Spring 5-2011

Communicatively Forming Developed Adoptive Identity: Explicating the Association between Parental Communication, Developed Adoptive Identity, and Adoptee Adjustment

Colleen Colaner
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, cwcolaner@huskers.unl.edu

COMMUNICATIVELY FORMING A DEVELOPED ADOPTIVE IDENTITY:

EXPLICATING THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN PARENTAL COMMUNICATION,

DEVELOPED ADOPTIVE IDENTITY, AND ADOPTEE ADJUSTMENT

by

Colleen Warner Colaner

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Communication Studies

Under the Supervision of Professor Jordan Soliz

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 2011

Communicatively Forming Developed Adoptive Identity: Explicating the Association between Parental Communication, Developed Adoptive Identity, and Adoptee Adjustment

Colleen Warner Colaner, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2011

Advisor: Jordan Soliz

Adoptive families are inherently discursive, with communication acting as the lifeblood connecting the child to his or her adoptive parents. Adoptive families rely upon communication to create and maintain their relational bond. Communication is also the basis of our understanding of self as our identities are rooted in social interaction. Identity development for the adoptees is a unique process in which adoptees construct both a cohesive definition of the self and an understanding of what it means to be an adopted person. In the current study, I examined the communicative pathways through which adoptive identities are formed. I specifically focused on developed adoptive identity, or identities in which adoptees incorporate both positive and negative aspects of their adoption into a sense of self that includes, but is not overly preoccupied with, their adopted status. Guided by adoption, identity, and communication literature, I set out to develop a holistic understanding of the process of adoptive identity development from a communication perspective.

In researching this adoptive identity formation process, I first examined the role of parental communication in facilitating the formation of developed adoptive identities. Second, I explored the association between developed adoptive identity and adoptee

adjustment as indicated by individual well-being and relational well-being with the adoptive and birth parents.

Participants included 220 adult adoptees who completed a questionnaire assessing their adoptive identity, contact with their birth parents, adoptive parent communication, and individual well-being as well as their affect about their adoption, birth parents, and adoptive parents. Findings from the present study reveal that adoptive parents' communication openness, parental confirmation, and acknowledgement of difference as well as the level of structural openness in the birth parent relationship influence the adoptive identity development process. Adoptive identity in turn was related to individuals' affect for their birth parents and affect about adoption. The results are discussed in terms of implications for adoptive parent communication, conclusions about adoptive identity, and limitations and future directions for research.

DEDICATION

To Essie

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation embodies the efforts of a community of individuals whose mentoring, insights, and support have shaped in large part the work represented in these pages. Without the role the following individuals have played in my life, I cannot imagine making it to the end of this dissertation process.

First of all, I am indebted to the faculty of University of Nebraska-Lincoln who shaped me into a scholar. My deepest gratitude goes towards my advisor, Dr. Jordan Soliz. Jordan, to acknowledge all that you have done for me over the last four years would take pages. Perhaps the best way to summarize what you have done for me is to say thank you for allowing me to come into my own. Throughout the time I have been honored to work with you, you have empowered me to develop my own voice as a scholar through your tireless support evidenced in lengthy conversations, thoughtful and amazingly prompt critiques of my work, and encouragement in the highs and lows of my professional and personal life. Your guidance set me on a path, and your influence will be felt in my career for years. I hope to do your role in my graduate career justice by blessing my students with even a fraction of what you have given to me. Thank you specifically working so closely with me on this adoptive identity research. I have learned so much from you in this process, and your influence is noticeable throughout these pages.

I would also like to acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Dawn O. Braithwaite, Dr. Jody Koenig Kellas, and Dr. Julie Torquati. Dr. Braithwaite, you instilled in me a love of our field. I feel honored to have worked with you throughout my coursework and during your presidency at NCA. Thank you for investing so much in me

as a scholar and a person. Jody, I have benefitted immensely from your role in my graduate work. You continually inspire me to achieve greatness. Thank you for making me a better writer and thinker. Dr. Torquati, you expanded my knowledge of parent-child communication. Thank you for donating your time and offering attentive feedback to my research.

