" as other and different. In particular, this culturally sanctioned story is a powerful manifestation of "as if born to" discourses which influence and govern how we, as adopted persons, learn to think about, talk about, and live our everyday life. Additionally, the chosen child story begins to inscribe me, as an adopted person, in the dominant adoption story; a culturally produced narrative that shapes not only private self-understanding but what I am authorized to claim or not claim of my own life (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992).

Social practices rooted in the family necessarily function as instruments of social control in order to maintain and legitimize the familial structure of our society. The chosen child story exemplifies an individualizing and totalizing practice that fully participates in the

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social control of the adoptive family, and thus supports the dominant social order through perpetuating the myth of the biological family. This "story" is also authorized to function as a replacement for the adopted persons' own birth story.

The chosen child story, however, has profound implications for adopted persons, like myself, whose subjective experience is deeply embedded in, and influenced by, the "story" our culture has produced about adoption. From the outset, this culturally produced story categorizes "adopted" as "other" and thereby different and less than from people who belong to the category "born to", that is, "biological".

I will demonstrate specific sites of struggles associated with being "cut out" as the "chosen" and "special" child and in particular, how meanings attributed to the dominant category "born to" become a site of injury for adopted persons. For example, how can I raise questions about my status as "special" and possibly risk suggesting that I am not special? As well, how do I begin to reconcile my French Canadian background with the Scottish ancestry of my adoptive mother?

These are some of the many contradictions confronted by adopted persons who continue to live the legacy of adoption as "chosen" adults. The subject position "other" is constituted and constituting for adopted persons. Beginning with the chosen child story, how is the adopted person's identity constituted and constituting of his/her subjective experience of the adoption process?

Unknowingly, I accepted the intent of the chosen child story to be benevolent, especially since it imbued a special meaning to my identity as "adopted". How could I account for my pervasive feelings of shame for being adopted, and thus not "born to" my

adoptive parents? From an early age, I clearly thought something was inherently wrong with me for not feeling special. And so began the early construction of a childhood narrative of internal badness, a narrative that has been firmly rooted in shame for being different. I often wondered how I could acknowledge my personal feelings of confusion and unhappiness and possibly risk suggesting to my adoptive parents that I am not special and hence, they may not be special either.

When I was three years old my adoptive mother informed me that I was "adopted" and especially chosen out of many other children to be her child. At this early age I was told that I was special because I was chosen by my adoptive parents who desperately desired a baby daughter. I never understood what being "adopted" meant until several years later when my adoptive mother informed me that she was not my "real" mother, but that my "other" or biological mother gave birth to me.

I was further told that my birth mother could not take adequate care of me because of the social circumstances in 1958 for an unwed, Catholic, and pregnant teenager. Little did I know then that the identity "adopted" would strongly influence and fully govern my sense of who I was and what I would come to believe is and is not possible. From an early age, the chosen child story constructed, albeit silently masked, the meaning and direction of my experience of the adoption process.

Following the initial disclosure of the chosen child story, the issue of adoption tended to be shrouded in secrecy within my adoptive family. In particular, when I asked questions concerning my birth history, I sensed great reluctance to answer. Typically, my questions were characteristically met with suspicion, silence, and even disapproval. I

received the implicit message that some things were not acceptable to talk about and I had better avoid these issues. What I learned was to be ashamed of my identity "adopted"; a difference that was labelled "special" but clearly not open to public discourse.

The closed system of adoption, however, governed the release of all background information including the content pertinent to the adopted person's birth history prior to the adoption placement. As noticed above, the information selectively shared about my early beginnings is extremely limited, superficial and general in content. Even at this moment of writing, I am still unaware of how much personal data was released to my adoptive parents, how much of that data was shared with me, and what data has been retained in my personal but closed file which continues to be managed through the Children's Aid Society in Ontario. Regulative practices of this nature, however, serve specific purposes to further securing the foundation of the biological family and inducing its ideological power within Western culture.

The narrative of the adopted person's birth story has been necessarily incomplete and cut off as irrelevant data from the precise moment in history when the legal transfer of parental rights from the birth mother to the adoptive parents was sanctioned by the state. Premised on the "need" to safeguard the protection of all members of the adoption experience, the original birth certificate together with the adoption records were "sealed" by the state, presumably for a lifetime. Hence, the birth story of the adopted person was officially "sealed" at that moment in history.

This authorized process of "cutting off" adopted persons from all historical information continued to be governed through the adoptive family who embody and live the

manifestation of "as if born to" by re-creating the myth of the "normal" family. Specifically, the adoptive parents' decision to freely disclose information about their adopted son or daughter's birth history has been necessarily restricted by adoption agencies whose primary mandate is to maintain the dominant social order. Instead, they must submit to the social-legal agreement which sanctions secrecy and anonymity and learn to pretend "as if" the adopted child is "born to" them. The adoptive parents then must take up and uphold the template of "as if born to" in the interests of both preserving their created family and their position as legitimate parents.

Growing up adopted has meant confronting a painful dilemma concerning my birth story, a dilemma that I have silently lived with and accepted as "natural" to those of us who are positioned outside the dominant category of the biological family. The essence of the dilemma has involved living "as if" I have only one history, while wondering, albeit in silence and shame, about the other: the particular circumstances of my own birth history which preceded the adoption placement. How could I possibly openly acknowledge my own birth story when I am the "chosen child" who is expected to embrace the adoptive family "as if" I am born to them?

For over thirty years, I have learned to "take up" the history of my adoptive family and repeat it "as if" it is my own heritage. Despite awkward moments of pretending to be someone that I knew I was not, I never questioned what appeared to be "normal" behaviour in the context of my adoptive family and the larger social world. Instead, I continued to live "as if" I was a daughter who was "born to" my adoptive parents. Subsequently, I silenced my persistent feelings of confusion and anxiety by attributing my difficulties of "adjustment"

to personal inadequacy.

I also grew up believing my birth story was unimportant, if not irrelevant, to developing my identity. And yet I could not stop myself from thinking about my birth mother in particular, and the ambiguous circumstances surrounding my adoption in general. However, beyond sharing the initial disclosure of my special position of "adopted" within the family, my adoptive parents rarely, if ever, mentioned adoption or my birth history. I could not understand why members of my adoptive family were not talking about adoption but rather acted "as if" we were a "normal" family, when I knew we were different. Clearly, they accepted and treated me no differently from my other siblings, but I knew I was different. From an early age I often thought it was my problem for not wanting to let go of my interest in the birth story, especially given the lack of special recognition paid to adoption by my adoptive family.

I have since come to understand that silencing the issue of adoption and thus my difference, simultaneously dismissed acknowledging my birth history as important knowledge toward consolidating a positive sense of self. Consequently, I was left alone to make sense of my different position in the family while pretending "as if" I was the "biological" daughter of my adoptive parents. Feeling trapped by my overwhelming sense of confusion, I learned to disregard my birth story as relevant knowledge to who I am; while taking up and living "as if" the history of my adoptive family is true, when it is not.

How could I publicly disavow my own birth story for all these years while in private moments of reflection desire to know more about my early beginnings? More importantly, I wonder why it has taken over thirty years for me to begin to question how the adoption

experience has been organized by factors outside of my personal control but through the larger social order. These are some of the critical questions that continue to inform my writing and ongoing reflections in my attempt to further understand how adopted persons "take up" the problem of identity. Celia Kitzinger (1989) reminds me, that "identities are not primarily the private property of individuals but are social constructions, suppressed and promoted in accordance with the political interests of the dominant social order" (p. 94).

A post-structuralist analysis of the issues shows how the category "adopted" is produced as different and less than, and thus secures our knowledge of the privileged category of the biological family. Additionally, this critical analysis will demonstrate what has happened to the participants' identity, as well as my own, under the dominant regime of "truth" that values biology over the creation of alternative family forms.

> Despite the current obsession with the psychodynamics of childhood, nothing provides so much information regarding the development of any person as the knowledge of the society of which he or she is a member. All the primary aspects of selfhood, including the meaning that any individual ascribes to the term itself, are socially situated (Richard Lichtman, 1990, p. 17).

Contextualizing the adoption experience in consideration of its socio-cultural, historical, intersubjective, and political context works directly to contest "birth wound" discourses. This critical perspective will also demonstrate materially what happens to adopted persons' identity when the need for recognition of difference is continually thwarted and undergoes systematically distorted recognition.

Common sense knowledge tells us that the cultural notion of family history, most

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notably manifested through the birth story, is important personal information from which to learn about ourselves; especially as it relates to our ancestors. Knowledge of our history is also seen to situate us within a particular historical lineage, and tells us who can and who can not be included as legitimate members of "the family". Additionally, this personal knowledge positions us within a culture which privileges genealogy to authenticate relationships and affiliation between members of a particular family group.

Knowledge about family history, however, is socially produced and firmly rooted in the dominant ideology of the biological family, an ideology that structures the foundation of family organization in Western culture. As Poster (1978) points out,

> if one views this family structure as the spontaneous consequence of "freedom" which wells up from deep within each individual rather than as circumscribed by social structure, one is essentially presenting it as natural to mankind. Therefore one is presenting it as the fulfillment of human needs, as an ideal social arrangement" (p. xiv-xv).

Conceptualizing "the family" as a constructed category of social configuration then works to re-position "adopted" as a constructed rather than "natural" category. This critical framework also works to deconstruct dominant meanings that are typically seen as "natural" rather than socially created to serve the interests of the established social arrangement.

The culturally produced story about "family history" constructs the foundation of meanings attributed by the dominant discourse of "born to" concerning attributes seen to be essential to the initial formation of identity. In particular, the existent terms of the debate set out by the dominant story upholds the notion that the process of identity formation is

predominantly influenced by biological relationships. Specific attributes seen to be rooted in biology include physical similarity, familiarity in characteristic traits, genetic predisposition and "blood" affiliation, all of which form a secure basis of identity. Recognition of self through "blood ties" then is constructed as a "natural" and "normal" process of identity formation in Western culture.

I argue, however, that the dominant claims attributed to "born to" discourses are a myth and irrelevant to people actually positioned within this category, but rather become a heavy burden for adopted persons who fall outside of the dominant category. People who belong to the category "born to" likely do not live up to the myth, but that is irrelevant because the discourse allows them a secure position together with a secure identity within this particular category. As an adopted woman who continues to struggle with issues of identity, I am confronted with two questions. Specifically, what is the nature of the burden that lies heavily upon adopted persons? More importantly, what does it mean for adopted persons to think of themselves in light of these taken-for-granted and uncontested cultural meanings about identity formation?

In all of their stories, the participants attributed significant meaning to the birth story, especially as it informed their evolving understanding of the identity "adopted". It is important to note, however, that the participants adhere to the existent terms of the debate set out by the dominant story about "the family" as manifested by taking up these meanings as both "natural" and "taken for granted" about identity formation. Despite some awareness of how the biological family structures our society, the participants tend not to challenge the meanings attributed by the dominant discourse of "born to". Rather, they accept these

meanings and then try to counter them by struggling to claim their identity through the terms set out in the dominant category.

What is equally important and problematic is how adopted persons do not see the "fiction" in the production of the "normal" which produces their difference. Instead, adopted persons seem to get caught up in re-producing the category "adopted" which also re-inscribes "normal". How then do the participants uncritically "accept" the dominant story as "truth" about identity formation in ways that become injurious to them?

All of the participants were placed for adoption through the closed system and, similar to the process of my own construction of "adopted", they have been forced to "take up" the history of their adoptive family "as if" it is their own history. Our investment in "taking up" the adoptive family's history and naming it "as if" it is our own is structured by, and guaranteed through, the regulation of sealed adoption records. For all of us growing up "adopted" necessarily meant having very few, if any, personal details shared with us about our own birth story. Consequently, the adoptive family's history is authorized to function "as if" it is our own personal history while being "cut off" from our historical background becomes a naturalized process of adoption.

Liz talks about her profound sense of confusion resulting from her experience of being produced "adopted"; that is, "as if" she was born to her adoptive parents,

> This cutting a kid off from every little bit and piece of original historic genetic information and asking him or her to **pretend** [my emphasis] for all intents and purposes that they are, they have the same genetic pool as the other people living in that house to whom they are not biologically related. Therein lies the problem. .

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. . taking a child or a human being, and grafting it on to someone else's family tree and making that child believe and having that family make believe that that child was borne to them. . . they were trying to pretend, and trying to get me to pretend, and pretending to all their friends and school and the whole extended family was trying to pretend that it was as if I had been born to those parents - It's not so. . . my problem wasn't pretending that I was somebody who I was not, was so much not knowing who the hell I was. . . I mean I really felt that I was really walking around with my head in a fog, not really having any clear idea of where I was or why I was there. . . . I had no idea why because everybody else was wondering around playing like everything was just fine and therefore it must be me.

Liz's account of her confusion around "not knowing who the hell she was" reveals several critical insights into the process of construction of "adopted". Through the process of "taking up" the history of the adoptive family, the adopted person is forced to secure his/her identity to "as if born to" discourses and thus render his/her birth story irrelevant. As previously mentioned, the template "as if born to" is a pretense that forces the adopted person to fake it, and live "as if" s/he is a biological member of the adoptive family when s/he is not. The scope of one's self-definition and subjective experience then is productive of, and limited to, the meanings attributed by "as if born to" discourses that regulate the functioning of the adoptive family.

As mentioned above, to live "as if" something is true when it is not is intolerable and injurious to the adopted person's developing identity. As Liz points out " I mean I really felt that I was really walking around with my head in a fog, not really having any clear idea of

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where I was or why I was there". The cause of subsequent injury to identity is the ongoing lack of recognition paid to adoption, together with a lack of recognition extended to naming our difference. Rather, the regulation of the biological family is further strengthened through "as if born to" discourses taken up by the adoptive family. The ideological work of this discourse functions to continually locate adopted persons within processes of intersubjective construction that are rooted in the myth of biology.

For the adopted person, however, his/her potential to develop a more comprehensive and integrated understanding of self is severely restricted to available, albeit oppressive, dominant discourses. Liz, for example, attempts to make sense of her position within the adoptive family through the myth of biology, but since she is not "biologically related" to people who share a similar "genetic pool", she struggles to position herself as a legitimate member of her family.

Given the impossibility of that endeavour, however, Liz attributes her deep sense of confusion to her inability to make sense of her experience, unlike other family members whom she perceived were fully capable of pretending that "everything was just fine". Liz concludes that her lack of clarity about her position in the family must be due to personal deficiency. Consequently, she takes up the problem of identity as her individual response to a family situation that is constructed on the foundation of living a "pretense".

Steve's reflections on his struggle to situate himself historically reveals further insights to how adopted persons' identity undergoes systematically distorted recognition through the myth of biology.

But, you know you grow up people say well what's your background and you say

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well I'm English and all this and you know it's not true, you know, you're just, you

adopt your family's history, you know, oh, I'm English and so all of a sudden when

you say you're English, people associate certain characteristics, certain mannerisms,

certain ways of speaking and the thing is, that's not who you really are, you know,

even though that's what they, they think you are. But you're not. . . . it wasn't my

real heritage.

As Steve clearly points out, in the process of "adopting" his family's history he is

forced to position his identity in their biological heritage and thus, pretend "as if" he is

biologically connected to his family. Hence, he is forced to live "as if" he is a biological

member of his adoptive family when he is not. As well, people outside of the family

continually locate the adopted person in biological relationships. Because Steve's identity

is securely tied to biology, he is also forced to take up "certain characteristics" of the

adoptive family's history which necessarily constructs his position "as if" he is born to them.

However, the problem confronted by the adopted person is twofold. First, the

adopted person's identity undergoes systematically distorted recognition through the process

of "adopting" the adoptive family's history and living "as if" his/her identity is rooted in their

biological heritage. Additionally, the adopted person is forced to position him/her "self" in

a particular family history that offers no recognition of self through an historical sense of

time. Instead, s/he is forced to live "as if" the history of the adoptive family is true when it

is not and through this process is forced to disregard his/her own birth story. From the

outset, the adopted person's identity is constructed through taking up and living a pretense

that inevitably extends beyond his/her experience of the adoptive family.

Steve points out that,

You know, you go and you have friends and they say, and they can sit down and tell you that their Grandfathers came from Europe on some boat and you know, and they've got all this history and you know what they're telling you is real. And then you sit there and go oh yeah, well, my Grandmother, she was from Germany and she came over on some boat, like yes, it was your Grandmother, but it has nothing to do with you. It's not, it's not in your blood.

Steve learns to pretend "as if" the history of his adoptive family is his own history which causes him to experience extreme feelings of discomfort and dissonance within himself. Conversing with other people about "family history" seems to further intensify the pretense to which adopted persons are subjected. As Steve says, what other people reveal about their personal history is assumed to be "real" and complete because it is rooted in biology. Clearly, Steve can neither comfortably position him "self" in his adoptive family's history nor his own suppressed birth story. Consequently, he is not located in either the history of his adoptive family or his own birth story.

Drawing upon the notion of harm, the potential for adopted persons to claim the adoptive family's history is thwarted by the lack of recognition paid to their own birth story. It is further thwarted by the imposition of pretense taken up by adopted persons that continually ties his/her identity to biology. Through this process of construction adopted persons learn to privilege family history only to the degree that it reflects "blood" ties.

The discourse of familialism induces regular effects of power through adopted persons. Specifically, "as if born to" discourses manifest the power of dominant meanings

attributed to the category "biological" and functions to re-create certain myths about how "normalcy" is attained. These meanings, however, are regulative in nature because we, as adopted persons, come to understand ourselves through available discourses. Unknowingly, we grow up taking up a "fictional" story about how "normal" identity is attained, but our acceptance of this story re-produces the established fiction of "normal". Hence, our difference through adoption is further inscribed to the category "other".

In the process of taking up the history of the adoptive family, adopted persons learn to see themselves through the discourse of the family which is manifested through "as if born to" discourses. Through the discourse of the family, then, the importance of biological characteristics to the formation of identity appears "natural". Consequently, personal endeavours toward consolidating self-understanding are perpetually tied to biology and the dominant claims attributed to identity formation. Liz, for example, talks about her ongoing struggle for recognition of her resemblance to another person,

I didn't feel like I looked like anybody. And, when you're adopted, you're looking around and you don't look like anybody else in your family. Nobody has ever said, do you look just like Aunt Reene - I didn't look like anybody. I didn't look like anybody.

Phillip also looks to his "blood" ties to account for a "very basic part of his personality" which he believes is a "very powerful thing" in the formation of his identity. Similarly, Andrew describes living with the absence of his birth story "like trying to grasp in the dark". And for Catherine, she experiences the lack of recognition paid to her own birth story as " a very profound loss - It was all sort of end of subject, you're adopted and now

your history starts now, like you don't have a history".

In all of their personal accounts, the participants attribute significant meaning to learning about their own birth story as a necessary process to positioning their "self" within an historical perspective. Most of the participants also consider the birth story as critical knowledge to the formation and ongoing consolidation of their identity. For example, as Andrew says, "there was something inside of me that was very much ill at ease with this pervasive darkness around my identity". Similarily, Phillip speaks of developing an "articifical persona" to help him reconcile the discrepancy between living "as if" the adoptive family's history is true when it is not. While John is more "curious" about his birth story and in particular, he wants to reassure his birth mother that her decision to place him for adoption was for the best.

The process of "cutting off" and subsequently suppressing the birth story, however, is an unquestionably damaging practice to the adopted persons' formation of identity integrity. More specifically, negative views the adopted person develops about the "self" are produced through the lack of recognition paid to adoption which continually thwarts appropriate recognition of difference. The pretense "as if born to" constructs the adopted person's identity "adopted" within the adoptive family, causing further harm and distortion to the evolution of his/her identity. Consequently, the adopted persons' identity is securely tied to the dominant discourse of "the family" which functions to perpetuate certain myths about how "normal" identity is attained.

Reflecting upon the process of adoption, most of the participants describe being "wounded" in some significant way by their subjective experience of being constructed

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"adopted". Some of the feelings describing their narrative of "pain" include: "confusion", "difference", "traumatized", "not really belonging", "emptiness", "sadness", "anger", "dehumanized", "secretive", "real heavy burden", "not fitting in", and "living a life of not being myself". As Andrew says, " I wasn't authentically me in a pretty strong way". In fact, many of the participants attribute pervasive feelings of "incompleteness" and for others, an "empty void" to living all these years without knowing fully the specific details of their own birth story.   These negative self-views, often internalized as individual traits, are predominantly rooted in the myth of biology and re-produced through the template of "as if" born to which is active in, and productive of, the formation of the adopted person's identity.

The participants' accounts reveal that the meanings attributed to their own birth story are contingent upon the dominant claims about "normal" identity. When speaking about the birth story they position their identity from within the category "born to" and thus, take up the meanings constructed around biology to inform self-formation. In particular, notions of genetic predisposition, physical resemblance, familiarity, recognition through affiliation, and similarity of personality characteristics are accepted as "normal" and "desired" features of identity that individuals "naturally" acquire through "blood" ties.

For most, if not all, of the participants, the birth story predominantly symbolizes biology that the adoptive family's history can not provide them. As Andrew points out, " it's not because they are bad people. It's just because they can't, they didn't give me my bones and my flesh and they can't give me my bones and my flesh". For Andrew, and for many of the participants, the enduring impact of being "cut off" from the birth story has penetrated deeply to their "bones" and "flesh", causing a sense of woundedness to prevail for many

years. Bounded by pain, Andrew reduces the absence of his birth story to a deeply felt psychic/physical wound and in this process, he experiences the identity "adopted" as problematic.

I argue, however, that the biological family is not in itself a psychic and/or physical injury caused by a "birth wound". I believe to take up this dominant claim is damaging; because we, as adopted persons, end up re-producing the fictional story about "normal", which further re-inscribes the category "adopted" as different and less than. Not only do we attach our identity to "biology" but we also get caught up in re-producing our own deficit identity position. By struggling to re-position our identity from within the category "born to", we also take up the problem of identity constructed through the category "adopted".

Rather, I argue that the birth story is critical to adopted persons' identity integrity for reasons that work to contest "birth wound" discourses. When I reflect upon the meaning of my own birth story, I fully recognize the ongoing struggles involved in looking beyond the "normal" meanings ascribed to identity. In fact, I still find myself being pulled back into desiring "normal" from time to time and for me, these particular moments are now recognized and named as potential sites of injury. But, I also recognize the necessity of creating alternative meanings in the interests of disrupting and displacing dominant and oppressive knowledges through which adopted persons are continually constructed and subjected.

The particular meaning of the birth story I want to subscribe to ultimately works toward rescuing the category "adopted" as real so that proper recognition as the basis for identity integrity can ensue. If we claim the category "adopted" as real, then adopted persons

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can openly acknowledge their difference and talk about what life is like from that position. Additionally, the adopted person's potential for developing a positive relationship to self is empowered through the intersubjective experience of mutual recognition of his/her identity "adopted".

From this perspective, the birth story can be seen as an integral component of the adopted person's life story that properly recognizes his/her own historical background. Acknowledging the truths about his/her own birth story also frees the adopted person to claim his/her affiliation to all relationships inclusive of the birth family. Most importantly, the unique meaning the adopted person attributes to his/her own birth story can be fully embraced, integrated and re-worked throughout life so that proper recognition of his/her difference is endorsed and celebrated.

I began this discussion by identifying the "birth story" as a site of injury to adopted persons' identity formation. From a post-structuralist perspective, I examined how the manifestation of "as if born to" discourses creates the category "adopted" as different and less than and thus, secures our knowledge of the privileged category of the biological family. More specifically, I argued that potentials are harmed in the process of construction of "adopted" through undergoing systematically distorted recognition of difference.

As demonstrated by the participants' stories, as well as my own story, it is evident that adopted persons undergo a process of harm to their identity through being produced "as if" born to the adoptive family. Having established the birth story as a site of injury which is organized through the myth of biology, I will investigate, in the following section, how the participants "take up" this site as injurious to their identity formation. In particular, I will

illustrate through their stories how they live, re-produce, and/or re-organize the birth story as they struggle to claim their own historical narrative.

. . . . LIVING A PRETENSE

Reconciling the experience of difference has been at the centre of some, if not all, of the participants' struggles toward claiming their own birth story. The concrete production of difference, however, inscribes the adopted person to "as if born to" discourses which forces him/her to take up and live the adoptive family's history "as if" it is their one and only heritage. Being constructed "adopted", then, perpetually ties the person's identity to living a pretense and thus, constructs him/her to invest in re-producing this pretense.

Steve, for example, talks about "playing a role" within the adoptive family for the purpose of securing his position to their historical background.

Well, growing up again, I had all these mixed signals, it was like every time I wanted something I couldn't express it or I didn't feel comfortable enough to be who I was because I didn't know who that was - I know I'm a Smith and I carry on this great heritage in name, but that's it. It's in name, it's not in my bones, it's not coursing through my blood. Do you know what I'm saying. I don't carry the blood of Richard the 4th who slayed the peasants in Brazil. But my birth family is, I don't know, it's just different, it's different. It's like when you go on stage and you play somebody, sure, you can play the role and you can make it believable but the thing is, it's still, it's not who you are, and when you go off stage, you become that real person again. And that's what it's like being adopted in a way. You accept all this information and

all this stuff and you play the role. But, inside, deep down, you know if you could step off that stage for awhile and become who you really are, you'd be a lot happier.

For Steve, the production of "adopted" generates a pervasive sense of incongruity, albeit unspoken, about living "as if" he is a biological member of his adoptive family when he is not. Although forced to "accept" his family's "great heritage" in name, he describes himself as being positioned outside of, and personally detached from, this heritage. In fact, taking up this pretense causes Steve to seriously question who he is supposed to be and thus, he reaches the conclusion that he ultimately does not know "who he is" especially in relation to his own adoptive family.

Clearly, "as if born to" discourses totally confine the adopted person's identity to living a pretense that is rooted in the myth of biology. Many, if not most, adopted persons ruminate about, internalize and often problematize their identity "adopted" by inevitably questioning "who am I" for several years.

Having the identity "adopted" constantly tied to biology, then, is injurious to the person's integrity because s/he is forced to live "as if" something is true when it is not. This concrete production of difference also produces the "desire" to position one's "self" in biological relationships, a desire that is constructed as "essential" toward the attainment of a "normal" identity. Steve, for example, takes up the heritage of Smith, but he is adamant that, "it's in name, it's not in my bones, it's not coursing through my blood". In the process of living "as if" Smith is his own heritage, however, Steve expends considerable energy in maintaining a "believable" role on "stage" within his adoptive family in ways that become harmful to his identity. Ultimately, Steve wishes he could "step off that stage for awhile"

so that proper recognition of his difference would ensue.

It appears that the adopted person has two choices. S/he can continue to live "as if" the adoptive family's history is his/her own and thus, re-produce the biological family as the centre of Western culture. The other alternative is for the adopted person to desire a connection to his/her biological relationships by claiming his/her own birth story as essential to identity formation. This latter choice, however, also re-produces "normal" and further inscribes the identity adopted as "other". For the adopted person to pursue either of these two choices only anchors his/her identity back to biology and to the problem of identity "adopted".

The struggle, however, is that the adopted person is continually located within processes of intersubjective construction within the adoptive family that directly work against supporting proper recognition of difference. Because the need for recognition of difference is constantly thwarted, the adopted person's potential for developing a positive relationship to self is harmed in that process of construction. Additionally, to live "as if" something is true, when it is not, perpetuates the pretense "as if born to" and thus, harms the person's potential for developing authentic relationships within the adoptive family.

As Steve says,

I think with my adoptive family it's just I'm so - well-rehearsed in what or who they expect me to be. . . . but it's been repressed, you know, like it's just, this is what my family expects so I've rehearsed and I've become so good at it now, that as soon as I get with my adoptive family, that's who I am.

For Steve, the investment in taking up his "role" constructed through "as if born to"

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discourses has been so well "rehearsed", he systematically takes up this vested position in his adoptive relationships.

The adoptive parents also have a vested interest in keeping his/her adopted son or daughter tied to their biological origins in the interests of safeguarding their child "as if" s/he is born to them. Andrew recalls an earlier experience that reveals particular insights to how adopted persons are implicated in intersubjective processes resulting in systematic distortion of difference.

I can remember this story from when I was around the same age, I was around eight years old - and we were at a swimming pool somewhere, somebody's swimming pool, and there was a bunch of people around and I was jumping in and out of the pool, and an associate of my father's was there. He didn't know our family so well, but he came up to my father and he said I didn't realize that one was yours, and he pointed to me. And he, this guy, you know, unknowing of the situation in our family, he said where does he get his blond hair from. And my father said, oh, my sister's really blond. My father, I don't, in a certain sense, I understand what he was trying to do, it was a very uncomfortable situation and he was trying to come to terms with it in a way that kind of made sense and he didn't have to go into our whole family history and upset my mother about it and upset me about it so he said that his sister's blond. But, the fact that his sister is blond has nothing to do with the fact that I'm blond, I mean, my father's sister is not my mother and I don't have a genetic connection to her. So there was this real confusion about where my eyes come from, where my ankles come from - it enhances this lie that oh yes, I was born into this

family. I mean that's the message that he was giving to this man, and to me, that I'm connected to my family genetically and everything's kosher and we're all one big happy family.