In addition to the faculty, I have been privileged to work alongside many amazing people in the Department of Communication. I would like to extend a special thank you to my academic big sisters Christy Rittenour and Allison Thorson. Christy and Allison, you have been wonderful mentors to me. I have learned so much by watching you take on the various hurdles built into doctoral work with ease and grace. You never hesitated to remind me that the seemingly impossible tasks are indeed within my grasp. Christy, you were particularly supportive of my transition to motherhood, and I cannot thank you enough for reminding me time and time again – through your words and your example – that I can be a good mother and a good scholar. Allison, you introduced me to Husker football, and for that I will always be thankful. You have been a tireless friend to me, and I thank you for keeping me laughing during these last four years.

I would also like to thank Sarah Dirks for her friendship. Sarah, I always knew I could count on you to be there when I needed you. You embody what a support network should be, and I am so grateful for our sisterhood. Your strength and grace inspire me. Finally, I would like to thank Haley Kranstuber. Haley, you kept me laughing and kept me grounded during these last three years. Our mutual love of many things but most importantly Ohio, labs, Essie, and Huskers has created a deep bond between us. Thank you for loving my family and supporting me through both happy and difficult times.

I would also like to thank my family. Seth, it is impossible to capture the extent of your influence in my life. I am humbled by your devotion to my success. You were gracious enough to move to Lincoln – sight unseen – to put me through my doctoral program. In addition to your hard work to support our family, you have been an unending source of emotional support. You make me a better person, and I couldn't love you more. Thank you a thousand times for all you have done for our family! As we move into this next chapter of our lives, I hope to contribute to your goals as thoroughly as you have to mine.

Essie, when I started this dissertation, I never imagined that you would be in my life at the end of it. Adopting you has been the greatest joy I have ever known. Your strength continually inspires me. You have also made me smile every day since I first held you. You breathed new life into this research for me, and I see adoptive family research in new light due to your role in our family.

I also would like to acknowledge my mother Susan Warner for her unlimited support. Mom, knowing that you were always behind me gave me the confidence to achieve my goals. Thank you for all the sacrifices you made that allowed me to be in the place I am today. I would also like to acknowledge my father Dana Warner. Dad, you are one of the best sources of pep talks in my life. Your completely biased opinion of me never ceases to inspire in me the belief that I can accomplish my goals. I hope that I can live up to be even half the person you see me to be. To my brothers Nathan and Luke, thank you for believing in me and supporting me through the various stages of my life. Forming a friendship with you in the adult years of our lives has been a joy, and I am honored to be family with you.

Finally, I would like to thank the adopted individuals who so generously participated in my adoption research. Thank you for completing all of my surveys and for sharing your experiences with me. You have helped me to realize that the adoptive family is varied, fluid, and dynamic.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Adoptions have been a legal and viable option for family formation in the United

States for nearly a century (Grotevant, Perry, & McRoy, 2005). Demographers estimate

that adoptees comprise 2-4% of the national population (Stolley, 1993), and recent

statistics indicate that nearly 100,000 domestic and international adoptions were finalized

in 2002 (Placek, 2007). Although adoptions have a long history and occur with measured

frequency, we are still in the process of understanding adoptive family functioning.

Current research supports the notion that adoptive families face complex questions of

identity that make adopted children more vulnerable to various emotional, behavioral,

and academic problems (Miller, et al., 2000). Specifically, adopted children often report

feelings of loss and rejection with respect to their birthparents, confusion about their

source of identity, and uncertainty about their role in their adopted family (Kohler,

Grotevant, & McRoy, 2002; Miller, et al., 2000; Rosnati & Marta, 1997; Wahl, McBride,

& Schrodt, 2005). Studies show that adoptive families face some unique challenges such

as parent-child interactions, sibling interaction, socialization to cultures, and negotiation

of family relationships to society at large (Galvin, 2003), and the adopted child may feel

a larger portion of these difficulties as he or she attempts to make sense of his or her

experience as an adopted individual (Grotevant, 1997).

The degree to which adoptees and their families face such challenges, however,

has been overinflated in academic research. For decades, researchers have sampled

adoptees from clinical rather than general populations (Wegar, 2000). Such sampling

contributed to a bias in adoption research in that only individuals seeking counseling for

existing psychological issues were included in adoption research, ignoring adoptive families in the general population functioning within normal standards of mental and psychological health. Scholars are beginning to reject the notion that adoptees inevitably face psychological difficulty, asserting instead that there has been an overrepresentation of problems faced by adoptive families (Brodzinsky, 1993). Researchers have recognized this bias and have made steps to include a wide range of individuals in samples of adoptees (Grotevant, et al., 2007), and the need to balance research on adoptive families from both general and clinical samples still exists.