Andrew's words strike a personal chord in me, as I recall my adoptive parents presenting me to other people "as if" I was their actual biological child. Over time, I learned to "accept" being positioned "as if" I was born to my adoptive parents as a "normal" process of my membership in that family. Like Andrew, I knew that I was living a "lie", but considering other people's apparent acceptance of me helped to temporarily quieten my active state of confusion. In fact, up until the time I embarked on this project, I concluded, similar to Andrew, that "adoption was not a big deal", albeit an ostensibly "upsetting" issue within the family. But rather, I lived "as if" the history of my adoptive family "naturally" represented my genetic roots and through this process of construction, I also learned to dismiss my own birth story as important self-knowledge.

Andrew's account clearly demonstrates how the adopted person's position in the family is systematically organized through "as if born to" discourses. Regulated to function "as if" they are a "normal" family, adoptive parents, as exemplified by Andrew's father, are also forced to tie his/her adopted son or daughter to their "genetic connections" so that talking about physical similarities appears "natural". So when other people, including birth relatives or friends of the adoptive family, raise questions about our physical resemblances, we also re-produce "normal" by positioning ourselves in their particular family history.

Regulated by this process of construction, adopted persons, like Andrew and myself, learn to take up and connect our identity to the genetic attributes belonging to the adoptive

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family. Through this process, we learn to accept and live "as if" we are born into this family while our own birth story, that is, the truth about our difference, is denied appropriate recognition. We also learn to re-produce our own deficit identity position as we are forced to see ourselves through the template of "as if" born to in the interests of belonging to the adoptive family.

Despite the lack of recognition paid to adoption, private thoughts of my own birth story have persisted and grown in intensity over the years. These personal thoughts, however, are laden with strong conflictual feelings causing me to seriously question both my loyalty and gratitude toward my adoptive family. Specifically, I often wonder how I could be drawn to another history, even if it concerns my own early beginnings, when I am already situated within the history of my adoptive family. For me, the ongoing struggle involves my attempts to hold on to both family histories through the process of living "as if" I am born to my adoptive family. I definitely want both histories, but continually end up back to the original place of personal conflict subjected by feelings of deficiency and shame.

Marie's reflections further illuminate this particular site of tension;

My adoptive relatives hardly ever mentioned my birth mother, and I would never have approached any of them on the subject, whatsoever. Because to them I was my dad's daughter, no questions asked. It didn't matter where I came from, it didn't matter that I didn't look like them. I was part of that family, I was a Taylor and that's exactly who I was. . . . I know I was very very torn because there was a sense of guilt and that's where I'd gotten that sense of betrayal and loyalty and you know, if I were part of this family and I accepted this family and I loved this family then how

come I keep on thinking about this birth family. Is it right? Should I be thinking about them?

In particular, Marie raises the issue of her divided sense of loyalty as she grapples to reconcile the different truths about her two family histories. Similar to my own struggle, Marie names her attempts toward understanding her historical background as wrong, if not an obvious sign of her lack of appreciation toward her adoptive family. Additionally, she seriously challenges both her love and acceptance of her adoptive family as a result of even thinking about her birth family. In fact, Marie intimates that the love and acceptance of her family can only take proper hold in the absence of thinking about her history prior to the adoption. Mired in feelings of self-doubt, Marie also returns to her place of original struggle left wondering, "Is it right? Should I be thinking about them?"

As Marie's struggle demonstrates, to live "as if" born to the adoptive family produces intense contradictory feelings that raise larger questions about family membership for the adopted person. On the one hand, she is inscribed onto the adoptive family's history which functions to "cut off" and securely seal her membership to one specific family. The adopted person's family membership is further endorsed through the myth of biology and "as if born to" discourses. On the other hand, the adopted person's own historical background prior to the adoption also places him/her as a member of a second family including its history.

Being produced "adopted", however, authorizes and regulates exclusive family membership to the adoptive family so that the adopted person's birth story is rendered insignificant. But Marie's and my own struggles attest to the significant meanings we both attribute to our respective birth stories. Because of the site and strength of contradiction,

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however, neither Marie nor I could sufficiently sustain the birth story's significance without undue conflict, particularly if it possibly meant risking our membership in the adoptive family. As a result, both Marie and I returned to take up and re-claim the problem of identity "adopted".

Adopted persons re-experience this particular contradiction as a site of injury especially in other "family" contexts where the importance of the birth story continually resurfaces. Alexandra, for example, remembers her painful experience at family reunions she attended twice each year with her adoptive family. She recalls,

> I think there were times when I had a sense that I was grieving, for example, at a family reunion. My adoptive family is rather large. I had thirty-two cousins and a number of aunts and uncles and second cousins and we would have these wonderful gatherings about twice a year, one in the winter and one in the summer. I knew that those times were particularly difficult for me, but you know, it's really hard to step outside of your own life and look back and see the pattern. Now I can see it, hindsight is 20-20, but every single gathering like that, my depression was more acute. I would go into the bathroom and bawl my eyes out and I knew that part of that was it just got to me to look at my cousins who resembled each other and it just highlighted and underlined that fact that I didn't really feel like I fit in. And even just the subject matter of the things that they would discuss and their interests and their lifestyles. There was just such a contrast, you know, even though from their perspective, they included me and nobody treated me particularly differently. But, you know, I'm the one who knew that I was, I was really not one of "them".

Alexandra's experience of family reunions poignantly demonstrates how the adopted person sustains considerable injury to identity from the lack of recognition paid to adoption, and thus how s/he takes up "adopted" as a problem of identity.

From the outset, Alexandra feels bereft and immediately excluded from the "wonderful gathering" as her attempts to recognize her "self" amongst her large extended family prove unsuccessful. At that moment, however, she ties her identity to biology by looking for similar physical features in others to mirror back her "self". For Alexandra, the established practice of family storytelling also engenders intensified feelings of personal exclusion from others.

Failure to achieve a sense of affiliation produces additional feelings of depression, sadness and isolation which she attributes to her lack of biological ties to her adoptive relatives. Concluding that she did not "fit in" predominantly because she is not one of "them", Alexandra takes up "adopted" as a problem of identity. As a result, she deeply re-experiences the birth story as a site of injury to her identity integrity which she attributes to her unobtainable feelings of wholeness generated through biology.

Clearly, family reunions embody and sanction culturally specific meanings attributed to the biological family. For the adopted person, who is continually located in processes of intersubjective construction, his/her identity becomes problematized through the dominant ideology that privileges biology over the creation of alternative family forms. Inevitably, s/he is inscribed in the category "other" causing repeated harm to his/her identity because of undergoing systematically distorted recognition of difference.

The concrete production of difference, however, sets up a false claim for adopted

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persons. Specifically, the process of construction of "adopted" rests on the fundamental assumption that the lack of recognition paid to adoption will promote the person's feelings of inclusion within the adoptive family. Hence, the template of "as if" born to becomes active in the process of identity formation for adopted persons. But, learning to see the self through "as if" born to discourses only functions to further reinforce this self view in other intersubjective contexts.

As Alexandra points out above, however, the lack of attention on the part of her extended family to recognize her difference further entrenches her existent feelings of exclusion and causes her to problematize the identity "adopted". Additionally, her attempts to attain a so-called "normal" identity become increasingly burdensome to her. In particular, Alexandra comes to desire her own biological connections as the principal means by which she can successfully experience a sense of familial inclusion. In the end, her sense of burden is re-produced as she endeavours to continually tie her identity to biology.

Initial attempts to re-organize the meaning of the birth story by adopted persons are usually directed toward seeking state owned "non-identifying information". In claiming the birth story it may appear that adopted persons are invested in re-creating "normal" together with re-inscribing the category "adopted". But rather, I argue that in claiming the birth story adopted persons can begin to claim adoption as real so that proper recognition of difference can occur.

All of the participants, including myself, have received some background history through submitting a formal request for information to the Children's Aid Society of Ontario. Through this regulative process, however, the truths about our personal birth stories have

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undergone systematic distortion in the interests of the closed system of adoption. Adopted persons, however, are forced to wait for, and accept, whatever information, accurate or not, that is provided to them with the implied expectation that s/he should be "grateful". For some adopted persons, like Marie, the truths about the first two years of life may never be revealed to her primarily because of regulative practices that were sanctioned by closed adoptions.

I am reminded of Liz's first recollection of reading the poetry written by her birth mother, poetry that had been sealed in her adoption file for twenty-one years without her knowledge. As I listened intently, feelings of sadness and anger were elicited on my part as I was again reminded of how adopted persons are subjected to unjust practices. I wondered then, and now, what difference it would have made to Liz if she had received this poetry while growing up. As an adult, Liz can no longer pretend that her birth mother does not exist, especially in light of her poetry. For me, I now wonder what, if any, information I may have been denied in the interests of maintaining established social practices.

When I read my "nonidentifying information" for the first time in October 1991, I vividly remember being unduly appreciative and relieved to have finally received some data about my historical background (See Appendix G). The reality of having waited over one and one-half years for this state-owned information was immediately dismissed from my memory, including feelings of deficiency and personal discontentment. In requesting this information, my specific intention was to acquire some historical data especially concerning my birth family. Until that time of my life, I learned to accept not knowing as a normal state of anxiety imposed on adopted persons.

I remember opening the large envelope and reading the introductory letter with such an intense investment, as if my whole being depended on the specific contents of this envelope. The particular contents of the envelope included the following information: general adoption information, seven core issues of adoption, and my background history. At that time, I was only interested in reading my background history that was compiled in one and one-half single spaced typewritten pages.

Drawing upon my own birth story, it is evident that, in order to maintain the promised anonymity, significant details have been necessarily "cut out". In general, the brief narrative presents an anonymous sketch of superficial pieces of life pulled together and named "background history for" Lise Beauchesne. In fact, this historical sketch represents another person's interpretation of my official record which also marks the particular interpretation of someone else far removed from my birth story. In the end, this official interpretation is authorized to represent and function as the "true" legacy of my birth story.

I continue to struggle with the birth story as a site of injury in ways that become burdensome and, at times, intolerable to me. Specifically, I struggle to reconcile the meanings of my birth story with insufficient personal information, especially "the dates of things, places, pictures, - the irrefutable and the undeniable" (Findley, 1996). I then find myself locked into a place of not knowing. What keeps me tied to this locked position is my continuous commitment to learning more about my own historical background. And yet what unties me, albeit temporarily, is to pretend "as if" the birth story is unimportant to my identity integrity, as well as to my evolving life story.

The meanings of my birth story symbolize one part of my identity that necessarily

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intersect with and influence another part of my "self" through living "adopted". Through my ongoing struggle I am committed to transforming my experience of difference in ways that free me in my efforts toward claiming "adopted" as real so that proper recognition of my identity can occur. I fully recognize, however, that my struggle for liberation continues as I grapple to hold on to the different truths about my own birth story: truths that continually compete with and maintain resistance against the dominant claims of the established social order.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SECOND SITE OF INJURY

LIVING SILENCE. . . . .

That the governance of the adoptive family is manifested through "as if born to" discourses raises additional questions concerning how adopted persons learn to negotiate their difference in the context of everyday life within the adoptive family. When I reflect upon earlier experiences, I am reminded of my family's interminable silence about adoption. Consequently, I, too, learned to silence myself. For many years, I believed silence naturally reflected how living adoption was supposed to be. In fact, I rarely wondered how I could grow up with an older brother, who is also adopted, and not even speak to him about our shared experience of adoption.

While undertaking this project, however, I interrupted our years of shared silence by inviting him to engage with me in open dialogue about the adoption experience. Although initially surprised followed by immediate relief, my brother and I spoke in considerable depth about how adoption has influenced our early experience in ways that continue to construct our self-views and subjective experience as adults.

As I listened intently to my brother's story of adoption, I quickly acknowledged the unforeseen similarities with my own story. Specifically, he recalled feeling different growing up and rarely, if ever, felt good enough when he compared himself to our two younger brothers, who are the biological sons of our adoptive parents. For him, the identity "adopted" also produced feelings of depression, as well as an acute sense of confusion, and

detachment from members of our adoptive family. From an early age, he learned, as did I, to be ashamed of the identity "adopted", causing a sense of woundedness to prevail, albeit silenced, for many years.

Until that moment of genuine dialogue, these feelings that were shared between us had remained unspeakable and unspoken within the adoptive family. For the first time in over thirty years, my brother and I connected on an affective level through our mutual experience of private pain and current acknowledgement of both having survived the adoption experience. We have since come to a place of greater self-acceptance through personal healing by taking the initial risk of talking about being positioned in a different category.

Since that initial dialogue occurred, however, particular critical questions have troubled me about living in silence for all these years. More specifically, **what contributes to the production of silence within the adoptive family? Why has it taken over thirty years for the silence to be broken between my brother and me concerning our shared adoption experience? How could my brother and I grow up in the same family, both of us adopted, and not speak about the meaning of our experience?** Although the barrier of living in silence for over thirty-eight years has been broken between us, I continue to be bound by the need to protect other members of our adoptive family from the knowledge of how adoption has influenced my life. For now, the discussion that transpired between my brother and I remains our private matter.

A post-structuralist analysis of adoption opens space for me to engage in critical thinking about the constructed meaning of silence. In particular, I want to investigate how

silence is governed through the adoptive family, including how this process is a manifestation of power relations that are sanctioned by the dominant social order in the interests of policing families. This critical perspective, then, necessarily situates the regulation of speaking and silence in the social realm so that the politics behind what can be spoken and who can speak for whom can be explained from within a broader context. Hence, the question of how the participants' and my own silence and speech has been organized can be taken up as critical knowledge.

Many of the participants attributed blame to their adoptive parents for not being actively "open" about the adoption issue and in doing so, looked to their own intra familial dynamics to understand the reasons for this continual lack of dialogue. For many years, I, too, believed my adoptive parents were primarily responsible for suppressing any possibility for a meaningful exchange to occur. Bound by parental blame, I frequently felt that they failed to fully comprehend the significance of adoption in determining the meaning of my everyday life.

Other participants, like Andrew, believed they were "born" with feelings of "rage" and "intense grief" resulting from the **in utero** experience with his birth mother. However, this view of attributing adopted persons' affective experience to the original birth wound is problematic and highly questionable. Specifically, this dominant claim gives primacy to the biological relationship between mother and child and in doing so, provides a decontextualized, static, undynamic, and individualized perspective on the origins of emotion.

Additionally, this claim continues to propagate the myth of biology as the conclusive

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explanation for our subjective experience of adoption. Thus, the individual/social distinction established to account for the construction of knowledge of the biological family is perpetuated. Consequently, this perspective continues to place undue privilege and highly questionable re-emphasis on the birth mother/child bond as the decisive dynamic in explaining our lived experience of the adoption process.

I recognize, however, that my critical stance is different from, and directly challenges, most of the participants' views of the adoptive family as a distinct, self-correcting, autonomous, and cohesive unit seen to be fully accountable for making the adoption experience either a positive or negative memory for each of them. Regarding the adoptive family in this discrete way only serves to perpetuate individualism and re-produce the biological family as the centre of social organization. As well, the functioning of an unjust social order is further protected from critique by the suggestion that individual and/or familial responses are problematic.

Poststructuralism advances the perspective that the adoptive family is governed to maintain and to re-produce the familial character of our society. In this regard, the construction and governance of silence within the adoptive family takes on a radically different meaning that situates family discourse within the politics of speaking. From this critical framework, I argue that adopted persons are positioned as "objects of regulation" (Walkerdine, 1985), who necessarily learn to take up certain prescribed rules that govern acceptable and unacceptable discourse organized through the adoptive family.

Drawing upon the participants' stories, I recall on several occasions how feelings of sadness and strong identification were evoked as they reawakened memories of isolation

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arising from bearing the personal burden of such intense affect. Similar to the participants' experience of silence, I often received the message that some issues were uncomfortable and, therefore, not permissable to talk about within the adoptive family. So I learned to completely avoid and subsequently repress these adoption related issues as meaningful to the process of understanding myself through the identity "adopted".

I argue that for adopted persons to bear the burden of silence all these years has been harmful to identity formation. Further harm to identity has been repeatedly sustained through being denied the opportunity to speak the different truths about the adoption experience. As Steve points out, "if you don't have someone saying it's alright to talk about this, you don't talk about it because then it becomes a bad thing". For most of us, adoption was usually associated with being an injurious experience in some way.

In fact, many of the participants perceived their restricted opportunity to engage in open dialogue about adoption as a lack of personal choice. But rather than contest the organization of silence, it is evident that adopted persons learn to negotiate silence and speaking in ways that cause intolerable burden and damage to their sense of self. In the process of the construction of silence, then, "we bear the burden of anxiety ourselves when we are denied the opportunity to speak" about our personal reality (Walkderdine, 1985, p. 225).

I further argue that adopted persons are forced to negotiate a "delusional reality" (Walkerdine, 1985) that is produced by "as if born to" discourses so that open dialogue is systematically curtailed within the adoptive family. As previously discussed, the primary ideological function of this discourse is to secure knowledge of the biological family as the

privileged category of social organization. It also preserves institutionalized secrecy of the adopted person's birth story through the closed system of adoption. Hence, the fundamental structure of this delusional reality is firmly rooted in social practices organized in the interests of perpetuating the dominant category of "the family".

I have established, in the initial section, that "as if born to" is a pretense; this further suggests that adopted persons are continually located in, and constrained by, specific prescriptions governing family discourse. Organized to preserve the myth of biology, the rules of discourse also function to maintain the dominant interests of the biological family. These particular prescriptions necessarily function to regulate how the process of speaking and silence is manifested within the intersubjective context of the adoptive family. Hence, "as if born to" discourses also work directly against adopted persons taking up adoption through meaningful dialogue.

In fact, "as if born to" discourses impose further pretense upon adopted persons who are forced to engage with the adoptive family in maintaining a distorted reality. This distortion of living "as if" s/he is a biological member of the family when s/he is not becomes more burdensome to adopted persons when they are denied permission and space to speak openly about their own reality. Clearly, rules that govern family discourse within the adoptive family are inevitably implied and rarely, if ever, open for discussion. Consequently, permission to talk about being in a different category is continually thwarted for adopted persons.

In this regard, particular sites of contradiction ensue for adopted persons arising from their struggles to belong while attempting to hold on to fragmentary pieces of their own

reality that are rooted in difference. Specifically, how can the adopted person raise questions about adoption when his/her identity is securely bound by "as if born to" discourses? If s/he opens the issue of adoption for discussion, s/he also raises the possibility that s/he is not actually a biological member of the family. Pursuing this realm of questioning, however, also puts at risk the fundamental structure of the adoptive family by suggesting that there may be something "wrong" with their particular family.

Conversely, if s/he does not engage in open dialogue about adoption and the reality of his/her difference, s/he gets caught up in re-producing the constructed pretense of living "as if" s/he is a biological member of the adoptive family. It is evident that, if open dialogue about adoption is curtailed, adopted persons also struggle to resist taking up the deficit position "other" that is constructed through the identity "adopted". Hence, s/he ends back up at the original sites of contradiction involving the systematic regulation of his/her speaking and silence, causing continued harm to identity formation.

In reviewing the participants' stories, the regulative effects of power are manifested through their lived experience of silence and, in particular, learning to accept silence as a "natural" and "normal" process of living adoption. Andrew, for example, talks about learning not to question the imposed silence he experienced within his adoptive family. He says,

> I think I just learned to dissociate from it. . . . I can see myself as a kid around ten
> years old walking through the school yard and I had this very strange sensation. .
> . . I remember feeling that there was an image of two strangers, a man and a woman,
> who were up in the sky somewhere and they were god-like creatures looking at me,

and then I walked on a little bit, and I said well that doesn't concern me. And I remember saying to myself in my head - many people have very interesting births and lives and interesting life stories and it seems that mine just won't be very interesting. And it wasn't a huge emotional thing, it was just a decision that I made at that point in the school yard as a child that my life won't be interesting, the way other people's is. Because I needed to be safe, I needed to shut down all these feelings and at that time, I couldn't deal with the wonderment of it, it was too painful. It was too painful for me and it was too painful in our family. So, the wonderment about my life and my birth I just said well no, it's not an issue. My life isn't going to be about questioning things.

Andrew's recollection of an earlier pivotal experience clearly demonstrates how the adopted person learns to take up the rules of family discourse and, in the process, attribute the meaning of silence to the pain inducing issue of adoption. But rather than challenge this imposed silence, Andrew learns to "shut down" on an affective level and thus concludes that his identity "adopted" must not be an issue for him. At that particular moment, he also closes off his sense of "wonderment" about his identity. Through this process of "dissociation", then, Andrew also learns to compartmentalize his feelings and thoughts about adoption that provide significant meaning toward understanding himself through his lived experience.

Bound by silence, Andrew's potential to consolidate critical issues that influence self-knowledge undergoes systematic distortion concerning his identity "adopted". I also learned not to question or to have feelings about adoption and when I did, I learned not to have them. Rather than naming individual responses as problematic, poststructuralism advances the view

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that both Andrew's and my own silence is the concrete effect of regulation through our identity "adopted". In the process of construction of silence, we learn not to question or to trust our own subjective reality. Instead, we learn to live in silence and to accept silence as "normal" and "natural".

Being constructed "other", however, continually subjects the adopted person to his/her identity "adopted". Thus, the adopted person is securely tied to his/her feelings and thoughts involving the meaning of the adoption experience despite the inflicted damage and harm in not speaking one's own reality. In reflecting upon his own silenced voice, Andrew says, "it's given me a great sensitivity to silence and to unspoken words and to the need to learn how to say unspoken words that need to be said. It's been a very big struggle for me to break off this lock around my throat". One of the concrete effects of the production of silence, then, is being "locked" in and bound by our feelings arising from the identity "adopted".

Andrew's account provides additional insight to the intersubjective processes within the adoptive family that contribute to the production of silence. He says,

> ... there are a lot of unresolved issues that my parents have about my adoption. And these feelings, I don't want to speak for them, and I can't, I don't want to articulate their feelings for them, but I know that they're there, I know that they have them. We haven't, I haven't discussed them so much in my family, but there's a lack of dialogue.

Several insights are revealed toward understanding the social process of living silence within the adoptive family. Recognizing the absence of familial dialogue as problematic, it

is evident that Andrew surmises, rather than actually knowing, how his adoptive parents feel about adoption. Specifically, he believes his parents have several "unresolved issues" concerning his position in the family, issues that have been unspoken for over twenty years. But Andrew reveals that he has carried the silent burden of these unnamed issues which he feels personally responsible for creating. Thus, the lack of dialogue within Andrew's adoptive family only perpetuates self-blame in ways that further problematize his identity "adopted", as well as his own adoption experience.

Andrew's further reflections attest to the effects of power relations produced through the politics of speaking in the interests of maintaining the closed system of adoption. Having lived with his adoptive family for over twenty years, Andrew still is uncertain about the nature of his adoptive parents' feelings about his membership in the family.

How they feel about me being in the family, from the beginning. Their feelings about having to adopt a child. Their feelings of that whole process, going through that, what was it like for them, to suddenly have this kid with them. These kinds of things were never discussed in my family. And that's their issue. It's my issue because I'm involved in it, but it's part of it, of why, I guess what I'm trying to say is that there are a lot of feelings and it's like they're all under the surface. Like they're not articulated, they're not brought to consciousness, they're not. It's not part of the ongoing discourse within our family. And it starts from when I came into the family and it just continues this theme of not talking about this issue.

Clearly, "as if born to" discourses function to inscribe adoptive parents to the position "as if" they are biological parents in ways that limit their potential to promote meaningful

dialogue about adoption with their adopted son/daughter. I have often wondered how adoptive parents could comfortably raise the issue of adoption beyond the initial disclosure, especially from their own subject position "other". They, too, are denied open space to dialogue about being in a different category and through the governance of the adoptive family, they are forced to preserve the pretense endorsed by "as if born to" discourses.

As Andrew's account demonstrates, adopted persons sustain considerable harm to identity formation when his/her need for recognition of difference through dialogue about adoption is systematically curtailed. Andrew, for example, is left feeling overburdened and confused by both the unspeakable and unspoken issues within his family, but foresees no end to the continuation of the "theme of not talking" about adoption. Instead, he concludes that adoption "is not part of the ongoing discourse" within his family. Andrew takes up silence as a "natural" and "normal" process of his adoption experience and thus, also takes up "adopted" as a problem of identity.

Similarly, Steve addresses his thwarted potential to consolidate the meaning of his adoption experience in ways that responded to his changing need for recognition of difference. He remembers the ongoing lack of dialogue about adoption within his adoptive family. He says,

> I guess it's kind of like "better left unsaid", you know. I suppose if you talk to my mother or my sister they'd say well we were open about your adoption, we always told you. That's fine, you know, that's great, like I buy that. I did, I've always known that I was adopted, but the thing is as you mature, you need more than the fairy tales. You need somebody to sit down and say, that's what I think it was. No one except

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my sister really, she' come to me and say, like every now and then she'd come to me and it was kind of like a sneaky little thing. She'd come in and if mom wasn't around and she'd say, do you like being adopted? What's it like being adopted? . . . When I reflect back on it, I think was she just being nosy, was she doing it to make me feel more alienated, or was she trying to reach out to me. I can't, I don't know, I'll never know what her motives were. And then, with my mother, I'm sure she would say well we were very open about your adoption, but the thing was they weren't open enough that I felt I could go up and say - I really feel crappy about this sometimes and I feel like I don't belong and I don't look like anybody. So, you didn't feel that comfortable enough that you could have an open discussion.

Steve's recollection of his intersubjective experience within his adoptive family captures several rules, albeit implicit, established to govern family discourse. In keeping with the regulative practices of the closed system, adoption is necessarily positioned as a fixed circumstance that is best left in the past. So, beyond naming the chosen child "adopted", further dialogue about adoption is deemed insignificant, if not irrelevant, to perpetuating the fabric of the adoptive family. The process of naming adoption, however, is sanctioned as legitimate "openness".

If, however, the issue of adoption is raised again, the manner in which it is presented is often secretive in nature and tainted with an aura of ambiguity. As Steve reveals, he continues to struggle with how to interpret the nature of his sister's intentions when she queried him about his identity "adopted". But rather than positioning herself from within the family experience, she locates herself outside of adoption and thus, her questioning generates

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feelings of discomfort and detachment within Steve. Consequently, he positions himself outside of the adoptive family and concludes that adoption is exclusively his own private and problematic matter to resolve.

Instead, the questions posed by Steve's sister (i.e., do you like being adopted? and what's it like being adopted?) offer proper recognition of difference in her secretive attempt to engage with him in open dialogue. But her genuine efforts are curtailed by the prescribed rules inscribed by "as if born to" discourses that regulate acceptable and unacceptable family talk within the adoption experience. Hence, neither Steve nor his sister come to any further understanding about his identity "adopted" and so, it's "better left unsaid".

What remains unspeakable and unspoken, however, continues to influence Steve's experience of himself within the adoptive family in ways that become burdensome and injurious to his identity formation. Like Andrew, Steve also learns to negotiate his adoption experience through silence and in the process, learns to accept the lack of open discussion about adoption as acceptable family life. As Catherine was growing up, she also recognized that personal feelings or questions about adoption were predominantly her responsibility to bear and so concluded, "let's just be silent about it - you know what". Catherine also learns to take up silence and thus learns to silence herself.

As Alexandra points out, however, taking the risk to open the issue of adoption for dialogue raises intense anxiety about the possible repercussions. She says,

> . . . only by acknowledging it can we move forward, otherwise, we're in some ways bound up with it forever and never able to move on. And this is my reticence to talk about it in that family. It's like I don't want to be seen as focusing on the negative

and whining and complaining and oh whoa is me.

So, if adopted persons raise the issue of adoption as Alexandra suggests, s/he possibly fears outright rebuff emanating from the need to speak one's own reality. But as Alexandra points out, she did not want to be perceived by her adoptive family as a complainer or as a negative person who was creating problems unnecessarily. In the end, it seems that the only viable option for adopted persons is to take up silence while recognizing, albeit privately, the need for space to speak openly about his/her reality of adoption.

As some of the participants' stories reveal, the process of learning to negotiate their lived experience within the adoptive family is continually tied to "as if born to" discourses so that proper recognition of difference is curtailed. In particular, the dominant discourse of adoption regulates family discourse in ways that severely restrict opportunities to create space for open dialogue about adoption. So, there is an entire level of lived experience within the adoptive family that is constructed as unspeakable and unspoken and thus, undergoes further distortion in the process of silence and regulated discourse.

Additionally, the adopted person is forced to continue to live "as if" s/he is a biological member of the adoptive family and through the construction of silence, is compelled to silence his/her own reality about the adoption experience. For this reason, it is evident that adopted persons struggle to resist the deficit identity position when they are continually tied to "as if born to" discourses and constructed to be silent.

Bound by the need to belong to the adoptive family, adopted persons learn to take up and accept silence as a "normal" and "natural" process of how living adoption is supposed to be. Living silence, however, re-produces the identity adopted as "other" and also re-

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inscribes the biological family as the privileged centre of social organization. In the following section, I will demonstrate how some of the participants struggle in unique ways against the silence by showing how they live, re-produce, and/or re-organize silence in ways that sustain continued harm to identity formation through the process of living silent.

. . . . .LIVING SILENT

It is part of the kaleidoscope of life that these feelings are not only happy, beautiful, or good but can reflect the entire range of human experience, including envy, jealousy, rage, disgust, greed, despair, and grief. But this freedom cannot be achieved if its childhood roots are cut off. Our access to the true self is possible only when we no longer have to be afraid of the intense emotional world of early childhood. Once we have experienced and become familiar with this world, it is no longer strange and threatening. We no longer need to keep it hidden behind the prison walls of illusion. We know now who and what caused our pain, and it is exactly this knowledge that gives us freedom at last from the old pain (Miller, 1994, p. 81).

Alice Miller's words strike at the heart of the lived experience for adopted persons who struggle to overcome the regulative effects of speaking and silence. It is important to note, however, that I am not positing an essential "true" self for adopted persons. Rather, I claim that his/her identity undergoes further systematic distortion of difference when the lived reality of adoption is predominantly governed by silence and structured family discourse. In the absence of permission and space to speak freely about adoption, the

adopted person is forced to "cut off" access to his/her emotional world. Recognition of his/her identity "adopted" is also cut off from genuine dialogue. Thus, opportunity for self-understanding about adoption through the integration of personal truths is continually thwarted.

How, then, can we, as adopted persons, feel good about ourselves if we are denied open expression of our emotions related to being in a different category but are forced to carry around intense, and oftentimes painful, affect? Clearly, the reality of the adoption experience is generally not damaging. But rather, the adopted person's inability to speak his/her lived reality is damaging to the process of identity formation.

Several of the participants spoke candidly about their subjective experience of silence. For example, Catherine says, "I am so emotional and so intense that it often did feel like I was in an emotional straight jacket - that is what it's like being in this family". Marie experienced a pervasive "sense of emptiness" arising from a "huge void" which she felt grew from having "no space or voice" to put words to her lived experience. Similarly, Alexandra carried around intense affect realizing that she "had some level of insight but there was no way to articulate it. There was grief, there was pain" And then, there was silence.

As for Phillip, he says, "it was as if I'd wrapped the whole issue up in cotton wool and was very unwilling to have the cotton wool removed. . . . But there is a sense that it is a tricky area in the family and for all their support, it always has been". Liz identifies with the contradictory aura around her identity "adopted". She recalls that, "the fact that I was adopted was never a really big issue and it was never a really big secret. It was put to me like this, "You were adopted, that's all we know and it's family business, so you're not to talk

to anybody about it". But, Liz raises the critical question that if being adopted is not a "big issue", then, why can we not talk about it openly?

I also longed for adoption to be acknowledged as a legitimate issue for family discourse, but constantly ended back up at the original place of desire for recognition of difference - "please someone, anyone, ask me, talk to me about what it feels like to be adopted". Neither did I voice these feelings nor did any one engage with me about my adoption experience. Instead, when I dared risk disclosing my identity "adopted" with others, I typically received no response or "so, what". So, adoption became a strange and threatening issue that I learned to approach with caution and eventually learned to silence. I also learned to keep my identity "adopted" "hidden behind the prison walls of illusion" (Miller, 1994, p. 81), so that the pretense of "as if born to" could be protected within the adoptive family.

Experiencing the concrete effects of the production of silence has resulted in many, if not most, of the participants constructing a childhood narrative of internal badness. Several of the participants' stories reveal how feelings of deficiency, shame, fear, threat, and guardedness are rooted firmly in early adoption experiences in ways that maintain a powerful force over their attempts to re-construct the original narrative. Through the process of being constructed "other", however, adopted persons experience additional feelings of gratitude, loyalty, and protection especially toward the adoptive parents which function to strengthen his/her vested interest in being silent.

Marie talks about how the shroud of secrecy around adoption has constructed the negative story-line of her narrative. She says, "I think that secrets generally are secret

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because there is a negative concept around them. So, there's always, immediately from birth, from the adoption, there is always a negative connotation with adoption to me because of the secrecy. . . . and I didn't talk about it as much as I should have because it was a secret". So Marie takes up adoption as something negative about her "self" because of the blatant nature of secrecy in which it is enveloped. In the process of internalizing the identity "adopted" as a negative attribute, she also learns to be silent through the constructed secrecy of adoption. Thus, her negative feelings about herself are continually tied to silence, causing further distortion of reality to ensue.

Additionally, Marie's feelings of internal badness are secured to, and undergo repeated distortion through, her sense of gratitude towards her adoptive parents. Marie recalls,

> . . . even though my mother, as I said before, was open to discuss it, I never felt that though because it was a secret. And because it was a secret, it was negative.   . . . And there's a big struggle with me, or there had been with loyalty - well that's great and you appreciate that, but you're so afraid because you've been told for so long by so many people, by society, in particular, how grateful you should be that you are adopted, that no one's ever given me a chance to say hey, maybe I'm not happy. Or, maybe that this has affected me or what about the fact that I feel rejected or what about the fact that I felt abandoned or that I felt insecure and that no one ever told adoptees that that was alright to feel that way or to talk about it . . .

Marie's experience uncovers several insights into how her constructed narrative is predominantly influenced by and re-produced through the grand narrative of adoption.

Specifically, the story our culture has created about adoption advances the notion that adopted persons are fortunate to belong to a legitimate family and thus should be appreciative. The grand narrative constructs the meaning of adoption as a positive and fortuitous milestone for adopted persons and thus constitutes feelings seen to be negative as "other". So any conflictual feelings arising from the adoption experience are necessarily constructed as wrong and attributed to individual deficiency in some way. Rather, the grand narrative of adoption constructs both gratitude and loyalty as acceptable feelings on the part of adopted persons.

As Marie herself demonstrates, adopted persons who struggle with feelings of internal badness get caught in the mire of tension between the story lines of the two competing narratives. On the one hand, Marie struggles to reconcile her "other" feelings about adoption with her strong sense of loyalty and gratitude toward her adoptive parents. Part of Marie's struggle entails her attempt to hold on to her own private reality together with her feelings of appreciation. But since her own feelings about adoption fall outside of the grand narrative, they are rendered unacceptable and force Marie to take up silence about her subjective experience. Hence, feelings of gratitude, loyalty, and protection toward her adoptive parents continue to prevail over her relationships.

On the other hand, Marie attests to the multiplicity of emotions that emerge from the lived experience of the adoption process. Clearly, the internal struggle for clarity and recognition of difference intensifies as the adopted person is continually tied to intersubjective processes of construction of "other" and "silence". Not only does Marie's narrative of internal badness take up the dominant claims of "rejection" and "abandonment"

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concerning the origins of her adoption, but she is denied public space to dialogue about being in a different category. Instead, she is left to bear the burden of anxiety herself without proper recognition of her struggle to make sense of her experience of difference.

In fact, there is an entire realm of the adopted person's subjective experience that is constructed as unspeakable and unspoken. Instead, his/her reality is silently lived in ways that are injurious to identity formation. As for many of the participants, Marie's struggle to make sense of her difference has been forged through the construction of her childhood narrative of internal badness.

Andrew reaches similar conclusions about himself early in life while maintaining the belief that his identity "adopted" must be problematic. He says,

> . . . this leads into I think the whole issue of my insecurity and apologizing for all, you know, just discourse in general that it's, you know, that don't worry, there is nothing wrong with you - which has been a part of my experience of being adopted and feeling in some way there is something wrong with me because I'm different, I feel different. It wasn't ever explained to me why I was different and this hiddenness and this secretiveness about it that there must be something bad; there must be something wrong.

From Andrew's account, it is evident that his experience of regulated speech and silence has been injurious to his identity formation. Specifically, he interprets the silence within his adoptive family as a direct reflection of his identity "adopted". Subjected by silence, any attempt on Andrew's part to check out his constructed meaning about his adoption experience is restricted by the manifested power of secrecy and the politics of

speaking. Recognizing that adoption is "the" obvious secrective issue, he takes up the problem of identity by concluding that "there must be something wrong" with him. Consequently, his narrative's story-line of internal badness begins to take root.

Clearly, harmful feelings about himself are produced through the construction of silence in ways that fasten his identity to the category "other". From within that position, then, he takes up feelings of deficiency and insecurity to inform his sense of self, feelings that are re-produced through the governance of speech. Denied the opportunity to engage in honest dialogue about his own reality, Andrew is left in silence to make sense of his difference, a difference for which he feels he should "apologize".

As Andrew points out, however, the concrete production of difference also produces his desire to be "normal". He refers to an earlier period of his life:

> I think I went to extremes in terms of trying to make myself feel as normal as other people, just psychologically doing that. And that's part of this kind of thing of wanting to be the same as everybody else and it's just so unnatural and it's just so untrue and it takes its toll on a person.

Given that Andrew can neither be positioned as "normal" nor receive proper recognition for his difference, he silently lives through his adoption experience. Thus, bound by his narrative of internal badness, he learns to "lock" the issue of adoption "away somewhere, for a long time". At that decisive moment, his identity "adopted" also undergoes a process of compartmentalization in ways that severely limit his potential to acquire important self-knowledge as he matures in his efforts toward developing a positive relationship to self.

Clearly, the construction of silence prevents the adopted person from even talking about his/her constructed narrative of internal badness. Instead, s/he learns to take up his/her narrative as the only plausible, albeit unspeakable and unspoken, explanation about the adoption experience. Through this process of internalization, however, the adopted person learns to "numb out" on an affective level as a necessary self-protective response to the barrage of emotional responses arising from his/her reality of the adoption experience.

Steve, for example, vividly remembers his ongoing and "awful" experience of isolation resulting from the imposed silence he accepted as a "normal" process of adoption. He says,

> I became the keeper of secrets. I became secret boy. I just never got the chance to
> vocalize how I felt, so instead of vocalizing it, I just internalized it and kept it all
> inside until finally someone said, I'm listening and it all just came out.

In fact, it was not until Steve was twenty-seven years of age that he spoke openly, for the first time, about the meaning of his subjective experience of being adopted. Until that time, however, he harboured feelings of deficiency about his identity "adopted". As Steve states, "I was a normal average looking kid. I didn't have anything other than I was adopted. So, that's the one thing that was my weakness".

Steve's story strikes a personal chord in me as I remember the barren reality of living in extreme isolation for all these years. I wonder why adopted persons continue to maintain the investment in silence and from that position, learn not to take up a critical perspective on his/her adoption experience. However, Steve reminds me of how adopted persons are "subjects in power" (Foucault, 1984) through which the regulation of speaking and silence

is manifested. Through our silence, the interests of the dominant social order are perpetuated, including the established familial character of our society. For adopted persons, however, we continue to be subjected by the ideological power of the category "biological".

> Steve says,
>
> That's what I mean, a lot of this is coming, it's all reflective now. I'm looking back on my life and I say oh, you know, like why did I handle those situations that way. Why wasn't I more direct or why didn't I do this and why didn't I do that. But at the time you don't even realize you're doing things like that. You don't realize you're holding all these feelings inside until someday the cork just can't hold it all in any more and it all comes gushing out. . .

Adopted persons' investment in silence is a critical question that I continue to grapple with in order to understand how the origins of personal deficiency are necessarily located in the social realm. By taking up a poststructuralist perspective, the origins of the childhood narrative of internal badness are also seen to be socially constituted. At the level of the individual, however, it is evident that adopted persons who bear the burden of silence also suffer systematic damage to his/her sense of self. As Alexandra disturbingly points out,

> I died. . . . It eroded my trust in them further. It made me feel powerless. It confused me. It made me feel like my experiences weren't important, or maybe they weren't even real. I couldn't trust myself. I felt more ashamed, more guilty. I felt like I had no right to those feelings and that they were bad feelings and that there was

something wrong with me. It made me feel even more flawed. You're already flawed because your birth mother tosses you, right? There's got to be something wrong with you if your own mother is throwing you out the door; that goes without saying. That's going to take years of therapy, if ever, to not believe at any level at all. Even if it's only one cell, I will always believe that. I really will. It's a matter of minimizing the damage but, damage control if you will.

Alexandra's narrative originates from the belief that she is already a "damaged" and "flawed" person for having been rejected by her birth mother. Being continually located in intersubjective processes that force her reality to be silenced or, at best, guarded, Alexandra must interpret the meaning of her lived experience of adoption from that place of silence. Similar to other participants' stories, she labels herself as the problem which further solidifies her original narrative of personal deficiency. Hence, Alexandra's conflictual feelings take root in her identity "adopted", as well as adversely colour her experience within the adoptive family.

As some of the participants' stories demonstrate, however, these intense feelings of deficiency are re-produced through established family practices in ways that are further injurious to his/her identity integrity. More specifically, the date of birth of the participants marked a particularly difficult and "painful" occasion for many of them, often causing feelings of sadness among other conflictual emotions to ensue. But the production of silence, that is governed through the adoptive family, functions to impede, for adopted persons, any thought of or attempt at interrupting the rules of acceptable family discourse.

Marie, for example, talks about the sadness she experienced on her birthday. She

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says,

> I don't really know if I made sense of it actually. I think that the biggest reason I
> didn't ever discuss it was because a birthday was supposed to be a happy time, this
> was a celebration of my birth. So, in some ways I kind of felt ridiculous saying to
> my adoptive family well, I really feel depressed, especially when I was older because
> I'm thinking about my birth mother. Actually, out of all the times that I knew in the
> year of my life, that was going to be the day that they were thinking of me,
> particularly my birth mother. I always knew that. You can not give birth to a baby
> and forget about them.

Marie's account raises an important site of contradiction that broadens insight into how adopted persons struggle to reconcile their own reality while living without proper recognition of their difference. Specifically, Marie acknowledges that a birthday is typically a celebratory event, but within the adoptive family her experience is differently constructed. Marie is confronted with feelings of both shame and wonderment, but remains silent about her reality. Instead, she takes up the rules of adoption discourse and silences herself in that process.

Being constantly located in intersubjective processes regulated by silence forces Marie to problematize the meaning of her own birth. In fact, it is the construction of silence that occurs within the adoptive family that initially produces these conflictual feelings. How can Marie talk openly about her birth when she is positioned in "as if born to" discourses that name her birth story as "other"? Marie's different truths about her birthday are not open to public discourse. So Marie names her mixed feelings as "ridiculous" and re-produces her

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own silence. Rather than interrupt the imposed silence and possibly risk being misunderstood, she turns to herself for comfort by validating her difference with private, albeit shameful, thoughts of her own birth mother.

Birthdays for Steve also evoked private reflections of his own birth mother, reflections that he perceived were unacceptable discourse to share with members of his adoptive family. He remembers,

> . . . around birthdays, I'd get upset about being adopted. . . . it would be two days before my birthday and I'd start thinking about my birth mom and like I'd never cried about any of this with my family. Heaven forbid I'd start crying because I'd have to tell them, and then you know, I thought well if I tell them, they're just going to kind of shoot me down and I went, oh, I'm not going to say anything to them. And my friend, he just took it all . . .

Steve's account points to additional struggles adopted persons encounter through the construction of silence that result in further distortion of their narrative of personal deficiency. As Steve poignantly demonstrates by his lived experience, he has learned to dissociate his genuine feelings about his identity "adopted" from his silent reality that he takes up within the adoptive family. Rather, he carries the personal burden of containing his intense emotions while preserving the belief that his range of feelings about "being adopted" are dangerous. In fact, even the anticipation of possible disclosure of his reality evokes strong images of retribution from his adoptive family. Bound by feelings of protection, Steve ventures outside of his adoptive family for recognition of difference. But, in doing so, he also takes up "adopted" as a problem of identity through continuing to live silent within

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his adoptive family.

Feelings of personal deficiency that emanate from the constructed narrative of internal badness are continually at risk of re-surfacing and of being re-produced, especially outside of the adoptive family. Specifically, it is predominantly within the larger social order that adopted persons are acutely cognizant of their difference from other people who belong to the category "biological". In this regard, then, adopted persons' everyday life is in some way intimately tied to the knowledge of the biological family as the privileged category of social organization in our culture. Hence, we, as adopted persons, are constantly reminded of our deficiency for not belonging to the dominant category.

Alexandra talks about her attempt at interrupting the aura of silence around her adoption at a family reunion, but is starkly reminded of being positioned outside of the category "biological". Overwhelmed by feelings of deficiency, she "gives up". Alexandra says,

> . . . you try so many times and you sort of get burnt, or you get the message that this is not comfortable and it's not okay. You stop trying, you give up, you say okay, this is not okay, this is not well-received, and people are not interested in hearing about this. You don't really understand as a kid that maybe they've got their own stuff around it or that simply is not part of their experience, so why should I talk about it. I mean they're in their birth family. If you're talking about a group of forty people, they've got other things to talk about. They don't need to be hearing about this. They don't want to be hearing about this. What's it got to do with them? Like I said it's a nonissue.

It is evident that Alexandra's subjective experience of the family reunion becomes burdensome to her sense of self. Given that her endeavours fail to engage other family members around her difference, she "stops trying" and concludes that "people are not interested in hearing about this". It is further evident that Alexandra internalizes their lack of personal interest in adoption also as a lack of vested interest in acknowledging her identity "adopted".

In fact, Alexandra makes the claim that members of her extended family can talk freely about their own birth family and thus her difference is a "nonissue" for them. It bears repeating an earlier claim that I posited at the outset, that people who belong to the category "born to" do not live up to the myth, but that is irrelevant because the discourse allows them a secure position together with a secure identity within this particular category. But as Alexandra's account shows, the dominant claims attributed to "born to" discourses become a heavy burden for adopted persons who fall outside of this privileged category.

Clearly, adopted persons who struggle with living silent are governed by social processes of adoption that function to regulate speaking and silence. These processes, however, harm the person's potential to acquire self-knowledge, as well as severely limit choices to speak openly about his/her reality of the adoption experience. Instead, adopted persons are continually located within processes of intersubjective construction that secure their identity to "as if born to" discourses, and to the politics of speaking.

As demonstrated by some of the participants' stories, the production of silence forces the adopted person to make sense of his/her subjective experience in ways that give some meaning toward understanding his/her identity "adopted". As illustrated through some of

the participants' stories, the construction of a childhood narrative of internal badness develops and undergoes further distortion through the regulation of speaking and silence. In fact, being denied an open space for public dialogue about adoption is extremely burdensome and injurious to the adopted person's identity formation.

In most of the participants' stories, they continually struggle to resist against taking up the silence. But without proper recognition of difference and constructed to be silent, adopted persons also struggle to resist taking up the deficit identity position. Thus, adopted persons learn to silence their own reality by living silent as a "normal" and "natural" process of adoption. Consequently, the narrative of internal badness is re-produced and re-inscribes the category of adoption as "other". Social organization keeps "born to" as its centre.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE THIRD SITE OF INJURY

THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING MOTHERED. . . . .

The experience of being mothered emerged as a significant and often conflictual theme in many of the participants' accounts of adoptive family relationships. Specifically, the story of the relationship between the adopted person and his/her adoptive mother emphasized their lack of biological connection. This realization of difference evoked intense and at times, painful emotion on the part of the participants who have struggled to forge a sense of genuine connection within the adoptive family. In fact, for some of the participants, the process of disclosing the intimate dynamics of their relationship with the adoptive mother signified a first time public event, while for others it meant re-awakening painful memories of disconnection. I have often wondered, how a person who was adopted as an infant can not experience a sense of connection particularly to his/her adoptive mother.

When I think about the personal experience with my own adoptive mother I am filled with sadness and regret because of the lost potential to our relationship. For many years, I struggled to make sense of our relationship and often attributed my struggle to the absence of "blood ties" shared between us. Regrettably, my adoptive mother and I never engaged in dialogue to further understand the nature of our strained relationship. Instead, we lived silently side by side "as if" we were mother and daughter, while dynamics beyond our comprehension at that time influenced and organized the lived experience of our adoptive relationship.

It has now been over eight years since my adoptive mother died, but my determination to understand and re-write the story of our relationship has continued to be an integral piece to naming my adoption experience in a different, more liberatory discourse. For this reason, I have engaged with the participants' stories of their experience of the adoptive mother so that I can learn more fully about how they have weaved together the intricate dynamics of that influential and yet unsettling relationship.

Listening to these stories was extremely powerful; but also unsettling for me, as I was acutely reminded of how earlier feelings of pain and disconnection had constructed my original narrative of the mother experience. Many of the participants had constructed a similar narrative of their own mother experience rooted in birth wound discourses. For some, it also continues to inform their understanding of recurring and/or unresolved struggles with identity. It was this re-emerging theme about adoption that became more problematic to me.

In developing this alternative perspective, I looked to my subjective experience of being unsettled to help identify another critical site of injury for adopted persons. In particular, some of the participants' experiences of the adoptive mother, as well as my own account reveal injury to identity in ways that cause harm to our potential to develop a positive relationship to self through the experience of positive relationships within the adoptive family. Rather, several of the stories show systematic injury to self sustained through confusing, if not difficult, adoptive relationships, especially as manifested by the lived experience of the adoptive mother.

Many of the participants experienced the lack of biological connection to the adoptive

mother as a site of psychic and physical injury to their process of identity formation. Through the process of taking up the dominant meanings ascribed to mothering, many also ascribe the identity "adopted" to primal wound discourses (i.e., infant trauma). As discussed previously, this discourse propagates the widely held view that adopted persons sustain irreparable damage to the self following the initial separation from the birth mother.

From this perspective, the birth mother is positioned as the "natural" connection seen to be necessary to the child's process of "normal" development. The adoptive mother is produced as the "other" mother which means different and less than because she constitutes the negative of "biological". Nancy Verrier, author of The Primal Wound (1993), and herself an adoptive mother, points out that the "other" mother is not the "right" kind of mother for the adopted infant. Verrier (1993) also believes that infants intuitively know the difference between the two experiences of mothering. Hence, the site of injury is named for adopted persons.

I argue, however, that the nature of the injury to identity does not originate from within the birth wound, but is systematically produced through adoptive family relationships that are structured by specific dynamics firmly rooted in our cultural context. Specifically, the dynamics organized through "good" mothering practice manifest one form of social power which function as prescriptions for the construction of the mother experience within adoption. It also functions to mask the marginalized position of the adoptive mother and her lived experience of oppression, especially within her own familial relationships.

Additionally, the power of the familial discourse necessarily positions relationships formed through adoption as "other" because they, too, constitute the negative of "biological"

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relationships. The social origins of this particular power are manifested through the category "born to" which positions "blood ties" as the basis of legitimate relationships, relationships that are seen to be part of the natural order. Because adoptive family relationships fall outside of the dominant category, they are produced and perceived as different and less than. And so, the natural order is re-inscribed.

While I recognize the impact of individual dynamics on the development of adoptive relationships, it is evident that other dynamics rooted in the social order are manifested through these familial relationships. Generally, the current view of adoptive relationships is questionable and problematic because it locates the origins of interpersonal difficulties predominantly within the family system. For example, established reasons for problems are attributed to faulty communication between parent and child, unresolved personal issues involving infertility of adoptive parents and/or adjustment difficulties on the part of both the adopted person/adoptive parent to his/her adoptive status.

Instead, I argue that this widely held perspective on adoptive relationships presents an undynamic, static, de-contextualized and limited view that severs relationships from their socio-cultural context. Thus, the question of how relationships are structured by other critical dynamics falls outside of most, if not all, current perspectives on adoption. For example, what impact does the privileging of the biological family have on the creation of adoptive family relationships? What happens within these relationships when pieces of their shared lived experience can not be talked about? More specifically, how can adoptive mothers reconcile their feelings about their position "other" in silence, especially when they are regarded by society as a second class of mother?

A poststructuralist analysis of production specifically considers how dominant discourses and social practices organize to perpetuate "the family". It also demonstrates how the adoptive family is governed by the "natural" and "normal" configuration of relationships in ways that are injurious to adopted persons' potential to form authentic relationships, especially with the adoptive mother. Poststructuralism advances an important augmentation to current views about adoption in ways that locate relationships within the social structure. This theoretical perspective also illuminates how intersubjective experiences between people are systematically organized and re-produced in everyday life in the interests of perpetuating the status quo.

Several questions deserve consideration. Specifically, what is the impact on relationships to be raised "as if born to" the adoptive parents? What is the connection between oppression and relationship? What is the impact of oppression on the relationship dynamics between adoptive parents and the adopted person? Moreover, if the biological family is not in itself a "birth wound", then what other dynamics impede the formation of an authentic connection between the adopted person and the adoptive mother? These critical questions will be taken up in the following discussion on how adoptive mothers are socially produced as "other" mother and thus, provide insight to the ideological power of cultural dynamics on the experience of being mothered within adoption.

One of the most predominant and pervasive assumptions underpinning the conception of motherhood is the notion that motherhood is a "natural" and "biological" phenomenon (Russo, 1976; Whitbeck, 1983). O'Barr, Pope & Wyer (1990) point out that, "Biological motherhood, as a discrete and exemplary feminine event, is elevated, providing of course it

occurs within the prescribed cultural scenario" (p. 14). This position recognizes that the idealization of motherhood is rooted in the traditional conception of mothering as essentially biological. According to this argument, motherhood is explained on the basis of women's reproductive capacity, a childbearing capacity that constitutes a natural process determined by innate factors and biological characteristics of women.

Biological explanations for women's mothering role rest on the basic premise that a woman's physiological constitution necessarily and naturally equips her to reproduce children. Consequently, the dominant ideology perpetuates motherhood as natural, universal, inevitable, and appropriate female behaviour. The argument predicated on biological determinism, provides some insight into the dominant perspective on motherhood and the ascribed social meanings of this female event. What this position fails to consider, however, is the degree to which mothering practices are culturally prescribed.

Monique Wittig (1979) argues that "one is not born" a woman, but becomes a woman through the socially constituted category of woman. Wittig (1979) contends that the conception of what a woman is or should be, and the concomitant mothering role, is culturally determined. Premised on the notion that the definition is imposed upon actual biological women, Wittig (1979) elaborates on how the concept of woman is constructed rather than a "natural" category,

> . . . sex, is taken as an "immediate given", a "sensible given", "physical features".
> They appear as though they existed prior to reasoning, belonging to a natural order.
> But what we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and
> mythic construction, an "imaginary formation" which reinterprets physical features

through the network of relationships in which they are perceived. (They are seen black, therefore they are black, they are seen women, therefore they are women. But before being seen that way, they first had to be made that way.) (p. 71).

Wittig's (1979) central thesis is especially useful in providing insight into the inherent contradictions in the adoptive mother's experience of motherhood. Given that the dominant view of motherhood essentially equates the experience of motherhood to biologically determined factors (i.e., the childbearing capacity of women), how is adoptive motherhood perceived? In keeping with the notion of concept construction (Wittig, 1979), it is evident that, although adoptive mothers are women, they do not conform to the normative expectations of biological motherhood. Consequently, in our culture, it is likely that adoptive mothers are perceived as different. As a consequence, they are different. However, before being perceived as different, adoptive mothers first had to be made to be different.

Within the dominant framework, adoptive mothers are necessarily placed in a deficit position when viewed against the normative parameters of "natural" and "normal" female behaviour. Through the process of construction, they are produced as the category "other" mother and function to further secure biological motherhood as the centre of "good" mothering practice. Additionally, the adoptive mother's experience of motherhood remains undefined as "other", but clearly is made to be and perceived as different because it constitutes the negative of biological motherhood. Consequently, the adoptive mother is continually located in intersubjective processes, albeit oppressive, that tie her identity "other" mother (i.e., adoptive not biological) to the position of different and less than.

I argue, however, that the dominant meanings ascribed to mothering are a

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"sophisticated and mythic construction" (Wittig, 1979, op. cit.) that establish false claims about the formation of relationships, especially between women and children. Specifically, the dominant claims constructed through "motherhood" propagate the notion that women who give birth to their own child also possess the "natural" capacity to form a secure connection with that child. In fact, the particular connection shared between birth mother and birth child is typically idealized in our culture over "other" relationships formed in the child's life. Thus, the significance attributed to relationships with "other" mothers, like with the adoptive mother, is systematically undermined and fails to receive proper recognition of difference. As well, it remains highly suspect whether the bond established with the adoptive mother can ever be sufficiently "good enough" for the child's development of a secure sense of self.

I further argue that the dominant ideology of "the family" functions to securely position biological relationships as the centre of social organization. Categorizing the birth mother/birth father as the "natural" parents is seen to be part of our culture's natural order. From this perspective, it is implicitly understood that the adoptive mother/adoptive father are the "unnatural" parents predominantly because of their lack of biological affiliation to the adopted child. The ideological power of this discourse works to name and organize the "normal" and "natural" configuration of legitimate and acceptable familial relationships in our culture.

Established knowledge of familial relationships, however, produces a fictional story about infant trauma that dominates the formation of adoptive relationships. In particular, the relationship between the adoptive mother and the adopted person is highly vulnerable to

being influenced by, and organized through, primal wound discourses. At the level of lived experience, the adopted person takes up the dominant claim that s/he has suffered an early trauma and subsequent internalized loss resulting from his/her initial separation from the birth mother. Additionally, s/he also takes up the notion that the birth mother is the "natural" parent whose source of physical and emotional sustenance is necessary, if not vital, for healthy human development to ensue.

By taking up the story of infant trauma, the adopted person's subjective experience of his/her relationship with the adoptive mother is continually tied to primal wound discourses. Rooted in feelings of trauma, the adopted person struggles to reconcile his/her experience with the adoptive mother, while maintaining the claim that the birth mother bond epitomizes the "natural" evolution of human relationships. In fact, the adoptive mother, herself, embodies the site of injury to the adopted person for she represents the lack of biological connection her child could have experienced with her. Hence, the adopted person's feelings of woundedness and deprivation of being denied the biological bond are vulnerable to further re-production through the relationship with the "other" mother who is seen as different and likely not the right kind of mother.