Galvin (2006b) refers to adoption as an understudied area and calls for ongoing research focusing on the communication dynamics of adoptive families. In the current study, I aim to answer this call by focusing on adult adoptees' perceptions of family communication during their upbringing. More specifically, my purpose in the current study is to enhance scholarly understanding of the role of adoptive parents in facilitating the formation of developed adoptive identities. Based on the theorizing of Erikson (1968), Marica (1966), and Grotevant (1997), a *developed adoptive identity is one in which adoptees incorporate both positive and negative aspects of their adoption into a sense of self that includes but is not overly preoccupied with their adopted status.* This definition of developed adoptive identity embodies Erikson's principles of exploration and commitment. Accepting both positive and negative aspects of one's adoption suggests considerable exploration about the role of adoption in an individual's life as well as a resolution of adoption-related issues; attaching some meaning to one's adoption suggests that an individual has committed to a set of beliefs about his or her adoption without ignoring other important aspects of his or her identity. I offer two specific goals

in the current study: (a) to examine the manner in which parent-child communication contributes to the formation of developed adoptive identity and (b) to demonstrate the way in which developed adoptive identity relates to individual well-being as well as relational well-being with the adoptive and birth parents.

In the subsequent sections, I detail these goals in four parts. I first give a rationale for studying adoptive families based on the unique communicative nature of such families. Specifically, adoptive families have relational components not present in consanguineous families. These features illuminate the centrality of communication in constructing and maintaining adoptive family relationships. Second, I provide an overview of research assessing adoptive family functioning, demonstrating that adoption researchers have narrowly conceptualized the communication behaviors of adoptive parents as limited to information-sharing (Schoenberg, 1974; Stein & Hoopes, 1985; Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2003). Third, I introduce the concept of adoptive identity as an important aspect of development for adopted individuals, demonstrating the need to further understand how parents communicate to facilitate the development of adoptive identity. Fourth, I briefly review adoptive identity research focusing on the associations between adoptive identity and individual and relational well-being. My overview in this chapter will guide my discussion of the theories and research presented in subsequent chapters.

Rationale for Researching Adoptive Families

Adoptive families are inherently discursive. Although adopted children share just as much of legal tie to their parents as biological children, communication is the lifeblood connecting the child to his or her adoptive parents as adoptive families rely upon

communication to create and maintain their relational bond. In the following section I highlight two communicative features of adoptive families that have received considerable attention in the extant research due to the centrality of these two constructs in creating and maintaining adoptive family relationships: structural openness (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998) and discourse dependence (Galvin, 2006a).

Structural openness. Adoption placement is an inherently communicative process. Domestic adoptions have predominately shifted toward increased contact with birth relatives throughout an adopted child's development (Brodzinsky, 2006). In the early decades of adoption practice, adoption largely occurred in a shroud of secrecy as birthmothers hid unexpected pregnancies from a disapproving society, adoptive parents kept their children's adoption status concealed from the child and the community, and adoption practitioners permanently sealed adoption records (Brodzinsky, 2005). In the 1970s, adoption agencies introduced the option of open adoption out of concerns over the role of secrecy and deception in adoption and in response to birth mother preferences for involvement after the placement of their child (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). Open adoptions have been increasingly common since the practice began (Stolley, 1993), and openness is quickly becoming the predominant norm in domestic adoptions (Henney, McRoy, Ayers-Lopez, & Grotevant, 2003).

Adoption scholars have recently pursued a line of research examining the role of openness in adoptive families (Wrobel, Ayers-Lopez, Grotevant, McRoy, & Friedrick, 1996). *Structural openness* refers to the degree of contact existing between the birth family, the adoptive family, and the adopted child (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998). Researchers characterize openness as a continuum ranging from confidential adoptions in

which there is no contact with or knowledge of the birth family, to mediated adoptions in which agencies facilitate contact between birth and adoptive parents, to fully disclosed adoptions (commonly referred to as open adoptions) in which the birth family engages in ongoing communication with the adoptive family (Wrobel, et al., 1996).