In efforts to understand the struggle to belong in his adoptive family, Andrew speaks candidly about the origins of trauma he has sustained,

> . . . it is a confusing kind of thing because it seems like there's no apparent course
> of events within the existential happenings of my family to make me feel this way.
> I mean, my parents are not bad people, but I haven't been through anything like
> physical or sexual abuse in our family - there hasn't been anything like that to make

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me feel this kind of trauma. And yet, it is a trauma in the family. So, I ask myself, well, where does this come from and I just have to make sense out of it in what might seem to be a more abstract kind of thing. It's abstract and it's not, but it's about the issue of being born and the feelings in the family and my feelings of being born. There's a trauma, a very deep trauma. I'm convinced beyond any question of a doubt that when you take a new born from its biological mother that that is a trauma and that I was traumatized in that event. And not only from birth. I mean my birth mother made a decision at a certain point while she was pregnant to give me up. So, my being in her womb while she is in this state of contemplating giving me up, I'm sure that that impacted me and my psychological development in a very big way.

In Andrew's attempts to make sense of his deeply felt "trauma", he looks outside of his lived experience of the adoptive family for plausible explanations. After eliminating the occurrence of any major traumatic event in the family to account for his subjective distress, he takes up the story of infant trauma. Within this discourse, Andrew subscribes to the dominant story-line that suggests the root of initial trauma is tied to his disconnection from his biological mother. Andrew also looks to his **in utero** experience to elicit further understanding of that particular events' critical impact on his subsequent "psychological development". Hence, he reaches the only possible explanation for the origins of his trauma that is circumscribed by primal wound discourses.

Andrew's interpretation of his struggle to belong is highly questionable and problematic for several reasons. Clearly, his understanding of adoptive relationships is completely severed from the dynamics rooted in our socio-cultural context, but rather

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propagates the conventional view of biological determinism. Andrew's explanation re-produces the birth mother as "natural" and re-inscribes the adoptive mother to the category "other". As well, Andrew takes up the dominant claim that the birth mother bond is essential to his healthy psychic development. Consequently, he believes the adoptive mother can not properly recognize or adequately provide for his needs considered essential to "normal" development of a positive sense of self.

Additionally, his experience of the adoptive family relationships are problematized because of the absence of the biological connection shared between them. In fact, Andrew intimates that his struggle to belong likely originates from his early trauma including the lack of shared blood with members of his adoptive family. Andrew's explanation evokes my puzzlement regarding how his subjective experience of adoption can be so intimately connected to the first nine months of life in ways that transcend the concrete production of his everyday life.

Clearly, the ideological power of primal wound discourses works to solidify biology as the "natural" and "normal" configuration of relationships and thus continually problematize the connections formed through adoption. Andrew's experience of adoptive family relationships is intimately tied to, and lived through, the fictional story of infant trauma so that his struggle to belong is re-inscribed to biology. Hence, Andrew's lived experience of his adoptive relationships is often personally unsatisfying, if not problematic for him.

In reviewing the experience of being mothered of the other participants, I was particularly interested in how they talk about the relationship with their adoptive mother.

Drawing upon the notion of discourse analysis, my reading of their individual accounts specifically focused on how the adopted person positioned the adoptive mother through discourse. I also considered how s/he positioned him/herself within the intersubjective context of that relationship. This particular analysis of the participants' stories also shows to what extent his/her mothering experience is influenced by and/or organized through the dominant story of adoption, including primal wound discourses.

Steve, for example, unequivocally believes he grew up without having a mother or a father which he attributes to his adoptive status, causing him to seriously question whether he actually bonded with his family,

> I never went out of my way and said I'm adopted. Like as far as I was concerned, I wanted that word to go away. I just wanted to be like every other kid. But, then in my mind I was always going, I don't have a mom and dad. . . . They knew who their mom and dad were and they were their real mom and dad and they looked like their mom and dad and they acted like their mom and dad and they sounded like their mom and dad and not me.

Steve takes up the loss of membership in the privileged category "biological" as a major assault to his identity integrity. Located from within the deficit position, Steve also takes up the dominant meanings ascribed to legitimate relationships as manifested through blood ties. Thus, Steve experiences the absence of biological connections as a deeply felt injury to his emerging sense of self. More importantly, the lack of recognition paid to his adoptive relationships gives the disturbing impression that these connections are virtually nonexistent, if not less legitimate to him.

Through positioning his adoptive relationships to the category "other", Steve's subjective experience of genuine connection is continually thwarted in ways that leave him desiring a sense of belonging to his own biological connections. His sense of familial disconnection is clearly apparent as he talks about his hesitation in naming his adoptive mother as his own mother,

I remember one time we had a school thing where the mothers came in and helped the kids sew puppets. Me and this little boy were over in the corner of the room and he says that's my mom and he just said it like it's a fact, "that's my mom". I just remember me going, "that's my mom", kind of like yeah, that's her. I remember so much when I was younger about my attitude towards things and the way I spoke - Because that's a fact. That's his mom and he doesn't even have to think twice about it, "that's my mom". Whereas mine was, "that's my mom, kind of ".

Steve's words elicit considerable sadness as well as anger on my part, as I am reminded of how the social construction of adoption is produced and re-produced through relationships. Through the process of taking up the privileged knowledge of "good" mothering practice, Steve positions his adoptive mother as "other" mother which he has learned to perceive as different and less than. Hence, this dominant perception of his adoptive mother perpetually informs his lived reality of the "other" mother.

Steve's further remarks speak poignantly to the lost potential he has experienced within his adoptive relationships, "I don't think I ever bonded with my family. I don't think I ever took them to my heart". Similar to Andrew's narrative of the mother experience, Steve's adoptive relationships generate feelings of woundedness together with an intense

desire to belong to the category "born to". For Steve, then, the mythic construction of "good" mothering practice and the "natural" configuration of legitimate relationships continually inform his experience of self within the intersubjective context of the adoptive, albeit "other" family.

When talking about the experience of the adoptive mother, Marie positions herself outside of the normative parameters of "natural" and "normal" mother/daughter relationship. She points out that,

> And it was also different for my adoptive mother because even though she loved me and I was "like" her daughter, she hadn't given birth to me. She was celebrating my birthday, but she was celebrating my birth that another person had.

Marie's distinction between the adoptive mother and the birth mother is important to how she positions herself in both relationships. Specifically, she positions herself as "like" the daughter of her adoptive mother because of the lack of biological bond between them. Marie's assertion about her position strongly suggests that she does not actually consider herself as "the" daughter of her adoptive mother. Clearly, the privilege of daughter exists exclusively with the birth mother in Western culture.

Additionally, Marie intimates that her adoptive mother's perception and experience of her is probably influenced by the absence of blood ties naturally shared between most mothers and daughters. Although recognizing that her adoptive mother does "love" her, Marie also positions that particular feeling against the category "born to". Thus, Marie's experience of her adoptive mother is organized through the ongoing possibility that it would be different, that is, better and feel more "natural", if she had given birth to her.

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Similar to my own silent experience within adoption, it is evident that Marie and her adoptive mother have not engaged in open dialogue about the nature of their relationship; but rather, Marie takes up the dominant meanings ascribed to "mothering" in ways that function to distort her own perception and subjective experience of the adoptive mother relationship. Considerable psychic energy, on the part of Marie, is likely expended in everyday life to wondering about `who she really is' in relation to her adoptive mother. It is also highly probable that the adoptive mother wonders about her own position as "other" mother and, in particular, what Marie's perception and experience of her as "mother" might be.

I return to Andrew's experience of the relationship with his adoptive mother, which he describes as the "darkest side of the whole issue of adoption". Clearly, there is a part of my own experience that strongly identifies with the "dark side". And yet there is another part of me that named the "experience of being mothered" as a critical site of injury, so that the grand narrative of adoption and, in particular, the sophisticated and mythic construction of "good" mothering practice would be disrupted and re-named.

It is important to note that, before our initial interview, Andrew seriously considered what information, if any, he would disclose concerning the interpersonal dynamics of the relationship with his adoptive mother. Clearly an important decision for Andrew, he wished to share his personal reflections so that both of our understandings of the mother experience within adoption would be further challenged and generate new insights. Andrew says,

. . . when I began thinking about all this stuff, that this was an issue that came up, me and my adoptive mother. I realized that that's really what a lot of this is about in

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terms of my identity and my problems around this issue. And I'm saying what I can say in order to hopefully shed some light on this for myself and for you in your work.

And so Andrew openly talks about how the adoptive mother can not possibly replace the bond that is naturally developed with the birth mother,

. . . there is a very very strong physical and I believe possibly spiritual connection between a new born and its biological mother, that it can not have with any other creature on the face of the planet, no matter how loving, or how developed, or how sensitive or how caring that other being may be. The bond between an infant and its birth mother is very strong and like I said, when you rupture that, it is a trauma. . . . this longing for my birth mother - there's just a lot of pain and longing for my birth mother. That's very real and I believe that it just goes back to that very very early phase of life.

While I fully respect and recognize the intense pain that Andrew has undergone within his adoption experience, the particular meaning he ascribes to his "pain" evokes uncertainty about the proposed site of injury. As previously discussed, Andrew situates the origins of his pain and "longing for birth mother" in the dominant story of infant trauma. By taking up the primary story-line that adopted people experience trauma at birth and also are highly vulnerable to re-experiencing this trauma throughout life, Andrew continually feels bereft and without a sense of belonging or genuine connection within the adoptive family.

Additionally, Andrew positions his birth mother as the "natural" and "normal" mother whose emotional, psychological, and physical function can not be performed by anyone else,

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including the adoptive mother. By accepting the dominant claims of "good" mothering practice, Andrew firmly believes that the relationship formed through biology is irreplaceable and, if ruptured, produces ongoing trauma for the child. In fact, he leaves me with the impression that he has not been engaged in a mothering relationship within his adoption experience. Andrew's experience of being mothered by the adoptive mother is constantly experienced as unsatisfying, as well as personally wounding to his emergent sense of self.

As I reflect upon my readings of some of the participants' stories of the mother experience, I am further reminded of how other social dynamics, such as the valuation of biology, has powerfully influenced and organized our lived experience of adoptive relationships. What is most revealing and unsettling, however, is learning about the concrete effects of the ideological power of biology on the adopted persons' subjective experience of self within the adoptive mother relationship.

As demonstrated by some of the participants' stories, the experience of an authentic and satisfying mothering relationship is continually thwarted through the power of the social configuration of legitimate relationships, including "good" mothering practice. In the following section, I will further show how the social construction of adoption is lived, re-produced and/or re-organized through relationships, causing harm to the adopted person's potential to fully engage in satisfying and healthy connections. Specifically, the ensuing discussion will examine how the participants', as well as my own perception of difference ascribed to the adoptive mother in particular, is experienced and lived through familial relationships.

. . . . THE DESIRE TO BELONG

Adoptive family relationships are a complex and multifaceted issue, especially in Western culture, which values biology over the creation of alternative family forms. When I reflect upon my own position within the adoptive family, I am reminded of a few isolated occasions where the subject of my inclusion was emphasized. Specifically, I remember my two younger brothers, who are the biological offspring of my adoptive parents, telling me that they consider me as their own `sister'. On another occasion, I recall both of them reassuring me that they have always felt that I am `just one of the family'. These genuine and unsolicited attempts of my brothers to reinforce my sense of belonging generated additional feelings of confusion and difference rather than increased feelings of inclusion.

Rooted in personal feelings of turmoil is a major site of contradiction involving my desire to belong to the adoptive family, as well as to my own birth family. On the one hand, there is a part of me that appreciates receiving some acknowledgement for being `one of them' even though I know that my position in the family rests on taking up the pretense "as if" born to them. In fact, I often felt envious of my younger brothers' privileged "biological" position in the family; but until taking up this project, I attributed my feelings of envy to personal inadequacy. So moments of reassurance helped to ameliorate, albeit fleetingly, private feelings of anguish for being an outsider to the adoptive family.

Since then, however, I have come to understand that my brothers' presence in the family has been a constant reminder of my own deficit identity position. Specifically, they belong to the category "born to" while I belong to the category "adopted" which I have perceived and experienced as different and less than. I learned to internalize these feelings

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of deficiency as part of my self-definition of being adopted within the family. Consequently, my adoptive relationships have been continually influenced by, and organized through, the ideology of biology by taking up the deficit identity position "adopted".

On the other hand, I have silently experienced repeated disappointment in my adoptive relationships because of the lack of recognition paid to adoption and, proper acknowledgement of my different position within the family. For many years, I have wanted to be connected to my own birth family primarily to ensure my membership to the privileged category "born to". Clearly, I desired to be like everybody else whom I perceived experienced a "natural" affiliation and sense of belonging with their own family members. In fact, I did not want to be `different' anymore but wished to be the `same' as everyone else.

What I now realize, however, is that my securely held `desire to belong' to the dominant category has been predominantly produced through the ideology of biology that organizes the centre of social organization. This dominant ideology establishes the mythical claim that biological connections guarantee a sense of familial belonging, but without "blood ties" one can not possibly experience a sense of "naturally" fitting in to a family group. So the desire to belong to the category "born to" becomes a naturalized process within adoption whose connections are often problematized because they lack the biological tie to legitimately secure the adopted person's membership to the adoptive family.

Drawing upon the notion of harm, the following questions are particularly relevant to the analysis of how adoptive relationships are lived in everyday life. Specifically, how can the adopted person develop and engage in authentic relationships within the adoptive family when s/he is forced to live a pretense organized through the template "as if" born to

them? Additionally, how can the adopted person resist taking up the deficit identity position when s/he is continually located in intersubjective processes that systematically thwart proper recognition of difference?

The following discussion will specifically examine selected sites of injury to the adopted person's identity as demonstrated by some of the participants' stories of their lived experiences of adoptive family relationships. In particular, these sites of injury will show some of the concrete dimensions, operations, and effects of the production of difference on adopted persons who struggle to forge an authentic connection to the adoptive family. This struggle for connection also interfaces with a desire to belong to one's own birth family.

In reflecting upon the relationship with her adoptive parents, Catherine remembers the pressure she experienced to maintain the pretense "as if" she was born to them. She recalls,

> I can remember my mom saying you're always at church - and what I realize now is I remember my mom at some point saying to me that my birth family were really solid church people. I think what was going on was that she was feeling kind of threatened by this because my parents went to church, but I was like really heavily involved in the church and they weren't. It was like, you are more like "them" than like "us". I think that's what was going on.

Catherine's account reveals several critical insights into how the template of "as if born to" constructs adoptive relationships. Specifically, "as if born to" discourses set up the false, albeit harmful, claim that the manifestation of difference is dangerous to the security of the adoptive family. As Catherine points out, signs of difference appear to produce a

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sense of threat on the part of her adoptive mother. In fact, Catherine surmises that her heavy involvement in the church exemplifies her difference from, rather than her similarity to, the adoptive family. Thus, she is more like her birth family than she is like her own adoptive family.

"As if born to" discourses necessarily organize relationships through the pretense of producing `sameness' between the adopted person and the adoptive parents, especially with the adoptive mother. For Catherine, it is the discrepancy of her church going behaviour with the behaviour of her adoptive parents that identifies the likely explanation of her mother's sense of threat. Any perceived deviation from `sameness' exhibited on the part of the adopted person either suggests that something has gone amiss within the adoptive relationships and/or being oneself, that is different from them, is not acceptable behaviour.

In this regard, Catherine speaks to how her particular personality characteristics and interests, interpreted as wary signs of difference, were handled by her adoptive mother. She says,

> There was a lot of messages that I'm one of them and I'm like them. Whenever there were things about me that I was getting affirmed for, from outside the family, they always had to kind of take it away if it was something different from them. . . . so and so thinks I'm a great writer. But, my parents would always, actually I shouldn't say my parents, I think it was more, at least verbally, the message came more from my mother - well you get that from us or your dad's like this and it was bullshit. The feeling I got was it's not okay for me to be different, that they had a real need for me [to be the same]. That is when I started to think that it had something to do with my

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being adopted, that their insecurity. Maybe they thought that now I was growing up and maybe I was going to move away and never come back or something. I don't know.

Catherine poignantly captures how her experience of self within the adoptive relations is continually subjected to, as well as thwarted by, "as if born to" discourses. Rather than receiving affirmation of self, Catherine's identity undergoes systematic injury through the lack of proper recognition extended to her difference. Clearly this account raises an important question concerning reasons for the adoptive mother's experience of personal threat.

Catherine experiences her adoptive mother's sense of threat as a serious injury to her identity integrity. Catherine remarks,

I felt like she was just taking it away and that it wasn't mine anymore. Like here's something that someone is giving me affirmation for something they see in me that's really good. What I would have loved to have heard from my mom was yeah, she's right, you really are a good writer, period. Just for you. But instead it was everything had to be connected to well you're one of us. So what happened was that when I was a kid, being one of us was great because it was security, it felt special. When I was in my adolescence, however, it started to feel kind of like a constraint.

As Catherine further comments, she felt that her entire identity was constantly tied to, and constrained by, "as if born to" discourses,

. . . my dad was always saying you're a Peters. It was always said as a joke, but he meant it. . . . So, it was like as a Peters, these are the ways we are, we are all this,

this, and this and like, I wasn't half of those things, so, what do you do with that. Obviously you want to be part of your family, but you also want to be who you are too, so. My parents became really controlling.

In efforts to sustain the pretense living "as if" she is the biological daughter of her adoptive parents when she is not, Catherine finds herself caught in a mire of interpersonal tension. On the one hand, she expresses her desire to belong as a member of her adoptive family, despite her realization that she is not "half of those things". Clearly the question posed regarding, "what do you do with that" identifies a critical site of contradiction for adopted persons who want to belong and yet, do not possess the biological traits of the adoptive family. Forced to take up the pretense "as if born to", adopted persons, like Catherine, are also forced to take up "this, this, and this" in order to secure their sense of affiliation to his/her adoptive family relationships.

On the other hand, Catherine also wants to be herself; but as her accounts of lived experience demonstrate, she continually struggles to maintain her sense of self. Additionally, she gets caught up in negotiating her adoptive relationships through "as if born to" discourses that tie her identity "adopted" to living a pretense. Rather than experiencing a strong sense of familial connection, Catherine's account leaves me with the impression that she expends considerable energy working at developing her adoptive relationships with little, if any, proper recognition of her difference. Instead, she is left struggling to hold on to her own ambiguous understanding of her different position within the adoptive family, while protecting her identity "adopted" from undergoing repeated and systematic distortion.

Clearly, Catherine's potential to form and fully engage in healthy adoptive

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relationships is severely constrained by the production of difference she undergoes through the template "as if born to". In fact, the lack of ongoing recognition of adoption, and thus her difference, systematically organizes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour within adoptive relationships. Thus, neither the adopted person nor the adoptive parents can step outside of this process of construction and be themselves. Rather, considerable interpersonal and psychic energy is continually expended in living and maintaining the pretense in ways that harm the adopted person's potential to experience mutually satisfying familial relationships.

Additionally, adoptive parents are given an impossible social mandate to fulfill in the interests of perpetuating the status quo. Bound by the investment to maintain the fabric of the adoptive family, the adoptive parents' constructed position of "parenthood" also constrains the development of open and spontaneous relationships with their adopted son/daughter. Rather, as Catherine points out, adoptive parents experience a sense of threat possibly arising from their own oppressed position, together with the lack of recognition as legitimate parents.

It is also highly plausible that the lack of recognition paid to the reality of the birth family functions to maintain the illusion that the adopted person actually is their own biological child. Signs of difference, however, begin to unsettle this illusion and pretense in ways that produce feelings of threat on the part of adoptive parents. Adoptive parents may seriously question whether they are fulfilling their social responsibilities adequately. In fact, maintaining the pretense that the adopted person belongs exclusively to one family is a damaging illusion that clearly manifests through the formation of adoptive family

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relationships.

Andrew's story of his adoptive relationships reveals further insight to his ongoing difficulty in resisting the deficit identity position "adopted". In particular, Andrew speaks openly about his strong feelings of jealousy and exclusion when he compares his "unnatural" position in the family to a younger brother, who is the "natural" born son of his adoptive mother. Andrew says,

> I feel like my adoptive mother could not and can not give me the same affection that she can give to her natural first born son, who would be my brother a year younger than me. I've been intensely jealous of that my entire life. . . . That's why I think there's such a strong longing for the birth mother because I see that with my brother and his natural mother that there's such a strong bond that goes beyond language. It's just how they relate to each other, and how she feels about him. As an adult I can understand that there is something there that I won't be able to get and I know that I won't ever be able to get it in a certain sense. It's something that I have to constantly learn to let go of, and that there's a lot of grief in that. I'm starting to feel it now, as I'm talking.

Andrew identifies several dynamics, albeit unspoken, that continually impede his subjective experience of positive relationships within his adoptive family. Located from within the category "other", Andrew talks about what life has been like for him as the "unnatural" born son of his adoptive mother. As well, his intense feelings of jealousy toward his younger brother intersect with and organize his experience of self in ways that leave him feeling bereft and perpetually deprived of a satisfying mother/son relationship.

Specifically, the unspeakable and unspoken recognition of difference that is imposed upon the adoptive family forces Andrew to learn to negotiate his relationships through the privileged category "biological". Through the process of intersubjective construction, his identity "adopted" is bound to the deficit position "other". Additionally, the presence of his younger biological sibling seems to confound and further entrench his subjective experience of difference, including personal feelings of deficiency.

Andrew, for example, positions his younger brother as the first born son of his adoptive mother because he embodies the biological connection that naturally develops between mother and son. In taking up the dominant meanings attributed to the category "born to", Andrew is forced to perceive his difference as "other" and significantly less than the privilege of relationships formed through biology. Thus, he believes he embodies the "unnatural" born son of his adoptive mother and automatically forsakes his position as first born to his younger brother.

Having positioned himself outside of the parameters that construct the "natural" mother/son bond, Andrew's lived experience of his adoptive relationships is informed by the dominant, albeit oppressive, story "born to" in ways that continually thwart his identity integrity. In particular, Andrew takes up the mythical claim that suggests a special bond of love is shared exclusively between the birth mother and the birth child, a bond of love that he is not entitled to receive as an adopted person. This claim also ties Andrew to the notion that adoptive mothers' love bestowed upon the child is not the same kind of affection because she is the "other" mother rather than the "biological" mother.

Andrew, then, arrives at the only possible conclusion about the constructed nature of

the relationship with his adoptive mother. Specifically, he takes up the notion that being the unnatural born son necessarily positions him as less deserving of the same kind of love a natural born son receives from and experiences with the birth mother. Andrew also maintains the false claim that his adoptive mother is not capable of having strong feelings of affection for him as she would "naturally" experience with her own birth son. Positioning himself as the "other" son, Andrew believes his presence in the adoptive family is associated with unresolved pain rather than to the experience of joy. Andrew says,

> The amount of shame that would be involved in a situation like that could be really very intense. And here I am, coming into this family, the product of another woman's womb. I'm a constant reminder to my mother, on some level, . . . that her womb was unable to give forth the fruits of life. I think that that would go pretty much to a person's core of who they are as a human being. . . but there's no doubt in my mind of the fact that she had very deep resistance to being my mother.

In the process of taking up the dominant story, Andrew painfully realizes that his experience of a mother/son relationship has not occurred within the adoptive family. It also can not occur with his birth mother. Hence, his sense of self is continually organized through private feelings of loss, grief, and deprivation. These intense feelings create further distance from himself and his adoptive mother, in particular, and diminish the potential to establish an authentic and honest connection.

Andrew currently struggles with the lost potential of being in a mothering relationship, especially with his birth mother to whom he strongly desires a connection. With regard to his "other" mother, Andrew queries, "is there something about me that puts

a barrier or is there something about the adoptive experience that puts a barrier between an adoptive mother and her adopted child - that it doesn't get spoken about?" While Andrew attributes biology as the "natural" barrier experienced with his adoptive mother, I subscribe to a different interpretation. Specifically, I argue that the ideology of "good" mothering practice and the valuation of "blood ties" has constructed the barrier proven to be harmful to his lived experience of relationships within adoption.

Reflecting upon Alexandra's account of the "tragic" relationship with her adoptive mother, I find myself being further challenged to understand how the mother experience within adoption is constructed as a site of injury for adopted persons. Some facets of Alexandra's story parallel my own experience, facets that are constructed by, and concealed through, dominant ideology. Other facets of her experience reveal how the dynamics of adoptive relationships are governed in ways that are injurious to the adopted person's positive experience of self and other within the adoptive family. These are the dynamics, albeit hidden by ideology, that I struggle to name so that insight into how identity is harmed in the process of construction of "other" can be augmented.

I particularly remember Alexandra talking about how the "death" of her adoptive mother gave her "life". These powerful and yet unsettling words strike a personal and reverberating chord in me, as I recall experiencing the death of my adoptive mother as life-giving energy. This realization, although painful, marks a silenced dynamic that is manifested through the lived experience of the adoptive mother relationship.

Alexandra speaks candidly about how the death of her adoptive mother impacted her view of their relationship,

I kept thinking, I know she wishes she was my birth mother. She said that, she told me that. She knew I was interested in my birth family and I was really reluctant to search or anything while she was alive. And the thought was this, my mother is dying so that I can live. It's like she was giving life to me the only way she could. I guess I want to think that.

Recognizing that her adoptive mother "did her best", Alexandra attributes the "highly dysfunctional" nature of their relationship primarily to infant trauma and the marked biological differences between them. As she points out, "We probably never would have been like really close because we're so different". Alexandra perceives and experiences these differences as a sign of her personal deficiency, especially "in relation to her own context of being wounded" at birth,

Because when I grew up, I always had this sense and again it wasn't really as articulate as it is now, but I just felt like I disappointed my mother at every turn. I wasn't the child that she wanted. I let her down constantly, and I know that she probably wouldn't say that, but she kept doing these things that let me know that she wasn't relating to me, to who I was. . . . it was like we were on two parallel courses that just never met you know. And we couldn't even communicate.

Even though the relationship with her adoptive mother lives on in memory, Alexandra continues struggling to make sense of that significant and conflictual experience through her personal therapy. Bound by primal wound discourses, it is evident that Alexandra positions herself as the "other" daughter in relation to her "other" mother. Additionally, ideologies of "good" mothering practice and "natural" relationships function

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as social processes in ways that severely constrain the intersubjective experience of her connection with her adoptive mother. As Alexandra's lived experience demonstrates, she clearly felt constantly thwarted in her potential to be her own person until the death of her adoptive mother.

Alexandra's account generates several other questions, as well as marks places of uncertainty about the experience of being mothered within adoption. As previously mentioned, the construction of adoptive relationships is complex and multifaceted, a process that is confounded by the valuation of biology over the meaning of alternative family forms. Relationships formed through adoption are continually located within processes of intersubjective construction of "other" in ways that are oppressive and harmful to the adopted person. In particular, his/her choice of how relationships are lived within the adoptive family are severely constrained by dominant ideologies, including the established story of adoption. For this reason, how the adopted person takes up the problem of identity "adopted" can only be fully understood within the context of the larger social order.

Rather than characterize Alexandra's experience with her adoptive mother as problematic, I argue that the relationship with the "other" mother is highly influenced by, and organized through, oppressive ideologies that harm potentials in the process of construction. Specifically, the relationship between the adoptive mother and her adopted son/daughter necessarily falls outside of the privileged category "born to", and thus is constructed as "other", which means a second class of relationship. Further oppression is experienced through the politics of speaking imposed upon the adoptive family so that pieces of everyday life are silenced and often compartmentalized. Adoptive family relationships are lived and

re-produced without proper recognition of difference. Instead, these relationships are continually located within processes of intersubjective construction that thwart opportunities for meaningful dialogue about their lived experience to ensue.

Alexandra's personal experience of burden is diminished following the death of her adoptive mother. In fact, Alexandra points out how much freer she felt to pursue choices involving her birth family, choices she decided not to initiate while her adoptive mother was still alive. This account raises the question of how other dynamics, such as gratitude and protection, are socially constructed and lived through adoptive family relationships.

The connection between oppression and relationship is very unsettling to me, especially as I am reminded of how vulnerable individual experience is to being subjected by social processes that are firmly rooted in dominant ideologies. For this reason, John's story of his positive experience of adoptive family relationships evokes my puzzlement regarding the marked difference from other participants' stories. In particular, I wonder what dynamics contribute to the construction of a more favorable experience within his adoptive relationships to promote a positive sense of self.

Several differences distinguish John's subjective experience of the adoption process. Most notable is his positive experience of self fostered through positive relationships with members of his adoptive family. Specifically, John describes feeling loved, accepted, and wanted, including a deep sense of belonging, which he attributes to the sensitivity of his adoptive parents and extended family. In fact, he derives considerable esteem in being named the "chosen" and "special" son and felt "as if" he actually was their "natural" born child. John points out that,

I guess the only way that I could have felt out of place when I was younger was in my appearance. But the fact that people would say I looked like or I resembled people in my family made me feel more like I was part of the family. So I guess thinking about that now, there was always, obviously there was always this awareness that I was adopted and that I wasn't blood relatives of these people, but it never bothered me. . . I always felt like I fit in, so it was never an issue not to fit in.

John attributes his positive experience more to what his adoptive parents and extended family did not do rather than what they did do for him. For example, he recalls never being insulted or feeling singled out as his parents "adopted son". Additionally, John does not associate himself with having any degree of identity issues or problems concerning his adoption. Rather, he states that he has developed a strong sense of self and adamantly rejects any social meaning ascribed to the label "adopted". John openly acknowledges being adopted and being okay, that is, being a whole person. Although the issue of adoption rarely was discussed within his adoptive family, this is not viewed as problematic by John.

In my attempts to understand John's positive relationships within his adoptive family, I continue to grapple with how his subjective experience of "adopted" has been differently constructed. While I recognize there are pieces of his experience where he has taken up the dominant meanings associated to the category "born to" (e.g., "the natural son"), his absence of ongoing struggles associated with the identity "adopted" is a significant difference to the other participants. In fact, he is the only participant who does not take up primal wound discourses as a means to understand his adoption experience. Rather, his current understanding of being adopted is predominantly rooted in anger and political action arising

from the oppressive and unjust social practices to which adopted persons are continually subjected.

John's position as the only child within his adoptive family identifies a different dynamic that distinguishes him from the other participants. I wonder how this dynamic may have organized his experience of positive adoption relationships. At one point during our conversation, John commented that the absence of siblings meant he did not have to "compare" himself to anyone else in the adoptive family. It is plausible that his position as the only child may have facilitated the creation of a different, more favourable intersubjective experience and protected him from acknowledging his difference.

For now, I am left with more questions and places of uncertainty about fully understanding the specific dynamics involved in the construction of John's positive experience. Clearly a part of me is envious that he is free of past identity struggles tied to "adopted". There is another part of me that grapples to comprehend how John can not be influenced by the ideological power of dominant discourses and oppressive practices that organize and govern the lived experience of adoptive family relationships.

As demonstrated by most of the participants' accounts, the resistance to taking up the problem of identity "adopted" is harmed through the desire to belong to the adoptive family, as well as to the birth family. The lived experience of adoptive relationships, especially with the adoptive mother, is a powerful site of injury. Specifically, the adopted person's potential to develop a positive relationship to self through the experience of positive relationships within the adoptive family is continually thwarted.

The experience of being mothered within adoption is extremely burdensome and

painful for many of the participants because the adoptive mother embodies the lack of biological connection they desire to experience with their own birth mother. Consequently, the adopted person's identity is securely tied to feelings of deprivation, and deficiency, feelings that also organize the intersubjective experience of the adoptive mother. As Steve regretfully points out, "I feel saddened that I didn't get more out of the adoptive parent relationship", while Marie recognizes her long standing desire "to be biologically related to somebody" in order to assuage her feelings of aloneness, insecurity, and difference. So the experience of being mothered and the desire to belong are taken up as a critical site of injury to the adopted person's ongoing process of identity formation.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE FOURTH SITE OF INJURY

LOOKING FOR RECOGNITION. . . . .

From the time I started to engage in the world as a very young child, I have been looking for recognition of my difference ascribed to the category "adopted". Clearly I could not have articulated the essence of my ongoing, private struggle, but on some level, I knew something was not right and/or missing in my life. On another level, my adoptive family appeared to be a "normal" family who treated me "as if" I was their biological daughter, even though I was not their own child by birth. Although our outward appearance as a "natural" family reinforced the necessary normalcy produced through adoption, I continued to harbour feelings of intense anxiety about being adopted. For many years, I also desired belonging to the category "born to" so that I could be like everyone else who shared a biological connection with their birth family. Until now, I realize how it has been inscribed in me to desire what I do not have in relationships with my adoptive family.

Clearly undoing the category "adopted" is a complex, multifaceted, and dynamic process of critical analysis. My purpose, however, is not to make the contradictions disappear, but to name them and to see what all of this would mean in my life and that of others who are adopted. In all of the participants' stories, for example, it is evident that the meanings they accept about identity formation are socially constructed to reflect and propagate culturally transmitted values of normalcy. These entrenched values also govern the meanings associated with the construction of legitimate relationships, which have been

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extremely injurious to their identity and ongoing experience of satisfying connections within

the adoptive family. Striving for "normalcy" and access to historical origins, many adopted

persons undertake to "search" for their birth parents in the hope to finally overcome personal

struggles around identity.

A post-structuralist analysis of the production of the "search" process will specifically

examine how discourses, social practices, and institutions (i.e., "the family", and closed

system of adoption) construct and govern adopted persons' investment in looking for the

birth family, especially for the birth mother. The following discussion will specifically

demonstrate how some of the participants, as well as myself, take up the dominant meanings

ascribed to the "search" in ways that continually secure our identity "adopted" to the deficit

position and produce our desire to belong to the category "biological".

More specifically, I will examine how the social construction of desire organizes

ongoing sites of contradiction for adopted persons, like myself, who genuinely seek

recognition of difference. There are moments when I notice myself securely bound by

feelings of desire for a biological connection, especially to my birth mother. For me, these

feelings are dangerous because I get caught up in re-producing my own deficit identity

position "other". They also function to further cement the ideological power of the category

"born to" as the centre of social organization.

In recognition of the harmful effects of the dominant perspective, I argue that the

meanings ascribed to the "search" process are only given in society and not in the innate

structure of the adopted person's needs (Lichtman, 1990). From this perspective, I further

argue that the participants' deep investment in learning about their historical origins is

grounded in their commitment to seek proper recognition of difference, and not in their need for biological connection, especially to the birth mother. The particular meaning of the search I want to subscribe to ultimately works toward re-naming this process as looking for proper recognition of difference. In fact, I believe adopted persons, like myself, seek to claim what we did not receive as a child, including some admission of the reality of our birth history. The birth family and, in particular, the birth mother, embody a sign of difference, which rescues the category "adopted" as real so that acknowledgement of our lived reality can enhance the basis of identity integrity. While the process of looking for recognition of difference will be addressed as a discrete event, I duly recognize the fluidity of that dynamic process to the participants' and my lived experience of adoption.

A post-structuralist conceptualization of the desire to search provides a radically different perspective on identity formation within the adoption experience. The underlying premise of this perspective is that the subjective experience of being adopted is discursively organized. The adopted person's investment in seeking recognition of difference can be understood only in relation to the discourse of adoption, to his/her subject position of "adopted", and the operation of regulative power through the social practices of the institution of adoption. As discussed in the previous sections, adopted persons are continually located within processes of intersubjective construction in ways that tie their identity "adopted" to: the template "as if born to", the politics of speaking, dominant ideologies, and the regulative practices organized through the closed system of adoption.

As mentioned earlier, the adopted person's impetus to search is usually attributed to a range of subjective, albeit harmful, feelings. For example, personal feelings of

incompleteness, disconnection, lack of belonging, and an acute sense of differentness typically characterize the adopted person's subjective experience of adoption. Post-structuralist accounts claim that the adopted person's sense of self is produced and regulated through the discourse of adoption.

Despite the special and chosen status associated with adoption, most of the participants have experienced themselves as deficient in some way. For some of them, these negative feelings about the self continue to prevail upon their everyday life. Seeking recognition of difference may be the adopted persons' earnest endeavour to overcome their sense of differentness and personal incompleteness. This quest for a complete sense of self, however, is predicated on the prime assumption that adopted persons are incomplete and less than whole.

Adopted persons take up the only subject position available to them, despite the inherent contradictions regarding their personhood. From a post-structuralist perspective, discursive practices of adoption function to produce the position "other" for adopted persons, and generate feelings of difference and deficiency. This becomes problematic for adopted persons who internalize their adoptive status as a sense of personal incompleteness. Being adopted, in Western society, is further confounded by the social meanings ascribed to `complete' individuals, that is, individuals who are the biological offspring of their family unit. When compared to the cultural norm of what it means to be `complete', it seems inevitable that many adopted persons feel themselves to be lacking and search to fulfill a historical void, the feelings of emptiness, and experience a sense of wholeness.

A post-structuralist approach would argue that the desire to search is socially

constructed. Thus, the perceived differences between adopted and nonadopted persons shape subjective experience and produce the desire to be recognized as a `complete' person. For example, the need to be biologically connected is socially constituted and highly valued in our culture. According to Richard Lichtman (1990),

> Of course, what we desire is a condition from what we presently are. But this is not sufficient to constitute us as an emptiness or void; rather, it is a statement that we are other than what we prefer to be. And, socially, it is out of what we are and value that our "absences" can be constructed (p. 46).

From the perspective of post-structuralism, the person who seeks connection to his/her birth family would be regarded as a `complete' and `whole' person. This is an innovative but extremely important conceptualization of the adopted person's commitment to seeking some recognition of difference. It is this re-conceptualization, however, that I want to subscribe to so that proper recognition of difference as the basis of identity integrity can ensue.

Looking for recognition of difference represents only one aspect of the adoption experience. For many adopted persons, however, this experience symbolizes identity development. Despite attaining adulthood, social power is operative at every step of the search process, power that continually thwarts endeavours toward seeking acknowledgement of difference. Adopted persons are forced to submit to several regulative practices that exert enormous power in determining their subjective experience. Specific examples include: lengthy waiting lists to obtain access to their background information, further waiting to initiate a search through the Adoption Reunion Registry, or possibly years of personal investigative work if the search is self-initiated, and imposed mandatory counselling in

preparation for the initial encounter with the birth parent.

The re-conceptualization of the desire to search raises several critical questions about the constructed nature of the adoption experience. Post-structuralist theory positions the impetus for recognition as a socially produced and discursively organized experience. This theoretical perspective seriously challenges the dominant understanding of an individualistic pursuit of a `complete' sense of self and/or reparation for the "birth wound". It also introduces several radical notions that suggest being adopted ought to be predicated on wholeness, completeness, and the valuation of difference.

When I reflect upon my own investment in seeking recognition of difference, I have been confronted by moments of inner tension. Previously, the site of tension has concerned a desire to feel a secure sense of belonging to my adoptive family, especially since I have been carefully chosen to be their special daughter. Feelings of personal security, however, were continually threatened by my growing awareness that I was not biologically connected to that family, an awareness that was unspeakable and unspoken between members of my adoptive family. This emerging realization of difference, that I learned to take up through the identity "adopted", forced me to position myself outside of the adoptive family. Despite living "as if" I was the biological daughter of my adoptive parents when I was not, personal desire for acknowledgement of difference remained uppermost in my everyday life.

Through the process of construction of "other", however, I was prohibited from naming or speaking about the meaning of my lived experience of adoption. My adoptive parents and other family members were also forced to take up silence, and thus learn not to speak openly about the different truths that governed our everyday life. Instead, we were

forced to live a pretense, a pretense that we all accepted as "normal" and "natural" associated with the experience of adoption. Consequently, the process of taking up the experience "as if" we were a "normal" family when we were not was silenced, causing the pretense to be seen as our only lived reality. Hence, my identity "adopted" was continually rendered invisible through the process of being produced "other", further reinforcing the subjective experience of invisibility. So I continued to bear the burden of adoption in silence, resulting in increased feelings of anxiety to prevail upon my lived experience of being "adopted".

Privately harbouring knowledge of adoption, I often looked outside of the adoptive family for some recognition of difference. Struggling with feelings of guilt and loyalty, I now realize that personal choices to receive acknowledgement for my identity "adopted" were severely restricted by the closed system of adoption, together with the dominant ideology and practices governing "the family". Forced to live silently in the interests of perpetuating a social pretense, I had no choice but to look outside of my adoptive family for verification of difference.

Specifically, I recall numerous occasions when I would look for signs of difference in the faces of various women passing me on the street. Although these faces were marked by anonymity, each individual woman represented a possible candidate for my birth mother. While appearing content on the outside, I would anxiously glance at selective faces to determine whether or not signs of my difference were visible by identifying similar physical attributes I shared with these nameless women. Over the years, I have expended considerable psychic energy desiring and looking for recognition of difference, but to no avail.

From a very early age, I have continually queried about my historical origins. Who is my birth mother? Could it possibly be that woman? Almost forty years have passed and I continue to be strongly invested in looking for proper recognition of difference for being adopted. Additionally, I continue to wonder what I am really seeking from my historical origins, including my birth mother. Is it genetic prediposition? Curiosity? Biological connection? Or am I looking for my birth mother as a sign of difference?

What grounds my strong investment, however, is living through years of systematic distortion of difference resulting from the ongoing lack of recognition paid to adoption, a distortion that is predominantly governed through the knowledge of the privileged category "biological". My continuing struggle for recognition pertains to seeking signs of difference so that I can begin to finally claim reality of my birth history in ways I did not receive as a younger person. I also seek to claim an integral piece of my identity, that until now, has been masked by living a pretense.

The desire to belong to the dominant category "born to", however, has been very strong, and at times difficult to resist in my everyday life. This desire comes from a place in me that is tired of the pretense, that is, living "as if" something is true when it is not. I am also tired of struggling against the ideological power of the cultural meanings ascribed to biology. This struggle involves a continual process of reconciling my marginalized position "other" with cultural dynamics that have constructed and harmed the development of my identity "adopted". As well, I am tired of being forced to live under oppressive and unjust social practices that continually subject my personhood to socially constructed, highly regulative, and limited choices of recognition of difference.

An integral part of my continuing, private struggle involves grappling with the different truths that organize my investment in looking for recognition of difference and clarifying for what end. From this inner place of turmoil I often question, who really cares? If I risk disclosing my own reality of adoption, I may also open myself up to being misunderstood and/or misperceived by others as an adopted person with identity problems.

Clearly this particular site of tension is a current struggle, but there are significant differences in how I experience myself subjectively when I begin to re-name the search for biological connection to looking for proper recognition of difference. For example, in taking up the dominant meanings ascribed to the category "biological", I get caught in desiring belonging to that category and its associated privileged status. Hence, I further secure my identity "adopted" to the position "other", causing feelings of deficiency to prevail upon my lived experience.

Re-naming the birth mother as a sign of difference opens up other possibilities to name, talk about, and to understand the adopted person's investment in seeking recognition of reality of his/her own birth history. As an adopted woman, I can fully acknowledge the reality of my own birth and affiliation to my birth family through naming the birth mother as a sign of difference. Viewing the birth family and, in particular, the birth mother as the embodiment of difference also unties the identity "adopted" from harmful emotions that have enveloped the adopted person's developing sense of self.

As a woman who is approaching the age of forty, I recognize I can never share a relationship with my birth mother in ways that persons growing up with their birth family have experienced. Personal endeavours toward seeking signs of difference, however, is not

associated with wanting to belong to the privileged category "biological". I do, however, acknowledge my need for proper recognition of difference, which for almost forty years, I have learned to dismiss as unimportant, if not irrelevant, information to the development of my personhood. In seeking recognition of difference, my identity "adopted" can finally be affirmed and celebrated in ways that promote a healthy integration and valuation of difference.

As demonstrated by my own struggle, the lived experience of adopted persons is systematically organized through, and influenced by, our culture's valuation of biology. For this reason, personal investment in seeking recognition of difference is highly vulnerable to cultural dynamics of desiring a sense of belonging to the category "born to". Thus, the biological connection with the birth mother often becomes the primary focus of individual pursuit. Many of the participants, for example, view their search endeavour as a critical process to identity development, including some reparation for the "birth wound".

Re-positioning the struggle for recognition from primal wound discourses to signs of difference begins to reveal the concrete effects of the social mode of production upon adopted persons. Hence, the struggle for recognition of difference is necessarily situated within the intersubjective context of the larger social order.

Richard Lichtman's (1990) theoretical perspective on the social construction of desire as a "learned" phenomenon offers critical insight toward understanding sites of contradiction manifested through the adopted person's investment in looking for recognition of difference. Lichtman (1990) points out that,

Then we are faced with the purported problem of the relationship of the individual to society. But the human individual is intrinsically social. Instead of the dualist dilemma of how the subject and object come to be conjoined, we have really the converse problem of how they come to appear disjoined. As a somewhat Zen exercise in bracketing habitual assumptions, it proves useful to reverse our prevalent psychologism and look at need as the representation within a human being of the demand made by the social mode of production upon its agents (p. 42).

Lichtman (1990) poignantly raises the critical question of the relationship of the individual to society. His notion of the "demand made by the social mode of production" upon individuals' experience of "need" is especially relevant to understanding adopted persons' vulnerability to dominant ideology. In particular, Lichtman's (1990) perspective on desire helps to situate the adopted person's "need" for biological connection as a socially constructed phenomenon. It also underscores the significance of an earlier question I posed; what is the impact (on adopted persons) of living under dominant ideology that values biology over the creation of alternative family forms?

Marie speaks openly about the continuing struggle involving her desire to be "normal",

> . . . there were a lot of times where I longed to be blood related just to be normal because everybody wants to be normal. Everybody has a fear of being different - There was a part of me, I was really envious. I wanted to be like my friends and I wanted to look like people and I wanted to not have to question this continuously or think about being adopted or think about being different. And I envied them because

they looked like their parents and when I went to their houses I could see the similarities or I could see the connection that they had, and that even made me further question if I had a connection with my adoptive family. I knew I did but I knew also that it was not as close as it was in a lot of other families that I had been around, and it was also a different connection. I think our connection was based on the acceptance of different personalities like in the adoptive home. But with my other friends, it was just based on a natural thing, like a natural occurrence. They had their children, their children are like them. They look like them; they had similar interests; they had similar hobbies. No one ever questioned it. It was the way it was.

Marie's desire to be "blood related" reveals several insights into how the concrete effects of the production of "other" impacts her sense of self. Recognizing that adopted persons are continually tied to processes of intersubjective construction, Marie uses the category "biological" as the "natural" point of comparison to her lived experience of adoption. In doing so, she secures her position to the category "other" and desires what her adoptive relationships can not provide. In fact, Marie concludes that her connections formed through adoption are different, that is, "not as close" as she perceives "natural" connections to be. Additionally, she believes her adoptive relationships inevitably deny her the experience of "natural" relationships formed through biology.

This process of personal scrutiny of "normalcy" engenders intense feelings of envy and longing, on the part of Marie, for her own biological connections. She constructs her deficiencies by comparing her marginal position to the dominant category, a category she

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accepts as part of the natural social order. Clearly Marie wants to be recognized as a "naturally" complete and "normal" person but realizes she lacks "blood" affiliation. In the absence of "blood" ties, Marie's desire to belong to the category "biological" is inevitably reinforced, and thus produces an "empty void" which she strives to fulfill.

For all adopted persons, like Marie, who were placed under the closed system of adoption, the production of desire is further reinforced by social regulative practices. As previously mentioned, these adoption practices manifest social power over adopted persons who are prohibited from fully knowing about their historical origins. Instead, they are forced to pretend "as if" they are the biological son/daughter to their adoptive parents when they are not. Through living a pretense that continually thwarts recognition of difference, adopted persons also learn to take up the cultural value attributed to biology. Hence, adopted persons are forced to see themselves through the category "biological". From the level of individual experience, it is understandable how feelings of deficiency and desire for biological connections ground adopted persons' investment in looking for their birth family.

Marie points out that the lack of recognition paid to adoption and to her own birth history are critical aspects to understanding her desire for blood ties,

> . . . there is this entire mysterious unknown past and unknown set of parents and ancestors and relatives and things that no one knew about. . . . there were actually a lot of times when I longed to be blood related to my adoptive relatives. Like I wanted to be their cousin or their niece or whatever. But blood related. I wanted to look like them. I wanted to have their traits, and I knew I didn't. I knew that they loved me and I loved them, but I wasn't like them at all. Not at all.

As Marie further comments, her intense feelings of desire have occasionally overwhelmed her to the point that she could think of little else,

It was like some days, I would have given anything to change, and transform myself into a blood relation. It was very frustrating, and again that made me feel different. As much as they accepted me, I was painfully aware of the fact that I was very different from my adoptive family. And my adoptive relatives, so it made me kind of feel ostracized. I don't think they were ever aware of it, my adoptive relatives, because they certainly didn't make me feel that way. They were very, very positive and accepting but I felt that because I knew. I knew I was different, for years and years. . . . It was like there's something missing here - I wish I had this but I don't.

Clearly Marie has learned to privilege the category "biological", especially as it informs her self-view and her view of legitimate relationships. In fact, she experiences the absence of blood affiliation in her own life as a major injury to her identity formation. Marie's injury produces feelings of deficiency, as well as intense desire to be connected to someone through biology. Speaking from her lived experience of difference, albeit rooted in pain, Marie reveals that she "would have given anything to change, and transform herself into a blood relation".

Instead, Marie's experience of a positive relationship to self through the mutual recognition of difference is continually thwarted. She says,

. . . instead of being myself, I think I was too afraid to be myself. I wanted to be like somebody else, all of my life or for a large part of my life. Then finally I

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realized, I thought well I am myself but there's got to be somebody else that's like me too.

Similar to my personal experience, Marie expends considerable energy longing for some acknowledgement of her birth history through taking up desire for her own biological connections. Marie remarks,

I felt a longing for that too. I mean I wanted to go into a room with a group of people and look like them and be compared to them and have similarities to them. I knew they were there but I didn't know how to find them [birth parents]. I didn't know if I ever would find them. I just knew that I wanted to find them back then.

Marie's investment in finding her birth parents is securely tied to personal desire to belong to the category "biological". Living under the dominant ideology and subjected by the social production of "other", it is evident that Marie has learned to take up the value of biology. In this regard, she sets out to achieve the standards of "normalcy" so that she can experience herself as a "naturally" complete and "normal" person. In doing so, however, Marie continually secures her identity "adopted" to the marginalized position "other".

Bound by primal wound discourses, Andrew talks about his desire to be cared for by "mother",

. . . a big desire for all those things - and why I attribute it to mother is also bound up with the need to be cared for by mother. I have all this pain around all of this stuff and I want that pain to be cared for and I want my mother to care for it. It's like there's this secret information which I'm longing for which I think the culture and history [has contributed] and there's this secret person that I'm longing to give that

to me. I want it to be my mother because it comes through her; because I came through her.

Andrew's longing for his birth mother is tied to dominant notions of infant trauma and "good" mothering practice. Mired in feelings of pain, he looks to the birth mother as both the source and healer of the injury he has sustained. Clearly Andrew regards his birth mother as the "right" mother primarily because of their shared biological bond. So the "need to be cared for by mother" organizes his personal investment in seeking knowledge of his historical origins. Through Andrew's acceptance of the dominant meanings ascribed to the "search" process, he continually transcends the constructed nature (e.g., secrecy) of his lived experience of adoption.

Andrew's desire for his birth mother is further confounded by his subjective experience of abandonment by her,

> I've had to come to terms that I have a great deal of pain about my mother, about both of my mothers. And I also have a great deal of anger towards my birth mother. I have a longing towards my birth mother and I also have rage towards her because she abandoned me. . . . there's just a lot of pain and longing for my birth mother. That's very real and I believe that it just goes back to that very, very early phase of life.

Primal wound discourses severely limit Andrew's understanding of his lived experience, including his desire for "mother". It also limits personal choices concerning adequate resolution of his pain specifically to finding his birth mother. While recognizing the nature of his conflictual feelings, Andrew continues to preserve the birth mother as the

panacea for his suffering. From this dominant perspective, Andrew's pain, solely connected to "mother", can only be completely resolved through finding her. In the event that his birth mother can not be found, Andrew must submit to living with unresolved pain. Additionally, he must submit to continually feeling deficient about his difference ascribed to the identity "adopted".

Andrew's desire for "mother" represents a current struggle that requires ongoing, personal reflection,

I've had this longing in me for a very long time and - possibly part of it is that I'm making my birth mother into something that she's not. I'm making her into the goal of my kind of resolution of part of my life conflict. I don't know if she'll really be able to give me that; but I am certain that maybe, if I do meet her, and I'm brought into a very concrete connection with my birth, that it will trigger something in me that will be very healing. And this thing that I'm looking for whether its that she gives it to me or I give it to myself or God gives it to me, I don't know. This kind of resolution of my personality that I'm looking for, my adoptive family can't give that to me. That I feel very strongly. . . . it's about wholeness. I mean this is the language that comes out is that wholeness of being alive, and acknowledging my birth, acknowledging that I was born that other people were born. And only she [birth mother] can give me that. . . . And because she's real I'm real.

Andrew's words strike a personal chord in me because he identifies a critical site of tension for adopted persons who are continually subjected to, and constrained by, the dominant ideology attributed to biology. His words also capture the essence of our struggle

to name personal desire for proper recognition of difference without connecting it to the desire to belong to the category "biological". As Andrew points out above, "possibly part of it is that I'm making my birth mother into something that she's not". Clearly this site of tension is extremely difficult to resist, especially living in Western culture that values biology over the creation of alternative family forms.

Looking for some resolution of his "personality", Andrew names "wholeness" as the missing element to his identity. He is adamant that his adoptive family can not provide him with what he is looking for to feel more integrated as an adopted person. Momentarily, Andrew begins to step outside of primal wound discourses for an alternative view of his desire for his birth mother. From this alternative position, Andrew is clear that he wants the event of his birth and his birth history openly acknowledged; but only his birth mother can give him that. He does, however, reach the conclusion about his birth mother, "and because she's real I'm real".

In the following section, I will further show how all of the participants struggle to reconcile their desire for recognition of difference. Specifically, I will examine how they have undertaken to claim knowledge of their historical origins, including connection with their birth family and/or birth mother. Additionally, I will pay close attention to how they have interpreted this process and, in particular, what impact it has subsequently had on their experience of self. As in previous sections, my personal struggle to claim my difference will be an integral piece to countering the dominant perspective on the "search" process.

. . . . CLAIMING OUR DIFFERENCE

Seeking recognition of difference fulfills a critical function, for all of the participants, in their continuing struggle to feel acknowledged as an adopted person. They have all undertaken to claim historical knowledge of their birth origins (i.e., background history) by submitting a formal request through the Children's Aid Society which is responsible for their original adoption placement. This is often an initial, albeit momentous, step many adopted persons pursue so that they can begin to learn about themselves through the reality of their own birth history. Accomplishing this step is perceived as a significant milestone in the participants' life, but often engenders further interest in, and commitment to, uncovering the mystery that surrounds the birth family, especially their birth mother. Clearly they all demonstrate a vested interest in understanding the different truths that have constructed their identity "adopted".

Most of the participants, except John, Andrew, and me, have connected with their birth mother. Some of them have connected with their birth father and others have discovered and subsequently been introduced to their birth siblings. Introduction to members of the extended birth family has also been important to some participants' process of claiming their difference. For some participants, however, the pursuit of acknowledgement of reality has meant learning to live with not knowing important aspects of their birth history, including the name and/or whereabouts of their birth father.

Drawing upon the dominant view of the "search", conventional wisdom coins the meeting usually between the birth mother and adopted person (i.e., birth child) as a "reunion". How can adopted persons reunite with their birth mother when there has never

been a lived union between them? Similar to the argument put forth in re-naming the "search", I argue that the taken-for-granted notion of "reunion" rests on several unchallenged and problematic beliefs about relationships formed through biology. Overall, the notion of "reunion" preserves the dominant ideology of legitimate relationships and "good" mothering practice. In particular, it privileges the biological connection shared between the adopted person and his/her birth mother during the first nine months of life. Hence, the notion of "reunion" works to re-inscribe the category "biological". It also functions to propagate primal wound discourses that view the severance of the biological bond between birth mother and birth child as harmful to adopted persons' subsequent capacity for healthy attachments.

Re-naming the "reunion" to claiming our difference necessarily locates the construction of the identity "adopted" within the social realm rather than exclusively tied to "birth wound" discourses. From this perspective, it also locates the origins of identity struggles within the larger social order, in general, and to the concrete production of difference, in particular. In this regard, the question of how adopted persons are continually impacted by cultural dynamics, dominant ideologies, and social practices, embedded in our society, can be taken up as critical knowledge. Thus, the notion of claiming our difference works to empower a sense of justice concerning the search for recognition of our birth history that I want to subscribe to for adopted persons.

All of the participants' accounts of claiming their difference will reveal significant and poignant transformations they experience through receiving proper recognition of difference. Many of them, for example, speak candidly about feeling "real" almost

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immediately following the initial encounter with their birth mother. This profound transformation in their sense of self engenders a positive relationship with themselves. Additionally, some of the participants remark upon their subsequent experience of engaging in more satisfying relationships within the adoptive family, especially with their adoptive parents.

The participants' accounts will also demonstrate their personal struggles involved in negotiating the regulative practices that continue to govern closed adoptions. Forced to submit to archaic, harmful, and unjust social practices, the adopted person's search for self-knowledge further subjects their personhood to systematic distortion of difference. For many of the participants, the reality of learning to live with difference is taken up as an active political struggle in their concerted efforts toward implementing more just adoption practices.

The participants' stories about claiming their difference will be presented in the following order: Phillip, Liz, Steve, Catherine, Alexandra, Andrew, Marie, John, and Lise. The inclusion of all their stories will reveal how each of them understands claiming their difference and, in particular, what impact this process of recognition has on their evolving sense of self.

It is important to note that most participants take up the dominant notion of "reunion", and thus tie meeting their birth mother to reparation of birth wound and seeking "normalcy". As stated earlier, I regard the birth mother as a sign of difference that allows for some admission of reality of our birth history. Rather than provide a critique of each participants' accounts, I will highlight the key elements involved in the process of claiming

their difference. I do recognize, however, that most of them take up the dominant meanings ascribed to biology. Hence, they get caught up in re-inscribing "normal", as well as their own deficit identity position "other". I will conclude this section by briefly addressing my own current struggles toward claiming some recognition of difference.

Phillip

Until his mid-twenties, Phillip learned to accept the obvious differences between himself and members of his adoptive family. In retrospect, he also recalls developing an "artificial persona, almost as a stratagem for dealing with the world". Phillip's subjective experience of himself underwent dramatic change following his chance encounter with another birth mother. This memorable encounter proved significant in facilitating Phillip's commitment toward claiming his own birth history. He says,

> . . . when I met somebody who was a birth mother and by chance we started talking about adoption and in an odd way, meeting somebody who was a birth parent clarified my sense of interest in my birth mother. It was as if meeting somebody who was actually in this position took away some of the **cotton wool** [author's emphasis] that I had closed around that particular topic. So she in a way clarified or brought into clearer focus my sense of this person who had always been important but at a great distance.

Clearly this opportunity for open dialogue about adoption and, in particular, acknowledging the reality of his birth mother, freed Phillip from his "artificial persona". Instead, he could begin to explore the meaning this admission of reality had for him and his lived experience of adoption. Phillip talks further about his developing sense of realness

concerning his birth mother,

> I met a woman who had given a child up for adoption and, in talking with her about her experience of that it eased my sense of what I might find. . . . her whole attitude to this suggested to me for the first time that my birth family might be very interested in finding me. And that wasn't something that had occurred to me before. Having this woman as a real person, talking face to face, made the idea of birth parents much less misty. In a way she brought these very distant people out of the fog to a certain extent, and I found that it also made it less fearsome, or fearful to actually go and meet them. There was a much clearer sense of these people being perfectly normal and involved with day to day activities like anyone else.

Having the reality of his own birth mother affirmed for him, the first time in his life, Phillip endeavours to "learn more about his birth family and his basic identity". Phillip formally registered his name on the Provincial Adoption Reunion Registry and subsequently waited eighteen months until receiving confirmation that his birth mother had also registered. According to adoption legislation in Ontario, both parties must submit their names to the Registry before a "reunion" can be facilitated. Once a successful "match" has been confirmed, regulative practices are enforced to "reunite" the birth mother and adopted person.

Phillip's "reunion" with his birth mother and two full sisters was necessarily mediated through a counsellor of the Adoption Reunion Registry. Initially, Phillip and his birth mother exchanged letters and photographs, albeit through the counsellor, with a view of arranging a face-to-face contact. Contrary to "recommended procedure", he arranged a visit to his birth family's place of residence where he spent one week with them. As Phillip

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recalls, "as the plane was descending into the airport, I was thinking goodness gracious. This was sort of the last skin of the persona coming off; like the last bit of cotton wool that I had surrounded this with, thinking oh God, this is going to happen, this is really going to happen".

Although Phillip's birth parents were married two years following his birth, his birth father had "died about six months before the reunion". Phillip describes his death as a "very unfortunate twist of fate". He further remarks, "this has been a sticking point for me ever since then - and at the time I was very angry about sitting on the Children's Aid waiting list for eighteen months or so to get the information that could have allowed me to do the search quickly ". Consequently, albeit regrettably, Phillip's knowledge of his birth father is now passed on through his birth family's own experience and personal memories of him.

Phillip describes his "reunion" experience as a "watershed". Since establishing personal contact with his birth family, he has noticed several meaningful changes in his personality. In particular, Phillip's reliance upon his "artificial persona" as a necessary stratagem to negotiate his everyday life has "diminished very nicely, actually since the reunion". In fact, he no longer perceives the issues of adoption and his own birth history "as things that are now surrounded in cotton wool".

Other aspects of significance to Phillip's process of change include his diminished "habit of self criticism", that is, being "easily turned against myself, or turned back on myself". Instead, "there is much more a sense now that I am an identity, an identity with a certain gravity, a certain weight that can't be shifted very easily - I don't have the feeling of being so light, of being easily movable". Phillip recognizes, however, the "lifelong process"

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involved in healing from the "unnecessary and very destructive", albeit "old habits", he learned to employ in coping with his lived experience of adoption.

At the time of my interviews with Phillip, he had known his birth family for approximately eleven years. Despite the geographical distance between him and members of his birth family, he remains highly invested in maintaining their relationship. In claiming his difference, Phillip clearly feels a greater sense of freedom resulting from his experience of mutual recognition of his birth history. For the first time in his life, he experiences a positive relationship to self, an experience that he attributes to his "consolidated identity".

Liz

Rooted in longstanding feelings of disconnection and personal unhappiness, at the age of nineteen, Liz set out to claim some recognition of her birth history. Being pregnant with her daughter at that time prompted Liz to request a copy of her background history from the Children's Aid Society. She waited almost one year before receiving this personal information. Liz remembers this earlier experience,

> I had a phone call from CAS and they said, "You can come and get your background history". Now, I don't know what I anticipated getting from them, but thank my lucky stars. I had hit on a worker who was really quite wonderful, . . . She gave me like six or eight pages of background history. But not only that, she had all this poetry there that my birth mother had written, that my birth mother had given to her worker, that the worker had kept in the file all of these years. . . . we read over this stuff. Yes, I mean, it was interesting to find out she was five foot four and had blonde hair and blue eyes and played the piano and all those kind of things. But,

what blew me out of the water was this poetry.

Having lived without proper recognition of difference until then, Liz's discovery of her birth mother's poetry openly acknowledges the reality of her existence. Liz, herself, has been writing poetry since the age of ten. From that moment onward, Liz clearly could no longer be forced to pretend "as if" her birth mother did not exist.

During the following year, Liz attended a Parent Finders meeting so that she could learn how to undertake the search for her birth mother. Within a short period of time, she was successful in her endeavours but was advised by her "search buddy" to wait one week before initiating personal contact with her birth mother. Despite being "conditioned" to believe that "this can't happen, shouldn't happen, won't happen, and then, it happens", Liz's memory of the first telephone conversation with her birth mother unquestionably affirms the reality of their relationship.

Liz speaks poignantly about the subsequent impact on her sense of self following the initial meeting with her birth mother,

> It was profound because first of all I didn't expect to find a real live walking talking woman. I mean I had always felt like I was not born but rather adopted; hatched maybe, dropped in from outer space, left under the cabbage patch, brought by the stork, but never born. But I did not expect to find a real live woman.

Through the process of finding her birth mother, Liz is also able to claim her own difference in a far more healthier way than she, like most adopted persons, experience living in our culture. As Liz says, "if she was real, then I was probably real". Continually bound by feelings of disconnection, Liz recalls that, "Even when I found my mother, until I had met

her I still felt that. Once I met her though, it went away".

Liz regards the connection with her birth mother as vital to the process of fully acknowledging her personhood, including the reality of her historical origins. Upon receiving this acknowledgement of reality, Liz talks about the positive reverberations she experienced,

> . . . one of the first things I did after finding my birth mother and meeting her and getting to know her was that I came to the rapid conclusion that I had what it took to go to university. . . . She said I did and that was that. She'd been to university and if she could do it, I could do it. . . . I thought to myself, maybe I'm alright.

In recognition of her personal transformation achieved through claiming her difference, Liz is also cognizant of its ongoing process,

> Well, it was a process. It wasn't a bing bang boom thing, but I just became much more confident, and felt confident. I began to care a lot less about making other people happy. I began to care a lot less about what other people thought about me and cared a lot more about what I thought about me. I certainly cared a great deal of what she [my birth mother] thought about me. This is partly adoption, partly reunion, and partly just being a woman I think, but I gave up that whole business of trying to keep everybody happy all the time - be the perfect mother and daughter and everything all at once.

Liz's experience of meeting her birth mother affirms that, "it can happen, it does happen, and it's good". At the time of my interviews with Liz, she had known her birth mother for fifteen years. They continue to exchange letters, telephone calls, and periodic

visits. Liz is, "waiting for the day that we have our 22nd anniversary of our reunion and then I'll be able to say to myself I have now known her longer than I didn't know her".

Steve

When Steve was twenty-seven years old, he decided to begin to actively look for his birth mother. Within one week, he knew where to find her. Prior to that time, however, Steve constantly grappled with feelings of difference and his growing awareness of a "little fire" inside of him. For Steve, this "little fire" came to represent his interest in, and strong commitment to, uncovering the reality of his own birth origins. He says, "Yeah, it had to be done. I don't think I could have made it if I didn't do it".

In addition to seeking personal and medical information, Steve also wanted to feel more grounded within himself. As he points out, "I didn't have any reality to base my life on. I had no facts of where I came from and that's why I decided to go looking". Although initially feeling that his quest was an "impossible dream", he, too, was directed to Parent Finders for assistance. He recalls saying to himself, "I'm going to do it, and I just did it".

Before actually making contact with his birth mother, Steve admits that the "hardest obstacle was talking to his family". Clearly his personal struggle over conflicting loyalties between his adoptive family and his birth family is shared by many adopted persons. Understandably, this site of tension engenders anxiety over attempts to reconcile his exclusive membership to the adoptive family with his investment in seeking some recognition of difference through claiming his birth family. Steve identifies the source of his struggle,

. . . even though it's the most important thing to you, you're also afraid. Is it worth

losing what I've got? Is it worth the chance of losing everything? I had to make the decision. Was it that much of a burning issue with me that I was willing to lose everything? . . . Could I wait? I remember saying to myself, well maybe I should until mom dies. I really did. Because I didn't know if it would hurt her. I didn't know if she would be distressed.

After considerable reflection upon the possible ramifications of undertaking to seek his birth family, Steve makes the decision, albeit "really tough", to proceed with his plans. For him, it is a "life or death" issue. Steve first informs his older sister, and then his adoptive mother of his intentions. He remembers his sister's emotional response and expressed concern about "losing him" to another (i.e., better) family. Placed in the position of providing reassurance to his sister, Steve enlists her support in the process of telling their mother. Armed with his sister's support and feeling trepidation about the possible reactions of his adoptive mother, (e.g., "offended, hurt, or sympathetic") he remembers,

So, finally I blurted it out. I said I decided to go looking for my birth parents. I found them in a week - It's really funny because my mother goes, oh, we've been waiting for you to do this for years - that was my mother's attitude, like you could have come to me any time and I would have told you all this but I never felt that - I never got those signals from her that said you can come and talk to me about your adoption.

Despite his initial uncertainty, Steve "knew he was right" and subsequently receives the positive, ongoing support of his adoptive family.

At the time of our interviews, Steve had known his birth mother, as well as members

of his extended birth family, for approximately four years. Similar to other participants, Steve felt a sense of realness about himself following his experience of mutual recognition within his own birth family. Contrary to Steve's view of his need for affirmation of genetic attributes, I argue that his sense of being real is rooted in signs of difference that are manifested through acknowledging the reality of his birth history.

> In recognition of his difference, Steve remembers the physical relief he experienced,
>
> Well, I know when I met my birth mother, this physical weight came off my shoulders. I literally mean that. Like I couldn't believe it. They say this emotional baggage wears you down; well, when I met her, it was really a physical weight that came off my shoulders.

Apart from feeling "strengthened" and increased self-worth of "who he is", Steve tells his birth mother that he has had a "good life" with his adoptive family. He believes she would be relieved to know that about his adoption experience. In fact, Steve acknowledges increased feelings of appreciation toward his adoptive family since meeting his birth family. Meeting his birth mother, in particular, helped to solidify his sense of belonging and connection to his adoptive family. Clearly he regards his adoptive mother as his "parent", and his birth mother as a "friend". Overall, Steve emphasizes the importance of "both" relationships in his life.

Steve's commitment to claiming his difference continues through his struggle to obtain information about his birth father and birth brother. His current priority is seeking knowledge of his birth father but his primary source of information has been slowly obtained through his birth mother, who "has a tough time talking about him". Steve points out that,

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I've still got a lot of questions, like I haven't met my birth father, that's something me and my birth mother have to deal with - I might never meet him, or I have to, so I'm working within myself to find him. She gives me little bits and pieces every now and then. She may not understand this but I have to find him. She's afraid if I find him, he's going to find her or something, I don't know - he doesn't even have to know I know she exists, but I have to find him too. Like she's 50% of my puzzle, but he's the other 50% and I have to find him. It's been four years now and I get a snippet here and a snippet there or an aunt tells me something or a cousin brings up something. I'm just writing this stuff down and it'll all make a nice big picture one day and then I'll figure it out and I'll know where he is. . . . I know my dad's out there, he's either alive or dead but he existed. He was a real person, and I need to know who that real person was, good, or bad, right or wrong.

Steve's continuing struggle to fully claim the reality of his birth history is clearly a frustrating process for him. His struggle raises several critical questions about, as well as insights into, the enduring impact of closed adoptions for all adopted persons. Further discussion pertaining to these issues will ensue in the final chapter. Clearly Steve remains highly invested in his pursuit toward seeking knowledge about all members of his birth family. It is evident that as Steve uncovers the reality of his historical origins, he subsequently feels more real and grounded as a person.

Catherine

After several years of thinking about her birth origins, Catherine "reunited" with her birth mother in 1987. Significant life events contributed to this momentous occasion, including the birth of her son, a sense of wonderment and even anguish about her background history, and living with the ongoing ambiguity surrounding her identity "adopted". As other participants remark following their "reunion", Catherine experiences a profound transformation in her self-view and ways of being an individual in all of her relationships.

Catherine speaks about these personal changes,

The actual meeting was very profound - there are all kinds of really intense, profound experiences in life but neither of them would be moreso than meeting you birth mother for the first time. And for me it was real - it definitely had major positive effects on a lot of things. I would say on all of my relationships, like significant relationships have improved - they have been enhanced because of how I feel about myself. It's like I'm more, I feel more **real** [my emphasis], and therefore I'm able to be more real in all of my relationships.

Overall, Catherine feels more at "peace" with herself, "more solid" and "integrated" as a person, feelings that solidified after meeting her birth mother. In fact, I recall her poignant account of looking at the bricks of her house with such clarity of vision that she has never experienced before that moment. Catherine attributes her renewed sense of life and authenticity to the process of claiming her birth history, which she intimately connects to her birth mother.

Additionally, Catherine acknowledges significant changes occurring in her adoptive relationships. She recollects her experience of freedom in finally taking her "rightful place within the adoptive family". Catherine says,

I feel my parents really did adopt me in their hearts, and I allowed that to happen in my heart to a big degree; but I think there was a piece that I was holding back or wasn't fully in there because part of me didn't know who I was even. So it's like there was part of me that couldn't be fully in the family until the sense of beginnings and roots and origin was in place. And once that was there, that enabled me to take my place in my adoptive family in a more, in a way that I couldn't before. It was like a more whole way, **like I really am in this family** [my emphasis].

When I reflect upon Catherine's experience, I find myself drawn to further understand how adoptive relationships are re-configured through the process of claiming our difference. While I recognize this is an issue of immense complexity, some preliminary insights deserve consideration. Further reflections will be addressed in the final chapter.

The process of claiming our difference allows us, as adopted persons, to step outside of living a pretense so that we can openly seek some admission of reality about our birth history. Clearly our investment in seeking knowledge of our past is predominantly rooted in living "as if" we are the biological son/daughter of the adoptive parents when we are not. As discussed in the previous sections, the concrete production of difference continually limits adopted persons' choices to knowing the different truths about their historical origins. Hence, the regulation of the adoptive family functions to re-produce these limited choices.

As Catherine's account demonstrates, the meeting of her birth mother represents a

sign of difference that she experiences as both "concrete" and "real". Previously bound by silence, she is now free to speak openly about her past, including naming the existence of her birth mother. This acknowledgement of difference validates Catherine's identity "adopted" in a way that was not possible within the adoptive family. Catherine is also free to "fully" embrace her personhood having now created a space for her difference to receive proper recognition within her adoptive relationships.

It is evident that Catherine highly respects her adoptive parents and, in particular, appreciates their willingness to acknowledge the reality of her birth family. In fact, her adoptive mother recognizes that Catherine has now "extended her family". Open dialogue between Catherine and her adoptive parents further solidifies her sense of belonging within the adoptive family. She points out that,

> . . . now it feels like my adoptive family - I don't know what the word is, it's not that they're more important or more front and centre but maybe just that feeling of being more rooted there. And I guess a real sense of the history that is there, that isn't there with my birth mother - and I think that surprises me in a way - . . . So it's almost like there's an ongoing deepening that keeps happening even long after the fact of the reunion and the beginning of it; and a lot of it feels more to do with my family than my birth mother, but it all feels like it comes from that experience and how it affected me.

The relationship between Catherine and her birth mother continues to evolve through their ongoing, personal contact. Catherine's endeavour to claim her difference continues through her struggle to connect with her birth father. In particular, her attempts to engage

with him via several letters has resulted in speaking with him only once on the telephone. At the time of our final interview, Catherine's struggle for recognition focused on how to proceed in meeting her birth father. It is important to note, however, that her process of letter writing, albeit disappointing at times, is a critical component of claiming her difference as an adopted woman.

Alexandra

When I reflect upon Alexandra's story of her "reunion" experience, I am reminded of how she spoke of attributing "curiosity" to her endeavour as "far too simplistic" an explanation for a very complex life issue. Alexandra's lived experience of adoption, and subsequent "reunion" with her birth mother speaks profoundly to this complexity. It is through her story that I continue to learn about the enduring impact of closed adoptions on adopted persons' identity formation.

Alexandra "reunited" with her birth mother in 1987. She has also met her birth father and extended members of her maternal and paternal birth families. Additionally, Alexandra has "two half brothers" whom she has also met.

Having struggled with issues of identity (i.e., "who am I" and "where did I come from"), and feelings of "mild depression" for most of her life, Alexandra rarely, if ever, questioned her "right" to claim knowledge of her birth history. She says,

I mean, to me reunion is about honesty and about setting the record straight and about confronting people, each other as human beings on your own ground - there's just no grey area for me in that I don't think. . . . it's a human rights issue for me

to meet my own flesh and blood relatives regardless of who thinks they might be hurt. . . . I mean, you can't pretend that it didn't happen. You can't pretend I'm not a birth relative. I am in fact related to the rest of the family, and I think that it's important for us to deal with our actions, and I don't mean it in a punitive sense. I just mean that I'm not interested in pretending any more - it's very complicated.

Forced to live the pretense "as if born to" her adoptive parents results in harmful feelings predominating in Alexandra's lived experience of adoption. Over time, these feelings become increasingly injurious to her developing sense of self, causing her to seriously question her "sense of reality". Alexandra remembers that, "until I had my reunion, there were many different cycles of my life - I thought I either was crazy or had some kind of psychiatric disorder because I was curious about my birth family . . . ". Despite living "as if" something is true when it is not, Alexandra never gave up on believing in her own sense of reality.

Alexandra's relationship with her birth mother is the primary focus of her "reunion" experience. Bound by primal wound discourses, Alexandra's commitment to meeting her birth mother predominantly arose from personal interest in seeking out her own biological connections. Upon meeting her birth mother as a sign of difference, she experiences marked changes in how she feels about herself. In particular, feelings of "self-acceptance", a sense of "continuity", and considerably fewer days of mild depression form Alexandra's sense of self following her "reunion".

Having recently attended a family reunion, Alexandra speaks candidly about her ongoing process of personal transformation,

I felt free for the first time in my life. It's also the first family reunion I've ever gone to and not become quite depressed. . . . It was terrific. I feel like I've really broken some horrible bonds that have been binding me to this almost craziness - well, it's quite obvious to me that the reunion has a lot to do with it. Had a lot to do with setting me free and making me feel comfortable in my own skin and having the content, having the continuity, having a connection. I'm not different. I'm just different from them, from my adoptive family; but I'm not so different from these other people.

Clearly Alexandra's experience of freedom raises additional questions about the continuing effects on adopted persons' identity resulting from their investment in claiming proper recognition of difference. For many, if not most adopted persons, living with difference is an ongoing, and often contradictory process.

Alexandra continues to face the residual effects of her "reunion", especially as it concerns her struggle to obtain additional historical information from her birth mother. She talks about her reaction to her birth mother's "blocked memory",

You're the end of my road, if you can't tell me about my birth, who can? . . . that's lost too. I mean, a part of me has kept her in my life this long because I'm clinging to the hope that some day she'll be able to tell me about my birth, and that may never happen, and I want it.

It is evident that the birth mother may not be able and/or willing to provide answers to all the questions we have concerning our birth history. For some persons, like Alexandra, she may never know her birth story in a way that is most meaningful and/or important to her self-

knowledge.

For Alexandra, these unanswered and unasked questions about her birth origins bind her to an ongoing struggle for signs of difference. Mired in feelings of hope, anger, and insignificance, she continues to wonder about the meaning these questions have for her self, and her future relationship with her birth mother.

There is one final aspect of Alexandra's story that troubles me concerning her sense of affiliation to family. She says,

> . . . my reunion has profoundly affected how I see myself as a person, as part of society, as part of the family. I still don't feel like I'm part of any family, really, any more so than I ever was; because I'm only a partial member of my birth family, I'm only a partial member of my adoptive family. I don't think that will ever ever change and for me that's a **wound** [my emphasis] that I will carry with me forever and that I'm sad about. I'm sad that I don't feel that I'll ever have the opportunity to have a family that I really feel like I belong to.

Although I fully respect her personal experience of adoption, I am troubled to know that Alexandra continues to feel burdened by a sense of woundedness. She also accepts that her life will never be free from feeling injured as an adopted person. Additionally, Alexandra is left feeling disconnected from both her adoptive and birth families. At this moment, I, too, feel saddened but also uncertain about what other dynamics have constructed Alexandra's subjective experience.

Andrew

A few months prior to our interview, Andrew had become more proactive in his endeavour to claim knowledge about his birth history. Clearly expressing interest in meeting members of his birth family and, in particular, his birth mother, his recent undertaking was in the initial stages by the time of our final meeting. Andrew talks about what this personal undertaking means for him,

> . . . this search for this other dimension which came before my adoption, which I'm calling mother and maybe that's why I say it's much broader than that. It's about my sense of who I am in the world, but I pin that word mother on to it because it's about my birth; but it's also all the unknowingness about culture and family background and health and religious identity. And for some reason, I pin a lot of that on to mother.

As previously discussed, Andrew continually gets caught up in re-inscribing the category "biological", and thus learns to desire his birth mother. In the above passage, however, he raises a critical issue that many adopted persons struggle with, that is, our sense of who we are in the world. I argue that this absence of feeling grounded is rooted in the lack of recognition paid to adoption.

Seeking to claim some recognition of difference, Andrew speaks about his brief, personal exchanges with a close friend of his birth mother,

> . . . what it's done for me, just talking to this woman who is a flesh and blood source of information which makes a big difference from getting a letter from the ministry of social services. It's like something happened to me, in the course of days,

weeks, maybe a few months, of speaking to her on various occasions that it was just, here was a living connection with my birth. It was like kind of a sigh of relief inside and I said oh, yeah, like it's real, this whole story is real. I mean it's not just a dream or something - it was just very real to talk in this way.

Instead of continually trying to "grasp in the dark" for self-understanding, Andrew feels immediately relieved to receive open confirmation about, and specific knowledge of, his birth history. He is also free to engage in open dialogue about his past, a past that is integrally tied to his identity "adopted". Through this process of dialogue, Andrew can freely express his feelings about his lived experience of adoption, as well as the reality of his birth.

As Andrew recognizes, "I've only met a third party as it were, but it's done a lot for me in a short span of time. And I feel like now I really want to pursue looking for my birth mother. And the reason why I want to do it is really so that eventually I'll be able to put her behind me". Clearly he views this brief, personal exchange as a profoundly transformative experience. Rooted in this sense of new found freedom, Andrew says, "it's just about me. It's like sinking down into myself and saying, oh, yes, this is really who I am. And I don't have to kind of guess at it any more". And so Andrew's endeavour to claim proper recognition of difference continues but from a place within himself that feels more grounded.

Marie

From a very early age, Marie expresses a strong interest in learning about her own historical origins. While growing up, she frequently preoccupied herself with private thoughts of, and unanswered questions about, her birth family. Marie never wavered from

her personal commitment to uncover the mystery surrounding her past. In fact, she maintained the belief that when she was ready and able to proceed, she would seek out members of her birth family. Marie was especially invested in finding her birth mother.

At the age of twenty-two, Marie embarks on a far more active venture to reveal the truths about her past. She is successful in her personal undertaking. At the time of our interviews, Marie has met with both of her birth parents; she has known her birth mother for four years, and her birth father for three years. Marie expresses these sentiments about the impact of her "reunion" with her birth father,

> . . . it meant for the first time in my life being connected. Like the first time I met my father, I looked across an airport and saw his eyes and they were exactly like mine. I think what it said to me in a nutshell was **it was okay to be me** [my emphasis] because there were a lot of other people like me. And there are a lot of aspects of my personality that were definitely biological and I think, not that my adoptive family hadn't accepted those traits, I hadn't accepted those traits, myself, because I didn't really know what they meant until I was in a reunion.

Feeling a "void all of her life that no one could really understand", Marie talks further about how meeting her birth father helps to consolidate her identity,

> . . . it's so hard to describe that reunion. Because my adoptive family was so dysfunctional and there was so many problems, I swear, for me it was like a reward.
>
> . . . It was a new beginning. It was tying up an old end. And it was, for the first time in my life, that I had a piece of that mysterious other side to me that had no name, that had no face, that I always knew was there because it was a part of me. I

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was always a part of somebody else. And it just, it made it alright, and it made me understand it and the mystery of it. . .

Marie begins to feel less burdened and, in particular, self-acceptance through meeting her birth father. It is evident that she is highly invested in claiming her own biological connection so that she can finally acknowledge the source of her physical attributes. Looking to her birth father to unveil the mystery, and thus provide acknowledgement of her difference, she then feels "alright".

For Marie, meeting her birth mother offers a subjectively different experience. Specifically, she speaks openly about her continuing feelings of disappointment in, and rejection by, her birth mother,

Well, meeting her was great, but she can not accept the adoption, she can not accept herself for giving me away. She doesn't accept a lot of things. She has never ever resolved her feelings towards my birth father and I look identical to him. So, she has no contact with me as a result of it. The impact of the reunion on me is that, for me and my birth mother it's actually been very, very difficult. It's because it's been like a second rejection for me. So, I'm still really really fighting that. It's like an eternal thorn in my side. The most painful thing I've ever had to deal with in my life has been not having contact with my birth mother. And it still is.

Clearly Marie's "reunion" experience with her birth mother continues to engender painful feelings that are rooted in the lost opportunity to establish a biological relationship. Consequently, Marie is left feeling a deep sense of burden and acute difference which she had hope would abate through meeting her birth parents. As she points out, "There is still

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an emptiness and I mean even after this reunion, I still have that void . . ." Marie continues to search for "something" that is beyond her reach, and yet is within her reach.

When I reflect upon Marie's experience of claiming her birth family, the nature of her ongoing identity struggles and feelings of "emptiness" epitomize the harmful effects adopted persons are subjected to in our culture. In particular, living in Western culture that values biological relationships over "other" relationships continually positions adopted persons in a deficit position. Striving for "normalcy" through the "reunion", adopted persons get caught up in re-inscribing the category "biological".

Marie's account of her adoption experience is also continually tied to primal wound discourses. In this regard, residual effects of her "reunion" clearly demonstrate the personal difficulties she experiences in accepting dominant ideology. On the one hand, Marie discovers that "it's okay to be herself", causing her to feel a new found sense of freedom. On the other hand, however, she continually feels bereft, rejected, and at times, angry for not having experienced a biological connection earlier in her life. Thus, her sense of "emptiness" and inner "void" leads me to conclude that her "desire" for a legitimate relationship is learned. Clearly Marie's "desire" to have a connection with her birth mother is produced through social processes that are hidden by ideology but appear to be part of our culture's natural social order.

John

John's account of his attempt to claim recognition of difference offers a significantly different perspective in relation to the other participants. Having been adopted after 1966,

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John's access to birth information is more harshly regulated than adoptions occurring preceding that time. For adoptions occurring before 1966, like myself, adopted persons can access their full birth name on their Adoption Order (See Appendix H). For adoptions occurring after 1966, like John, access is restricted to receiving only the birth forename. John's birth surname is cited but reveals only the first initial followed by his birth registration number. Hence, John's birth surname is "blocked" through regulative practices governing adoption.

John's endeavour to claim recognition of difference is continually "blocked" by government legislation that prohibits access to personal information. At the time of our interviews, he has been actively seeking his birth family for approximately three years but his efforts have been repeatedly thwarted by adoption practices and legislation. Understandably, John continually feels controlled by the social institution of adoption in his ongoing efforts to conduct a "blind search" for his birth history.

Throughout the process of obtaining his background history (i.e., nonidentifying information) from the Children's Aid Society to being "blocked", John speaks candidly about his feelings of anger, depression, and powerlessness. He says, "as adoptees, we have no control, or very little control of the situation. We don't have power - I am pretty well disenchanted with the political process - I wouldn't wish it on anybody to do this type of research". In my view, these adoption practices are highly regulative in nature, and continually locate John in unequal power relations, resulting in feelings of disempowerment.

John is clear that his anger is a direct consequence of being denied the "right" to access information about his birth history. His feelings are also rooted in being denied and

subsequently "blocked" for the past few years with little hope that current, unjust adoption practices will change in the near future. How does John proceed from here? As he points out, "Same place I was three years ago. I know absolutely nothing more than what I knew three years ago and I hit a road block. There's really nothing I can do except hope for a change in the law".

In this regard, John remains strongly committed to claiming "control" over his personal history, and advocates for change through his various political activities. A prime priority for John is assisting other adopted persons, like himself, to claim their right to access their own birth history, including the right to meet members of their birth family.

For me, John's story raises several interesting questions regarding the construction of his different experience of adoption. Unlike the other participants, including myself, John does not perceive himself as having problems of identity. In fact, John openly acknowledges growing up with positive feelings and self-regard about his identity "adopted". When I reflect upon John's subjective experience I am left wondering, "how can I better understand his experience of adoption so that I can learn what factors contributed to his identity in a positive way?"

Additional questions are raised for me through hearing John's story. In particular, how did his adoptive parents handle the issue of difference? Does having a grandmother who is adopted contribute positively to John receiving proper recognition for his identity "adopted"? How did his grandmother acknowledge his difference? Is being an `only child' an important dynamic in developing a strong identity as an adopted person? If so, how do we understand the absence of other siblings (i.e., biological) in the creation of a different and

more favorable adoption experience? What experiences have helped John to feel more comfortable with, and positive about, his identity "adopted"?

Clearly I can only speculate why John's subjective experience of adoption is different. However, my investment in being taught by his story is grounded in my ongoing commitment to garner ideas about how to re-work the adoption experience so that it is less harmful to adopted persons.

Lise

My personal endeavour toward claiming some recognition of difference continues. During the past several weeks, I have undertaken to pursue my own investigative work in order to uncover additional information about my birth history (Appendixes I, J, and K). In particular, I am now wanting to determine the whereabouts of my birth mother. I am especially interested in knowing whether or not she is still alive and if I have other birth relationships.

Most recently, I have been informed by the Adoption Disclosure Registry in Toronto that my request to seek contact with my birth mother will likely be activated within the next eighteen months (See Appendix L). Upon receiving this letter I recall feeling initially relieved to know that my wait of seven years was finally coming to an end. As an adopted woman, however, I am now more vigilant about how I continue to be subjected to regulative practices governing "closed" adoptions. Additionally, my commitment to the process of working through my own oppression is necessary to maintain resistance against taking up the deficit identity position.

Having lived in silence and fear of my own birth history for the past forty years, this

active pursuit of self-knowledge is now something I believe I have the right to claim. I am cognizant of pushing myself beyond the silence and fear so that I can claim what I did not receive as a younger person. There is a part of me that wants closure to this mystery. There is another part of me that subscribes to a sense of justice for all adopted persons who have been repeatedly harmed by the closed system of adoption. My commitment to both the personal and political agendas continually sustain me in my work.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

POST-INQUIRY: REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

My contention is that we collectively elicit, form and educate the possibility of our human existence, creating in the process something that has never before existed. In an age of pervasive reification, it is difficult to find the idea of creativity credible. But our reified lives are also a creation. We have no choice but to make ourselves, the only question is how well this self-constitution serves our human possibilities. The knowledge most necessary to emancipation grasps the openness of our future and our responsibility for its determination. From this it leads us to the fundamental imperative: to so appropriate our engagement in the world of nature, our own past residues and unborn prospects, that we emerge from the chrysalis of our potentiality able in reflection to affirm the nature of our human lives (Lichtman, 1990, p. 50-51).

When I reflect upon my lived experience of adoption, I can now name and understand the ongoing struggles involved in looking beyond the "normal" meanings ascribed to identity formation. As an adopted woman, my commitment to disrupting and displacing oppressive discourses and practices that continually influence my subjective experience forms the essence of ongoing personal and political work. Clearly the process of changing the status quo is extremely difficult. Through this inquiry, however, I am now able to locate the source of difficulty to cultural dynamics, social practices and institutions that are deeply rooted in the fabric of the larger social realm. I can also recognize that ongoing difficulties,

encountered in trying to feel okay as an adopted person, are not about my own personal deficiency but speak to the ideological power of the established social order in Western society. This is an important theoretical advance for the field of adoption in that it ceases to individualize adopted persons but promotes social critique.

This different and critical reading of the "problem of identity" has been further consolidated through engaging with the participants' stories of their lived experience of adoption. In particular, new insights emerged as I endeavoured to understand specific meanings they attribute to their struggles of identity, and how they reconcile these sites of tension. Without the private reflections of the participants, this different reading of adoption would not be possible. I am, therefore, appreciative to each of them for sharing their own personal experience and wisdom, and for teaching me about other possibilities.

I have now reached the stage of this inquiry where I am expected to put forth some "conclusionary" remarks about my research. So, how do I begin to put some closure on the sequence of this poignant experience? Unquestionably, I am a different person, and thus writing from a different location as a result of engaging in this inquiry. Rather than view this closing section as a circumscribed end point, I will share some of my personal reflections on how the creation of this critical reading of adoption opens up different, and more liberatory possibilities for living as an adopted person.

This alternative reading offers some fundamental insights toward re-conceptualizing the adopted person's lived experience and his/her struggles with identity. Additionally, this closing section affords an opportunity to further conceptualize and consolidate some of my thoughts on these issues. More specifically, I will briefly summarize my argument followed

by some suggestions for adopted persons with regard to how they might think differently about their lives as a result of this work. I will then put forth some suggestions about further research and action.

The analysis names a social process of injury tied to constructing the category "adopted" that is continually obscured by the dominant social order. Drawing upon the participants, as well as my own lived experience of adoption, I set out to make visible and to name the harmful effects sustained on our sense of personhood as a result of being produced "other", and forced to live "as if" something is true when it is not. Clearly unsettling established "truths" about adoption, I also set out to re-position the origin of problems of identity ascribed to "adopted" from the personal realm to the larger social order. Specifically, my analysis reveals how identity problems within adoption are thoroughly social rather than an individual trait. Additionally, it shows that the process of construction of "adopted" is tied not to naturalness but to power.

This critical analysis of adoption poignantly demonstrates four sites of injury to adopted persons' identity formation. These particular sites of injury included: (1) The Birth Story . . . Living a Pretense; (2) Living Silence. . . Living Silent; (3) The Experience of Being Mothered. . . The Desire To Belong; and (4) Looking for Recognition. . . Claiming our Difference. Each of the sites reveal a process of injury, albeit hidden, to adopted persons' identity when the need for recognition of difference is continually thwarted but undergoes systematically distorted recognition. Additionally, the following question is taken up as critical knowledge toward understanding the notion of harm on the formation of identity; what happens to the adopted person's identity under the dominant regime of "truth"

that values biology over the creation of alternative family forms?

Conceptualizing the analysis necessitated a different approach so that I would purposefully work to avoid re-inscribing the category "adopted", and thus avoid re-producing the category "biological". The two-fold approach included: a post-structuralist analysis of production in order to demonstrate how each site of injury is constructed discursively, and a concrete examination of lived experience showing how adopted persons take up and become invested in those discourses.

The creation of the analysis explicitly demonstrates the effectiveness of the two-fold approach. More specifically, the strategies employed work to radically reframe the dominant view of adoption by showing the concrete production of difference: how adopted persons are produced "other"; how problems of identity are propagated through dominant ideologies, and in particular, through the category "born to"; and how the ongoing struggles involved in the adopted person's endeavour to claim proper recognition of difference re-produce his/her investment in dominant discourses.

Central to my argument is the claim that being produced "adopted" is harmful because potentials are harmed in that construction. I specifically draw upon Honneth's (1992) theory of recognition to support my discussions about the insult to identity of undergoing systematically distorted recognition. Additional claims supporting this central argument included: the template "as if born to" is problematic because it creates the category "adopted" as different and less than, and thus cements our knowledge of the privileged category of the biological family; "as if born to" is a pretense that forces the adopted person to fake it; the process of living "as if" something is true when it is not is intolerable and

injurious to identity formation; and adopted persons sustain considerable injury to identity from the lack of recognition that is paid to adoption and that that lack of recognition is due to the strength of regulation of the biological family.

One of the problems adopted people struggle against is taking up the notion that people who are not "born to" are different, and thus deficient. Another problem taken up by them is accepting the terms of the debate set by the dominant story and trying to counter these taken-for-granted terms. Re-working the latter problem led me to argue that the meanings attributed by the dominant discourse "born to" are a myth, one that is irrelevant to people actually "born to", but becomes a heavy burden for adopted persons to continually bear. People who belong to the category "born to" do not live up to the myth, but it does not matter because the discourse allows them a secure place and identity within that category.

Clearly, the social privileging of the biological family organizes and governs adopted persons' subjective experience of their identity "adopted". All of the participants' accounts show that they have learned to take up the dominant meaning that claims biology is more important than relationships. For many of them, the ongoing struggle for legitimacy centres on the valorization of biology, especially as it informs their sense of self.

As a result of this inquiry, I have identified several reasons to account for the burdens shouldered by adopted persons in their ongoing struggles to resist taking up the deficit identity position: (1) Adopted persons do not belong to the privileged category "born to", and thus they are not privileged; (2) Their resistance (to not take up the deficit position) is further hurt by the socially constructed need "to belong" to "the family"; (3) Adopted persons have no permission to talk about being in a "different" category. In fact, open

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dialogue is further curtailed because of what we represent to our adoptive parents. Specifically, adopted persons are the embodiment of what their parents could not do, that is, to produce a biological child of their own. Adopted persons, then, take up being grateful and loyal toward their adoptive parents, and thus protect them from fully knowing their authentic feelings. As previously shown, silence becomes an integral, albeit harmful, dynamic within adoptive family relationships. Thus, living silent reinforces the rules of the "norm". (4) The everyday life of adopted persons is mediated by the discourse of "the family" which produces feelings of shame for being positioned in a different, and less privileged category. (5) Adopted persons, as subjects in power, are continually subjected to rules and regulations that are rooted in the closed system of adoption. It is extremely difficult to resist taking up the deficient position in the face of highly regulative social practices to which adopted persons are forced to continually submit. (6) The dominant discourse of adoption propagates the widely held view that adopted persons sustain irreparable trauma in early development as a result of the initial separation from the birth mother. Hence, adopted persons are labeled permanently traumatized, and are continually tied to this conventional notion of trauma through the identity "adopted".

While recognizing the heavy burden experienced by adopted persons, how might we begin to think differently about our lives as a result of this work? As previously mentioned, I am a different person in ways that have profoundly changed how I name, think, and talk about my lived experience of adoption. For me, this significant difference in how I experience myself subjectively is directly tied to situating the origin of "identity problems" to the established social order. I can now refuse the identification of "adopted" as deficient,

instead of continually feeling less than, and marginalized for not belonging to the privileged category "biological". Most importantly, I am learning to embrace and celebrate my difference in ways that did not receive proper recognition when I was a younger person.

The creation of a counter discourse, as demonstrated by the work of the thesis, offers adopted persons a different self-view so that they can claim their identity "adopted" in a different, more liberatory way. Overall, adopted persons are invited to consider how their lived experience, and in particular, their identity, is constructed and governed by discourses, social practices and cultural institutions. They are also challenged to think about how they become invested in those dominant discourses in ways that re-produce "adopted" as deficient, and thus re-inscribe the category "biological" as "normal".

I believe there are specific ways in which the adopted person can begin to think differently about his/her life, and in particular, his/her self, as a result of this inquiry. Specifically, adopted persons can begin to critically take up how living in a culture that values biology over alternative family forms continually impacts their sense of self. It is only within this broader social context that struggles tied to the identity "adopted" can be fully understood and challenged. This alternative perspective on identity formation also ceases to individualize problems of identity experienced by adopted persons, and thus radically unsettles the dominant story of adoption.

Additionally, adopted persons can question the social construct "true identity", especially as it relates to their struggles over the valuation of "biological" relationships over "other" relationships. As previously discussed, the construct of "identity" is securely bound by the meanings attributed by the dominant discourse "born to" which are a myth, but

becomes an intolerable and injurious burden for adopted persons. Rather than continue to invest in the struggle to belong to the category "biological", my work subscribes to a sense of justice for adopted persons so that our difference receives proper recognition. This political work can only be accomplished if adopted persons begin to dis-engage from and displace oppressive discourses and practices that perpetuate the dominant social order.

Ultimately, it is my hope that adopted persons reconsider the nature and source of injuries that they have sustained through their adoption experience. Clearly attributing injuries of identity to "birth wound" discourses is highly problematic and questionable because it continually ties the adopted person to feelings of deficiency and internalized "birth trauma". As previously shown, some participants continue to perceive themselves as irreparably damaged due to the initial separation from their birth mother. The analysis, however, advances a far more critical perspective that situates identity formation within the social context of Western society. In particular, this work poignantly demonstrates how the concrete production of difference is an injurious process on adopted persons' identity formation. The lived experience of me and the participants strongly attest to the ongoing struggles we engage in and/or take up through living with difference.

The political endpoint of my work in adoption is toward the elimination of the category "adopted". Post-structuralism informs me that oppression is enabled by creating the category "adopted", as the negative of the category "biological". As long as these categories remain tied to our culture's social structure, "adopted" will continue to be the less privileged term.

Barrett and McIntosh (1992) advance the view that we move toward eradicating

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familial ideology from the media and all public discourse. Viewing "the family" as an ideological configuration, they make the claim that diverse family forms are continually seen as deficient when compared to the taken-for-granted category "biological". Because the adoptive family falls outside of the "natural" social order it is produced and subsequently perceived as different and less than (i.e., "other"). So, if we work toward eradicating familial ideology from public discourse we then begin to open up space to embrace and celebrate living with difference. Open dialogue about alternative family forms is also promoted. This political work subscribes to a sense of justice for adopted persons in ways that support proper recognition of our difference.

While I fully support this political direction, we must first (re)define our family structure away from issues of "blood" ties as the basis of relatedness but to issues relating to emotional intimacy between people. Additionally, eliminating the category "adopted" raises a fundamental question regarding how we, as a society, begin to (re)name and (re)structure how we care for children. It also begins to unsettle the ideological power of the category "biological", along with the ownership of the family, as well as parental ownership of children. Instead, the value of relationships based on care and commitment is promoted as a collective social responsibility.

For now, however, I am fully invested in claiming my identity "adopted" in a more liberatory way so that I can rightfully claim what I did not receive for over thirty years. Rather than continuing to pretend to be someone that I am not, my identity "adopted" is now a source of pride for me. Through my endeavours to seek proper recognition of difference, I want other people to recognize and acknowledge this difference, starting with members of

my own adoptive family. I also want people to see the oppression and unjust practices to which adopted persons are continually subjected.

Several implications for adoption research are recognized. Most of what is currently known about adoption is conceptualized from the dominant perspective so that "problems of identity" ascribed to "adoptees" are re-produced. Thus, the privileged category of the biological family is further re-inscribed. Consequently, many, if not most adopted persons, take up struggles of identity as their own personal deficiency. As well, many of them are continually bound to seeking a "true identity" which often feels out of reach from their marginalized position "other".

This critical inquiry reveals that adoption, and in particular, identity formation of the adopted person is a complex and comprehensive social issue. Future research in adoption must move beyond dominant meanings and move toward the development of a paradigm shift, a shift that will advance a more contextualized and just understanding of adoption. Before moving beyond what is currently known about adoption we must first unsettle the underlying assumptions and "truths" that inform adopted persons' reading of their lived experience.

As demonstrated by the analysis, the two-fold approach I utilized poignantly illustrates how the primacy of the biological family as a cultural ideal causes identity problems for adopted persons. In particular, this inquiry openly challenges widely held beliefs that locate "problems of identity" to early attachment disturbance and birth wound discourses. It also reveals how adopted persons become invested in those discourses, causing struggles of identity to ensue.

Clearly employing different analytical strategies will work toward deconstructing dominant discourses and practices that are often viewed as part of the "natural" social order. It will also provide a comprehensive and far more critical understanding of how people's lived experience of adoption is continually impacted by the social context. Creating other possibilities of understanding the adopted person's lived experience, and in particular, the hidden process of construction tied to identity formation, can only be adequately augmented through asking critical questions about established "truths".

Finally, I acknowledge that persons who are adopted take up adoption in different ways. For example, there may be ameliorating circumstances (e.g., historical era, social policies, changes in discourses) that offer adopted persons a different location from which to resist the "problem of identity" and the oppression of biological discourses. Persons who are located in open adoption practices have a better possibility of resistance against investment in the deficit identity position. Adoption, however, will remain a "problem of identity" until the ideological power of the biological family is unsettled and dis-placed as the centre of social organization in Western culture.

I fully recognize the open-ended nature of this inquiry, and in particular, the partial perspective offered by my horizon of interpretation. What I hope for, however, is that this work creates a public space for ongoing dialogue so that a critical perspective on adoption can be sustained.

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Appendix A

Wilfrid Laurier University

<u>EARLY DISCLOSURE OF ADOPTIVE STATUS</u>:
<u>A PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE</u>

Psychoanalytic Theory
S. W. 655-020
Section 1

March 21, 1985.

Lise M. Beauchesne

Table of Contents

Introduction

Disturbances in object relationships, manifested by aloofness or emotional unavailability, problems in superego and ego-ideal forma-tion, lack of boundaries constituting a self, and a diffuseness from poorly integrated identifications, are from poorly integrated identi-fications, are all described as being consequences of the conflicts that adopted children may develop around the knowledge of their adopted status (Toussieng, 1962, p.62).

Adoption is regarded as the optimal social solution to the problem of parents who are unable to care for their biological children. From a developmental perspective, the problems encountered by an adopted child are similar to those of a nonadopted child, but with the additional unique task of working through the issue attributed to the adoptive status. The professional literature addresses the adoption theme as a significant factor in the psychological development of the adopted child. Specifically, the extent to which the knowledge of having another set of parents (biological) influences the personality development and behavior of the adopted child is examined.

It is important to note however, that psychoanalytic studies of adopted children are seldom addressed in the professional literature. Although, there appears to be a consensus that adoption should occur ideally at birth, for primary identification and good object relationships to develop (Bowlby, 1969; Wieder, 1977; Winnicott, 1960), "psychoanalytic case studies of the pathogenicity surrounding the meaning and experiences of being an adoptee are lacking" (Wieder, 1977, p.2). In examining the phenomenon of adoption, limited clinical studies have attempted to understand the adverse effects on the adopted child's psychological development (Barnes, 1953; Schechter, 1960; Schechter, 1973; Sherick, 1983; Wieder, 1977). However, a critical question rarely addressed is the importance of developmental timing concerning disclosure of the

adoptive status to the child.

In light of this perspective, Wieder states that, "in those adoptees I have studied, their development and relationship to the adoptive mothers were clinically indistinguishable from blood-kin chidren up to the time they were told of their adoption" (Wieder, 1975, p.795). Other authors support this premise, whereby behavioral change, symptom formation, thought content, and object relationships were noted as direct consequences to the adopted child (Barnes, 1953; Brinich, 1980; Schechter, 1973; Sherick, 1983). Traditional practice seems to support early disclosure (usually between two and three years of age), for fear the adopted child will be informed of his/her adoptive status by someone other than the adoptive parents. A significant question to address is ∠ the extent to which disclosure about the adoptive status to chidren under three years of age affects their psychological development.

The discussion presented herein will attempt to examine this precise issue. Specifically, the psychological impact of early disclosure on the young adopted child will be illuminated based on the following relevant issues as it pertains to the adoptive status namely, object attachment, the initial response of the adopted child and its impact on the developmental phase of separation-individuation, family romance fantasies, and finally, split representation of the maternal image. Central to this discussion will be an attempt of the writer to highlight potential consequences to the adopted child's self and object representation, considered a necessary precondition for good object relationships. For illustrative purposes, the writer will conclude the discussion with a self-examination as an adopted child in light of the impact of adoption during preschool

years as well as its current influence on adult behavior.

Object Attachment

The importance of satisfactory early mothering for the healthy psychological and physical development of the child has been well documented in the literature (Bowlby, 1969; Mahler, 1975; Winnicott, 1960). Given the fact that the adoptive mother is not the biological mother, an essential consideration is her adaptibility to and identification with the adopted child's primary maternal care needs. The extent to which the adoptive mother supports the continuity of being (Winnicott, 1960), of the adopted child through her auxilary ego, facilitates the attachment of the child to his[a] first object relationship (the primary love object) (Mahler, 1975).

The professional literature addresses potential intrapsychic and interpersonal conflicts experienced by the adoptive mother which may influence the quality of the early mother-child relationship. Specifically, it is important to consider the psychological impact on the adoptive mother in light of the fact that she has 'got' a baby, but has not conceived and given birth to her adopted child (Brinich, 1980). As Brinich suggests, "this fact has important implications for her mental representation of herself and her adopted child; and these in turn will be reflected in the relationships between the adoptive mother and her adopted child" (Brinich, 1980, p.110).

Of primary importance is the adoptive mother's motivation for adoption which the literature indicates to be infertility problems. This missed opportunity of primary maternal identification (Winnicott, 1960) with

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[a]For the remainder of the paper, reference will be to the male gender only for the purposes of ease of reading, but it is recognized that all comments apply equally to females.

the adopted child, may be experienced as a narcissistic injury by the adoptive mother, especially insofar as the nonbiological child emphasizes her own infertility (Blum, 1983; Brinich, 1980; Toussieng, 1962). As a result, the adoptive mother may experience intense feelings of frustration and inadequacy to the extent that her mental representation of herself reflects a deep sense of failure as a biological mother (Blum, 1983).

Thus, for not having fulfilled the expectations of motherhood, that is, the adoptive mother's ego ideal of natural parenthood, internal conflicts may be experienced. Should the adoptive mother not resolve this intrapsychic conflict and reflect inconsistent mothering, the adopted child in attempting to identify with his first object relationship may acquire a defective primary introject (Blum, 1983). The ultimate consequence to the adopted child is rejection by the adoptive mother who may in turn, fault the child's bad behavior on his inadequate genetic endowment (Blum, 1983; Brinich, 1983). To this end, it may be possible for the adoptive mother to split her internal representation of the adopted child to consist of two disconnected parts, one acceptable (adoptive mother's influence) and the other unacceptable (inherent personality from biological mother) (Brinich, 1983).

In light of this perspective, it becomes apparent that the attitude of the adoptive mother toward adoption and particularly, her maternal identification with the adopted child has important implications for early disclosure of the child's adoptive status and subsequently, his psychological development. The extent to which resolution of this intrapsychic conflict is forthcoming, may in turn impede or complicate the adoptive mother's task of informing the adopted child of the adoption.

When such a mother has the task of telling her child that he is adopted, she will be less sensitive to the child and will be apt to choose the wrong time or do it in a way that may push the child further into emotional difficulties (Toussieng, 1962, p.64).

Disclosure of Adoptive Status

A. Initial Response

The following excerpt illuminates the initial response of a young adopted child to the knowledge of his adoptive status.

> According to his adoptive mother, up to age two and a half he had been an alert, contented, "easy" baby who progressed rapidly. After disclosure of his adoption, he became unfriendly, slept poorly, "couldn't sit still", and ran away. He could not tolerate being reminded of the actuality of babies being given away; he rejected people, information, and reminders of adoption (Wieder, 1977, p.9).

The professional literature suggests that early disclosure of adoption has a marked impact on the adopted child's emerging ego development (Schechter, 1967; Wieder, 1978). To completely understand the significant impact on the adopted child's psychological development, it would therefore, be imperative to examine the phase specific tasks of separation-individuation.

Between the ages of two and three years, the young child embarks upon a critical stage of his psychological development. Specifically, two subphases of separation-individuation are encountered namely, rapprochment and consolidation of individuality and the beginnings of emotional object constancy (Mahler, 1975).

During the rapprochement subphase significant emotional changes occur wherein the young child evidences a realization of separateness between self and object representation. With the young child's growing

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perception of mother's separate existence, increased separation-anxiety results in the enactment of demanding and dependent behavior. As the young child strives toward independence in light of the awareness of self-representation, marked ambivalence is shown with regard to mother as attempts are made to re-establish the mother-infant dual unity (Mahler, 1975).

It is important to note that at this stage of development, the young child experiences fear of object loss and abadonment, consolidation of attachment to both mother and father for object identification purposes, internalization of parental demands which indicates the beginning of superego development, and fear of loss of the object's (mother) love, as reflected by an overly sensitive reaction to approval or disapproval by the parents, particularly the mother (Mahler, 1975).

Furthermore, consolidation of individuality and the beginnings of emotional object constancy denotes an open-ended subphase of separation-individuation wherein the young child's primary developmental tasks are twofold: to achieve self-identity formation, and to integrate the good and bad aspects of the primary love object into one whole mental representation (Mahler, 1975). The extent to which this fusion of good and bad images of mother occurs, preclude the use of 'splitting' as a defense mechanism, and thereby facilitate the young child's development of a cohesive sense of self (i.e., good differentiation of good/bad self object). However, for healthy self and object representation to be obtained, the young child needs to experience with the mother, a secure, stable, and trusting relationship. Given that the mother

provides continued emotional availability, a unified maternal represen-
tation produces in the young child a sense of security and comfort,
that is the necessary prerequisite of ego development (Mahler, 1975).

In light of the aforementioned tasks of separation-individuation,
the impact of early disclosure on the adopted child's personality devel-
opment and behavior can be appropriately examined. It is important to
note the extent to which some developmental issues are intensified as
a result of the adopted child's reaction to the adoptive status.

It is apparent from a review of the literature that there exists
a high correlation between the timing of disclosure of the adoptive
status, and the child's development of symptom formation (i.e., sleep
disturbances, hyperactivity, enuresis, withdrawal behavior) (Baines, 1953;
Schechter, 1973; Wieder, 1978). The message of adoption imparted to the
preschool aged adopted child, for example, 'you were especially chosen
out of many other children to be our special child; your real biological
mother was unable to care for you', is experienced as a narcissistic
injury (Brinich, 1980; Schechter, 1960; Toussieng, 1962) and thereby
produces intense feelings of anxiety, confusion, shame, and rage in the
young child (Sherick, 1983; Wieder, 1978). As the literature suggests,
the unique meaning attributed to the adoptive status, becomes a critical
issue in the subsequent psychological development of the adopted child
(Blum, 1983; Brinich, 1980; Schechter, 1967; Sherick, 1983; Wieder, 1978).

The knowledge of having two sets of parents is disclosed at a devel-
opmental phase, wherein the adopted child is unable to master or comprehend
the implications of 'adoption' in view of the immature ego development

(Wieder, 1978). As Wieder suggests, "communicated at an age when fantasy and reality were not clearly demarcated, the actual message of relinguishment had endowed phase-specific fantasies of loss of object and love with a sense of actuality" (Wieder, 1978, p.798). Given the fact that the child between the ages of two and three begins to perceive the separateness between self and object representation, the knowledge of adoption appears to intensify the separation-anxiety experienced by the adopted child (Barnes, 1953; Schechter, 1972; Sherick, 1983).

From clinical studies, it has become apparent that the adopted child's intense anxiety response and resultant fear of abandonment and rejection by the adoptive mother manifests itself by excessive dependent and demanding behavior (Barnes, 1953; Schechter, 1960; 1967; Sherick, 1983). As Wieder suggests, "the overwhelming separation anxiety that followed, precipitated a regressive period which led to a persistant, exaggerated dependency on the adoptive mother" (Wieder, 1977, p.188). Such heightened separation-anxiety was clearly illustrated in a particular case study, whereby the adopted child feared the physical absence of the adoptive mother, to the extent that a symbiotic-like attachment was perpetuated (Wieder, 1978). Although, the adoptive parents' may attempt to disclose the adoptive status in a benign manner emphasizing how much they love their child, the adopted child experiences himself as unwanted, abandoned, rejected, and different (Brinich, 1980; Sherick, 1983; Wieder, 1978).

In light of this perspective, the literature indicates that the adopted child experiences ubiquitous fears of abandonment and rejection that he will be placed for readoption (Sherick, 1983). At the critical stage of separation-individuation, it becomes apparent that knowledge

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of the adoptive status intensifies the adopted child's developmental responses to the fear of object loss and abandonment, fear of loss of the object's love, and separation-anxiety. To this end, it appears that the adopted child's intense anxiety response to his adoptive status, perpetuates the fear of abandonment, particularly by the adoptive mother.

It is important to note however, that the adopted child may respond to the knowledge of adoption in one of two ways namely, overly compliant 'good' behavior, or overly aggressive behavior (Brinich, 1980; Wieder, 1977). Specifically, the literature suggests that overly compliant, pleasing, good behavior exhibited by the adopted child indicates a defensive response against both the fear of abandonment and rejection by the adoptive mother (Wieder, 1977). Furthermore, it seems to reflect a belief of the adopted child that 'good' behavior will insure forthcoming love of the object (the adoptive mother), and thereby ameliorate fear of abandonment. "His fear that bad behavior threatened abandonment was accompanied by anxiety about whether a legal adoption could be undone" (Wieder, 1977, p.4). Therefore, should the adopted child express anger towards the adoptive mother, he may risk object loss as well as loss of the object's love (Wieder, 1977).

Conversely, the adopted child may manifest an alternate behavioral response to the knowledge of adoption, whereby the fear of abandonment is 'tested' through overly aggressive behavior directed towards the adoptive mother (Schechter, 1973; Sherick, 1983; Wieder, 1977). ". . . Brett felt compelled to provocatively test his mother, probably due to his fear that he would be sent away by his adoptive parents as he was by his biological parents" (Sherick, 1983, p.498). Whether the

adopted child exhibits overly compliant or aggressive behavior in response to the knowledge of adoption may, in part, be dependent on appropriate self-object mirroring from the primary love object (Kohut, 1971).

With regard to the initial response of the adopted child and its impact on the developmental phase of separation-individuation, it becomes apparent that knowledge of another 'real' maternal image interfers with the inner experience feeling of the reality of mother (Wieder, 1978). Furthermore, the adopted child appears to experience intense confusion at a critical period when the developing conceptualization of the nurturing maternal image is contradicted by the disclosure of another mother (Wieder, 1977). The extent to which good self and object representation becomes problematic for the adopted child will be addressed in a subsequent section examing split representation of the maternal image.

B. Fantasies (Family Romance Fantasies)

The professional literature addresses the significant impact of adoption on the young child's world of fantasy. Because young children generally, display a tendency toward concretism and literal interpretation of words (Wieder, 1977), it would, therefore, be important to understand how the adopted child experiences knowing he has another set of parents, particularly an imagined biological mother. In essence, fantasy may be attributed special importance when supported by reality (Barnes, 1953).

From clinical studies, it becomes apparent that the adopted child is preoccupied with adoption theme, in light of images and fantasies of the bad, abandoning biological mother (Sherick, 1983; Wieder, 1977). Obessed with the adoption story and the fantasy distortions derived from it, ('gotten rid of' by a biological and 'found' by the adoptive mother)

the young child is bewildered with critical questions in an attempt to understand his adoptive history (Barnes, 1953; Brinich, 1980; Schechter, 1960; 1973; Wieder, 1977b). Specifically, 'Why did my mother give me up?; If I was abandoned once, could it happen again? If I'm bad will my adoptive mother get rid of me? My adoptive mother would not give me away. She saved me; or conversely; Why was I stolen away from my real mother?' (Wieder, 1977a; 1977b).

It appears that the ubiquitous fears of abandonment and rejection by the adoptive mother and rage directed toward the imagined biological mother for relinquishing her 'real' child characterize the fantasies of the adopted child (Wieder, 1977a). Furthermore, persistent feelings of aloneness, worthlessness, and not belonging, seem to reflect the young child's internal self-representation (Wieder, 1977a; 1977b). As Wieder suggests, "in time, the children reworked and revised the adoption story in unsuccessful attempts to control the anxiety and shame engendered. A prominent focus of defense was against the recall of the realistic history" (Wieder, 1977b, p.188). Results of clinical studies thereby address the adopted child's use of defenses (denial, isolation, fantasy, avoidance) (Wieder, 1977a; Schechter, 1973), as it reflects his attempts to avoid thoughts of adoption, particularly the reality of two sets of parents. To this end, the adopted child's fantasy distortions of the adoption theme may, in part, reflect special adaptive and defensive reactions appropriate to his developmental phase, and confusion concerning his adoptive status (Wieder, 1977b).

Finally, with regard to Freud's conceptualization of family romances (Sherick, 1983; Wieder, 1977b), the adopted child's wish, in contrast

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to the biological child's, "is to deny adoption, establish a fantasied blood tie to the adoptive parents, and thereby erase the humiliation adoption implies" (Sherick, 1983). It would seem that fantasies, although distorted, assume an integral role in the adopted child's attempt to understand the reason for his biological mother's rejection. To this end, fantasies may provide for a defensive response against a more fundamental insecurity, that is, pervasive fears of loss of object and love (Barnes, 1953; Wieder, 1977a). A significant question to address is the extent to which these fantasy distortions affect the psychological development of the adopted child.

C. Split Representation of the Maternal Image

The separation-individuation subphase, specifically consolidation of individuality and the beginnings of emotional object constancy appears to become problematic for the young child in light of his adoptive status. As previously mentioned, self-identity formation and the fusion of good/bad images of the maternal object representation are considered critical. With the knowledge of having 'another' maternal image and the presence of a 'real' adoptive mother, the defense mechanism of 'splitting' is still required by the adopted child (Mahler, 1975). Because good and bad aspects of the mother (biological/adoptive) cannot be integrated into one unified representation, splitting, as a defense, facilitates ambivalence toward the adoptive mother (Wieder, 1977a).

> Hate for an unreachable, abandoning, hateful mother was directed toward the available adoptive mother, eventuating in a severely ambivalent relationship; the adoptive mother was both hated as the imagined abandoning mother and revered as the savior upon whom his very existence depended (Wieder, 1977a, p.5).

What may result is that the adopted child may split his two maternal images such that the adoptive mother becomes the 'good' object representation and consequently, the imagined biological mother reflects the 'bad' introject (Brinich, 1980; Schechter, 1973; Toussieng, 1962). It is important to note that a reversal of splits can also occur. As a result of poor differentiation of self and object, the adopted child experiences poor integration of good/bad self objects. (Schechter, 1973; Wieder, 1977a).

In light of the aforementioned phase-specific difficulties encountered, the following issues may affect the psychological development of the adopted child namely, conflicts around identification, problems in superego and ego-ideal formation, as it reflects the degree of 'parental' confusion, poorly differentiated self and object representation, difficulties encountered in resolution of oedipal complex, and minimal self-identify formation (Brinich, 1980; Schechter, 1973; Toussieng, 1962; Wieder, 1977a).

Case Example

The writer, (to be referred to in the first person hereafter), as an adopted child, will present a self-examination in light of the developmental issues addressed, and consider the possible psychological consequences as it reflects the uniqueness of the adoptive status. At the age of six weeks, I was adopted by parents who had been married for ten years and who experienced infertility problems during this time. I was the second adopted child. My brother was thirteen months at the time of my adoption. Two years later, my adoptive mother gave birth to a son and three years later, her second natural son was born. Throughout my childhood, both adoptive parents were employed full-time.

Given the fact that the focus of this paper has been on the effects of early disclosure on the psychological development of the adopted child, the major thrust will be on this period of my life. I will conclude the discussion with some relevant issues in my current adult life that appear to have roots in light of the impact of being told of my adoption during my preschool years. My knowledge of my preschool aged reaction is based upon two factors namely, reflection of my current behavior patterns and intrapsychic structure, and reports from my adoptive mother and other family members.

At the age of three years, my adoptive mother informed me that I was 'adopted', and especially chosen out of many other children to be their child. It appears consistent with the literature, that my psychological development was considered normal and primary maternal identification had been established. Although, I was in foster care

prior to being placed in my adoptive home, attachment with my primary love object (i.e., my adoptive mother), was not problematic. As Bowlby suggests, "it is unlikely that any sensitive phase begins before about six weeks and it may be some weeks later" (Bowlby, 1969, p.223).

In response to this early disclosure, my adoptive mother told me that I was 'good' and did not react, nor experience separation anxiety to the knowledge of my adoption. However, in view of my current adult behavior and consideration of the literature, it would seem that I internalized my anxiety and anger, and thereby became the overly compliant, passive, 'good' girl. This 'pleasing behavior' appears to indicate a defensive response against both the fear of abandonment and rejection by my adoptive mother. Furthermore, it seems to reflect a belief that if I am 'good', my adoptive parents, particularly my mother, will not give me away, nor place me for readoption. Should my anger have been expressed towards my adoptive mother, I risked losing the only real maternal love object to which I had become attached.

The literature suggests an alternate response to the knowledge of adoption, whereby the adopted child 'tests' the fear of abandonment through overly aggressive behavior directed towards the adoptive mother. This would seem to indicate that appropriate self-object mirroring (Kohut, 1971), and the development of good object relationship between mother and child had been established.

Conversely, my 'good' girl behavior may have reflected inappropriate self-object mirroring from my adoptive mother to the extent that I was required to reinforce good mothering through my good daughter behavior. Because of my intense fear of rejection and fear of abandonment by my

adoptive mother, I constantly pursued to perform as a good girl should. As a result, the separation-individuation phase, specifically consolidation of individuality and the beginnings of emotional object constancy was problematic (Mahler, 1975).

At this stage of development, self-identity formation and the fusion of good/bad images of the maternal object representation are considered critical. For this to occur however, the good and bad aspects of the mother need to be integrated into one unified representation such that the defense mechanism of 'splitting' of the object representation is no longer required (Mahler, 1975). Because I did not experience a sense of security, trust and comfort in my relationship with my adoptive mother and with the knowledge of having 'another' maternal image, the persistant feeling of ambivalence necessitated the defense mechanism of splitting. Therefore, during my preschool years, my whole maternal representation of the primary love object resulted in splitting two maternal images. Specifically, my adoptive mother became the 'good' object representation, whereas, my biological mother signified the 'bad' introject.

To this end, my self-representation reflected both a good and bad object. This resulted in poor differentiation of self and object and conflicts around identification. It is interesting to note that I defended against my 'bad' self through perfectionistic strivings. My internal belief reflected that if I was 'good', my adoptive mother would not reject me, nor abandon me.

Recapitulated in my adult life are intense fears of rejection should I not comply with meeting the needs of others, poor integration

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of good/bad self object and denial of bad self by constantly striving to be good. In adolescence, I reversed the split representation of my adoptive mother to being the bad object and then came to idealize my biological mother. My internalization of anger towards my adoptive mother manifested itself through self-depreciation and feelings of failure in school although, I excelled academically, nail-biting, slightly overweight, and perception of self as fat, and an inability to engage in heterosexual relationships. Because I experienced a poor self-representation, I focused my attention on the academic world, which signified one area of my life wherein I attained a feeling of completeness and developed a sense of self. Of further importance is that I did not foster independent thought in undergraduate school, but my efforts were in pursuit to 'please' the professor.

In an attempt to individuate myself upon completion of university, I geographically separated from my adoptive family. Fantasies of my imagined real mother have continued to preoccupy my adult life to the extent that I question my biological heritage.

In summary, this self-examination of my adoptive status and its impact on my psychological development, both as a child and current adult behavior, required consideration and reflection of some painful experiences that I had hidden since my preschool years. To promote healthy psychological development, it would, therefore, be imperative to re-examine the adoption theme as it affects one's adult life.
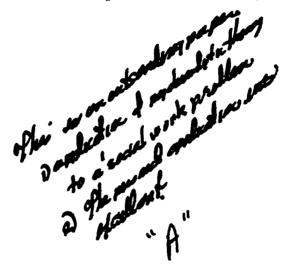
Conclusion

In view that the literature has only recently addressed the issue of developmental timing and the effects of early disclosure of the adoptive status on the young child, it would, therefore, indicate the need for further research. Because of the critical phase of psychological development upon which the young child embarks, particularly between the ages of two and three years, some authors recommend that knowledge of the adoptive status should not be disclosed until resolution of the oedipal stage (Brinich, 1980; Schechter, 1960; 1967; Wieder, 1978). It seems that at this time, the adopted child would be more developmentally prepared to integrate knowledge of two sets of parents, and thereby achieve good self and object representation, and self-identity formation. As Wieder suggests, "when will it be least traumatic" (wieder, 1978, p.801), for the psychological development of the child.

In summary, the writer has attempted to address relevant developmental goals and the subsequent impact on the adopted child in light of the unique task of working through the issues attributed to the adoptive status. It becomes apparent that developmental tasks specific to separation-individuation are intensified because of the young child's weak emerging ego development. Moreover, it may be important to consider the development of guidelines for adoptive parents to assist them with the process of when and how to inform their child of his adoptive status.

As Schecter suggest, "telling is a gradual process of communication over a period of time" (Schechter, 1967, p.696). Furthermore, "that adoption seemed to be an event in an individual's life which exerted

a continual influence, interacting between the internal foces and external changes in societal attitudes and specific confrontations and conflicts in the entire life history " (Schechter, 1967, p.708). Finally, it is the opinion of the writer that timing and meaning of the adoptive status experienced by the adopted child attributes a significant impact on both present and future personality development and behavior.

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Appendix B

COMPLETED INTERVIEWS

Participant	Dates of Interviews
Catherine	August 31st Sept. 27th Nov. 9th
Andrew	August 10th Sept. 24th
Liz	April 26th July 13th
Alexandra	May 7th July 9th August 9th
Phillip	June 7th July 26th
Steve	July 12th August 27th
Marie	June 11th July 19th July 27th
John	July 19th Sept. 20th Nov. 15th

TOTAL NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS.............20

Appendix C

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

My name is Lise Beauchesne and I am a candidate in the Doctor of Social Work program at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. As part of my program, I am conducting research in the area of adoption. This letter will introduce you to the primary aim of my study, as well as briefly outline how your participation would be beneficial.

I am an adopted woman who has held a view of myself as a struggling 'adoptee'. During the past several months, I have been engaged in a critical inquiry of the traditional view of adoption and in particular, of how the process of adoption develops into an ongoing question of identity. From this inquiry, I have developed a particular perspective that creates possibilities for a more liberatory experience of the process of adoption. On a personal level, I am now beginning to experience myself in a different, more positive way.

The purpose of this research is to learn from you, as other adopted women and adopted men, who have challenged the traditional view of adoption and in particular, to explore how your alternative understanding changes your self perception and everyday experience of yourself. I am particularly interested in further understanding how we, as adopted persons, can experience our lives differently within the adoption process and most importantly, claim our sense of self as 'adopted' in a different, more positive way. How, then, can we change the way in which the discourse on adoption is lived?

Would you be interested in participating in this study? If you are interested in this study, and choose to participate, you will be one of a small sample of participants.

Participation would entail meeting with me at least twice for a personal interview, with a view to discuss what it has been like for you as an adopted person, what your struggles have been with the identity 'adopted', how you have changed your adoption story and, how this different understanding influences how you feel and think about yourself. It is anticipated that the length of each interview will be two (2) hours. The time and place of our interviews would be arranged to accommodate your schedule. Your participation would be completely voluntary and, if you do agree to participate, you would be free to discontinue your involvement at any time, or to choose not to answer specific questions. Any information shared during our interviews would be treated as confidential and your anonymity would be rigorously protected in any verbal or written reports. For further information concerning the ethical protocol guiding this research, please refer to the attached Consent Form.

This study will reflect your unique experience of the process of adoption, as well as open my own particular perspective to critical reflection, scrutiny, and further revision. Additionally, I believe it is our lived experience within the process of adoption that will inform service providers, policy makers, and others whose lives are affected by adoption how being adopted impacts the way we feel and think about ourselves.

This study is being supervised by a committee of four faculty

members: Dr. Amy Rossiter (Chair - York University), Dr. Dennis Miehls (Wilfrid Laurier University), Dr. Susan Heald (Wilfrid Laurier University), and Dr. Anne Westhues (Wilfrid Laurier University). Should you wish to discuss any aspect of this research with my supervisor, Dr. Amy Rossiter can be contacted at (416)736-5226 ext.33463.

    If you are interested in knowing more about this study or would like to participate, please contact me in Waterloo at (519)884-1474. If I am not available to answer your telephone call, please feel free to leave a message and I will return your call as promptly as possible.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lise Beauchesne

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I agree to participate in the study being conducted by Lise Beauchesne which focuses on exploring alternative perspectives on how the process of adoption can be experienced in a different, more positive way.

I understand that:
   a) My participation in this research is voluntary;
   b) I have the right to terminate my involvement at any time;
   c) I have the right to refuse to answer any questions with which I feel uncomfortable;
   d) The sensitivity of the subject matter is appreciated by the researcher, and the intent is to treat the interview process with the utmost respect.

Furthermore, it is also my understanding that:
   e) There are no known risks associated with participating in this study; However, the interview process may be emotionally charged and may raise some uncomfortable feelings or latent memories. Should additional support be requested, the appropriate information will be provided.
   f) There are no direct personal benefits associated with participation.

Finally, I further understand that:
   g) All information collected for the purpose of this study will be treated in strictest confidence;
   h) The audiotaped interviews may be transcribed by another individual selected by the researcher. The transcriber will be obligated to keep all information in strictest confidence.
   i) The interview transcripts and interview notes will be shared and discussed with my Dissertation Committee.
   j) Any reports/papers, either published or unpublished, that result from this research will preserve codes of confidentiality and anonymity;
   k) Publications may involve verbatim quotations from the interviews.
   l) Despite codes of confidentiality, close associates or family members may recognize me through anecdotes or concrete details which might appear in a published version of this research.
   m) All interview audiotapes and transcripts will be confidential and appropriate care taken to safeguard them by securing them in a safe place;
   n) All audiotapes will be destroyed within an agreed upon time period.

_____   _____
Name (please print)   Signature

                                             _____
Date

CONSENT TO AUDIOTAPE

I give permission for my interviews to be audiotaped. I understand
that I have the right to turn off the tape recorder at any time
during the interviews.

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Signature

If you would be interested in receiving a brief written report on
my research, please provide your address in the space below.

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Address

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----------------------------
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City

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Postal Code

Appendix E

Name of Participant
Address
City
Postal Code

April 10, 1995

Dear   ,

A few months have passed since my last correspondence with you. Some of you may be wondering how my work is proceeding. The purpose of this letter is to keep you informed of my current progess with my research.

During the past several weeks, I have been reading each set of interview transcripts. As you know, this process of in-depth review of your adoption experiences has been invaluable in helping me to further reflect upon and critically revise my own interpretation of adoption. Thus far, I have discovered that we share several places of agreement in our explanations of adoption. For example, many of us have experienced feelings of difference, isolation, disconnection, as well as struggled with ongoing questions about our identity "adopted".

Additionally, I have discovered that I am learning the most from areas of agreement or difference in our explanations of the adoption experience. For example, the explanation of infant trauma has helped some you to account for feelings of difference and disconnection. Instead, following a social construction approach, my interpretation suggests that the primacy of the biological family as a cultural ideal causes identity concerns for people who are adopted. I realize that my critical perspective on adoption may not be relevant for some of you, but this is my truth of the adoption experience.

As previously mentioned, I will be sharing a synopsis of my interpretation with you in order to invite your feedback, as well as to provide an opportunity for our continuing dialogue. Unfortunately, due to the practical limitations of completing my research by December 1995, the opportunity for such dialogue is very limited prior to the date of completion. Rather, I am hoping that we can continue our dialogue in 1996, if possible.

I hope this gives you some idea of how my work is progressing. As my work evolves in the following months, I will keep you posted. If you would like to be in contact with me, please feel free to do so.

For your information, my home address is the following:

Unit 48-40200 Government Road
Squamish, B.C. V0N 3G0
(604)898-4563

Until the next time, keep well.

Sincerely,

Lise Beauchesne

Appendix F

Name of Participant
Address
City
Postal Code

October 10, 1995

Dear   ,

Hello! I hope you had an enjoyable summer. As promised in my last correspondence to you in April, this letter is to further inform you of my continued progress with my research.

Due to unforeseen personal circumstances, my anticipated progress on my dissertation has been temporarily delayed over the summer months. However, I plan to resume work on writing my interpretation in the next week or so.

You may be wondering what this delay will mean in terms of my scheduled date of completion. If my writing progresses as I trust it will in the next few months, I plan to complete my dissertation by April 1996. In the event that I may need additional time, I will likely defend sometime before August 1996. But not to worry; I will keep you posted of my progress.

If you would like to be in contact with me, please feel free to do so. I would be most interested in receiving any news from Ontario, especially concerning any progress in the area of legislative reform. As you may know, the province of British Columbia has recently introduced a new "Adoption Act".

For you information, I have recently moved to North Vancouver. My new address is:
203-226 East 15th Street
North Vancouver, B.C.
V7L 2R3

My new telephone number is (604)984-8553. If you have access to the E-mail system, please feel free to drop me a line. My e-mail address is the following: l(lower case L)9595@freenet.vancouver.bc.ca. Until the next time, keep well.

Sincerely,

Lise Beauchesne   336

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF THE DISTRICT OF NIPISSING

BACKGROUND HISTORY

FOR

LISE BEAUCHESNE

Prepared by: _____

        John Cresswell

        Post Adoption Services

Approved by: _____

        Linda Lamarche

        Supervisor

Date: _____June 13, 1991_____

This history contains all the non-identifying information taken from the record which was prepared at the time of the adoption related to the immediate circumstances of your adoption.

LISE BEAUCHESNE

Lise, you were born on February 16, 1958 at St. Joseph's Hospital in North Bay. You weighed 6 lbs. 10 oz. Your birth mother named you Denise. Because she had already decided that adoption was the best plan for both she and you when you left the hospital on February 21st you went into a foster home.

The foster mother's name was Marian. She lived in North Bay. Although the foster home was suggested by the Children's Aid Society and you and your mother were driven there by the worker, the arrangements and payments of this foster home had been made by your birth mother. A court date was set for March 14th for your mother to explain to the court why she could not look after you. You were described as quite dark with a wide nose bridge but otherwise you had regular features. On March 12th you weighed 8 lbs. 8 oz. Because your foster mother was sick about that time, you had to be moved to a second foster home.

This again was in North Bay and the foster mother's name was Leontine. There was another foster child in the home named Roger who was at that time, was 9 months old and also waiting for adoption. On March 26th you were seen by a physician and on that day you weighed 9 lbs. 8 oz. You were normal other than a slight umbilical hernia and were viewed to be fit for adoption.

On April 3, 1958 you joined your adoption family. You were welcomed by your future adoptive brother Marc Steven who was 14 months old. Your family renamed you Lise Mary. On April 24th, 1959 your adoption order was signed and you became legal part of your adoptive home.

BIRTH MOTHER

Your birth mother was 19 years of age when you were born. She was of French Canadian origin, was single and was Roman Catholic in religion. She was described as being 5' 1" in height weighing 120 lbs. and having brown hair and brown eyes. She was said to be in good health but had had the normal childhood diseases. Her hearing was described as good, her teeth were said to be permanent and she wore glasses because she was farsighted.

She was the oldest in a family with 6 children. Her father was born in 1914, had attended grade school and was in good health. Her mother was born in 1916. She similarly had attended grade school and had good health. Her oldest brother was born in 1940 approximately. He was married at the time you were born and had reached Grade 9 in school. The next oldest brother was born in about 1942 and had reached grade 11 in school. She had three sisters born in about 1946, 1951 and 1952 who were all in school and in grade 6, 2, and grade 1 respectively when you were born. Nothing was mentioned about the families physical or mental health.

Your birth mother indicated that both her mother and her aunt knew of her pregnancy.

She had reached grade 10 in school and following this had worked for three years in the health care field. After your birth she moved from this area and continued to work in the Health Care field. She indicated that she was not interested in either sports or attending clubs. She said however she liked music, particularly singing and she enjoyed reading.

Your birth mother refused to give any information about your birth father and did not want him to be involved in any financial responsibility. As a result she payed for your expenses in care herself. On April 1958 she had moved away from this area and was working in a health care facility.

BIRTH FATHER

Your birth father was 20 when you were born. Your birth mother indicated that he was of French Canadian origin, single and Roman Catholic in religion. She described him as being 5' 10" in height weighing about 155 lbs. and having brown eyes, dark hair, and fair skin. She said nothing about his personality other than he had a temper.

She did not indicate anything about his parents, however indicated that he had two sisters and one brother. The health of both your birth father and his relatives were unknown to her.

Your birth father apparently had completed at least grade 8 and worked dependably in the lumber industry. He enjoyed hockey and was a fair reader. Your birth mother was very reluctant at giving any information about your birth father therefore it is not known how she met him, how long she went with him or whether he knew of her pregnancy.

Lise, we trust this information about your past is helpful. We hope this knowledge will give a better understanding of yourself and your beginnings.

Children's Aid Society of the District of Nipissing
INCORPORATED

.WART S HETHERINGTON
SUPERINTENDENT
TELEPHONE 3100

129 MCINTYRE STREET WEST
NORTH BAY. ONTARIO

April 28,1959

Mr. and Mrs. Maurice W. Beauchesne,
558 Algonquin Avenue,
North Bay, Ontario

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Beauchesne:

It is a pleasure to enclose your final adoption order for Lise signed by His Honour Judge J. A. S. Plouffe of the District Court of the District of Nipissing on April 24,1959.

May we remind you that it will now be possible for you to secure a birth certificate for Lise in the name of Lise Mary Beauchesne at the Office of:

The Registrar-General,
70 Lombard Street,
Toronto 1, Ontario.

The cost is $1.00 and, in order to allow sufficient time for the nec - essary changes, it is suggested that you do not write to the Registrar- General until two months has elapsed from the date of receiving this letter.

When applying for a birth certificate, please give the following information:

1. The full name of the child (original). Denise Lafreniere

2. The date and place of birth. At North Bay, Ontario in the District of Nipissing on February 16, 1958

3. The adopted name of the child. Lise Mary Beauchesne

4. The date, place and district where adoption completed. At North Bay, Ontario in the District of Nipissing on April 24, 1959

If you have any difficulty in obtaining this birth certificate, please do not hesitate to contact us and we will be glad to assist you.

Yours truly,

E.S. Hetherington
Local Director.

\SH:AB
.ncl.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE

ORDER

(check) ☐ INTERIM CUSTODY ORDER

☒ ADOPTION ORDER

ONTARIO

In the **District** Court of **the District** of **Nipissing**
(supreme, county or district)

Before **J. A. S. Plouffe**   *Fri*   day, the **24th**
(name of judge)

day of **April** , 19 59

In the matter of an application for an order for the adoption of

Denise Lafreniere , herein called "child".
(pre-adoption name in full)

Upon the application of **Maurice William Beauchesne**

and **Lois Mary Beauchesne** ,
(name(s) of applicant(s))

both of the **City** of **North Bay**

in the **District** of **Nipissing** ,
(county or district)

herein called "applicant(s)", both domiciled in Canada and resident in Ontario, for an order for the adoption

of the child resident in **North Bay** , in Ontario, and born in the **City**

of **North Bay** in the **District** of **Nipissing** ,
(county or district)

in the **Province** of **Ontario** , **Canada** , on the **16th**
(province or state)   *(country)*

day of **February** , 19 58 , as it appears from the Certificate of Birth Registration Number

58-05-134941 issued by **Ontario** and upon reading the material filed in support of the application ,
(province, state or country)

AND upon reading

(strike out   (a) the written approval of the Director under section 72 of the Act,
and initial
a or b)   (b) the certificate of the **Local Director** under section 66 of the Act,
(Director or local director)

AND upon hearing what was alleged by or on behalf of the applicant(s), and upon it appearing that all
conditions precedent to the making of the order have been complied with,

~~1. I ORDER that and~~
(name(s) of applicant(s))

~~be given interim custody of~~
(name of child)

~~for a period of by way of a probationary period, upon the terms as regards
provision for the maintenance and education and supervision of the welfare of the child and~~

~~otherwise as hereinafter set out:~~

(strike out
and initial   2. I ORDER that **Denise Lafreniere**
1 or 2)   *(name of child)*

be and is hereby adopted as the child of **Maurice William Beauchesne**

and **Lois Mary Beauchesne**
(name(s) of applicant(s))

AND I FURTHER ORDER that

* (a) the given name(s) of the child be changed and the child be given the name(s)

Lise Mary Beauchesne

* (b) ~~the child do retain the child's surname.~~

(* strike out and initial, if not applicable)

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_____
(signature of judge)

Ms. Joan Vanstone
PARENT FINDERS
3998 Bayridge Avenue
West Vancouver, B.C.
V7V 3J5

April 26, 1996

Dear Ms. Vanstone:

Further to our telephone conversation of April 10, 1996, please find enclosed my membership registration, along with a cheque in the amount of $25.00 for my registration fee. Additionally, I have included a copy of my Order of Adoption, as well as a copy of my Background Information.

As you will see, I have started to pull together my "fishing letter", but need your input. Would you please advise me accordingly on how to proceed from here in finalizing this letter. Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at my home number at 984-8553.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your candid and refreshing support during our recent telephone conversation. After our discussion, I realized that I have nothing to lose and everything to gain in proceeding forward in my attempts to locate my birth mother/family. In this regard, I would appreciate any assistance you would be willing to provide to me in this matter of great personal importance.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Lise Beauchesne

North Bay Public Library
271 Worthington St. East
North Bay, Ontario
P1B 1H1

May 31, 1996

Dear Sirs or Madams,

I am working on my family history and would appreciate your kind assistance. Please check the North Bay City Directories for the years 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, and 1960 and send me the listings of all residents by the surname of Lafreniere.

I have enclosed a cheque in the amount of $3.00 and a self-addressed stamped envelope and look forward to your early reply.

Sincerely,

Lise Beauchesne

The Lafreniere Family
12345 Main Street
North Bay, Ontario
P1B 7V8

September 25, 1996

To the Lafreniere Family,

I am writing this letter to you in the hope that you might be able to provide some information concerning my "family history". I have currently reached an impasse and would greatly appreciate your help.

For the past few years my father had been researching his family tree, which had become more important to him toward the latter part of his life. Regrettably, my father has since passed away and I find myself left trying to finish our history working from his notes. During the time of my father's involvement in learning about our family heritage, however, I was actively engaged in raising my young children. I now wish I had paid more attention to his interest in our history.

The Lafreniere family I seek was comprised of six children; including 2 boys and 4 girls. The first child was a girl, born in 1939. I believe the other children were born in 1940, 1942, 1946, 1951, and 1952. Of course, the family was Roman Catholic. Their father, Mr. Lafreniere, seems to have been born in 1914 and his wife born in 1916. The last point in the note says the eldest daughter was either a nurse or a nurse's aide in the health care field.

If my Lafreniere ancestors match your family, please reply to me in the self-addressed envelope enclosed. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your interest in this family project.

Sincerely,

Denise Lafreniere

Ministry of
Community and
Social Services

Ministère des
Services sociaux
et communautaires

⚛ **Ontario**

MANAGEMENT SUPPORT BRANCH
Adoption Disclosure Unit
Central Services
2 Bloor Street West, 24th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1E9
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December 31, 1996

Dear Registrant

We are writing to all adoptees who registered with us between January and June 1990 to let you know that we are now doing searches for adoptees who registered in October 1989.

It is not possible to predict exactly when we will be contacting you to start your search but hopefully it will be within the next eighteen months. We are enclosing some reading material which you may find helpful in preparing yourself for the search process.

If you have not already requested your non identifying social history information, you may contact the Children's Aid Society that handled the adoption and request the information. If yours was a private adoption you may make the request to the Register. If you do not know who handled your adoption you can call our intake worker who will be able to direct you to the right place.

If you do not wish a search to be conducted, you may remove your name from the search list by completing and returning the enclosed form.

Please ensure that we have your current address so we can reach you when we are ready to begin your search. At that time we will be sending you a search information form and asking you to let us know for whom you wish us to search. You will have an opportunity to talk (by phone) with a Ministry counsellor before any contact is made with your birth relative.

We know that you have had a long wait for your search to begin. We are moving through the search list as quickly as possible while ensuring each search is as thorough as possible.

The Adoption Disclosure Register •

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