Empirical findings to date indicate that structural openness does not affect the adjustment of the adoptive child or the mental health of the birth mother; rather, characteristics of individuals, families, and the kinship network relate to individual and family well-being (Grotevant, et al., 2005). This conclusion suggests that it is not the openness arrangement itself that is important but rather how individuals in the adoption triad interact within various levels of open relationships. As such, there is not a "one size fits all" to openness decisions, and birth and adoptive parents must make agreements on the desired level of openness they will enact in their kinship network based on individual preferences and needs (Atwood, 2007). Birth and adoptive parents, in order to create mutually satisfying openness arrangements, have to address issues of relationship boundaries, privacy, control, predictability, and parental authority as well as establish expectations concerning frequency and type of future contact between the birth parent and child (Melina & Roszia, 1993). Entrance into an open adoption is an inherently communicative process and thus provides a prime opportunity for family communication researchers to understand and inform the communicative forces in adoptive families.

Discourse dependence. Not only do adoptions begin with communication, adoptive family relationships are created and maintained through communication. Adoptive families pose a unique opportunity for researchers due to the central role that communication plays in the construction of familial bonds. Scholars who take a

constitutive view of communication recognize that all relationships are created and maintained through communication (Baxter, 2004), and parents and children in adoptive families also depend on communication as a means of understanding their unique familial bond. As Galvin (2003) noted, adoptive families are constructed through "law and language" (p. 239), thus making adoptive families dependent upon discourse to develop and maintain their personal and family identities.

Adoptive parents face the task of discursively negotiating numerous facets of family life for their children such as explaining the legal process of adoption, constructing a parent-child bond with their child despite genetic relations, and simultaneously including and excluding members of the birth family (Grotevant, Fravel, Gorall, & Piper, 1999). Each adoption arrangement varies in the specific situations leading up to the child's placement in the adoptive family and the degree to which birth parents are known and included in the adoptive family (Atwood, 2007). With each adoptive family facing a unique set of communicative demands unparalleled in non-adoptive families, adoptive parents must construct their family relationships in the absence of societal scripts (Silber & Dorner, 1990). As such, there is no model in general society or in the adoption community from which adoptive parents can draw.

The situation becomes much more complicated when additional layers of difference are considered. Harrigan (2009) details how families formed through visible adoption, occurring when parents adopt children with differing racial, ethnic, or national orientations, rely on communication to construct personal and family identities. Harrigan specifically examined the contradictions parents of visibly adopted children face as they construct and negotiate their identities in their communication, finding that adoptive

families face complex questions of identity. Adoptive parents must rely on communication to manage contradictions inherent in their role as adoptive parents of visibly different children. In response to these contradictions, parents experience competing discourses that collaborate to facilitate meaning-making for family and personal identities (Harrigan & Braithwaite, 2010). Taking these findings as a whole, Harrigan concludes that identity-work for families formed through visibly different adoption is complex, dependent on numerous discourses from various family members, and importantly constituted through communication.

Adoptive parents stretch the limits of biologically based definitions of family relationship through their legal and communicative bond with their adopted children. Communication plays a primary role in adoptive families as a means of forming legitimate relationships in the absence of genetic similarity (Galvin, 2003). In adoptive families, family discourse replaces blood ties, and communication becomes the key to adoptive families' livelihood (Suter, 2008). Due to the central of role of communication in adoptive families as a result of open adoption arrangements and their dependence on discourse, it is essential that scholars attend to the communication of adoptive families. Indeed, a number of scholars have noted the need to conduct research on how adoptive families communicate (e.g. Brodzinsky, 2006; Mendenhall, Berge, Wrobel, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2004; Sobol, Delaney, & Earn, 1994). In the following section, I offer an overview of this line of research.

"Communication" Research about Adoption

Scholars from a variety of fields have contributed to the current literature concerning adoptive families. The bulk of this work has come from psychology,

sociology, and family studies researchers, with communication researchers only recently joining the conversation (Suter, 2008). Adoption researchers to date have primarily focused on issues of attachment and development, yet relatively little attention has been paid to the communicative aspects of adoptive families (Galvin, 2003). Galvin notes that the little research that has been done on communication focuses upon the acknowledgement of differences or the rejection of differences as a discursive practice.

Adoption researchers have oversimplified the role of adoptive parents by limiting the bulk of parent-child communication to information-sharing about the child's adoption (e.g. Grotevant & McRoy, 1998; McRoy, Grotevant, Lopez, & Furuta, 1990). Researchers primarily conceptualize the role of parents as answering questions about their children's adoptive status (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998; McRoy, et al., 1990), asserting that parents can enable their child to become more comfortable with his or her adoption status by giving their child information about the adoption and encouraging the child to ask questions (Mendenhall, et al., 2004; Schoenberg, 1974). Most adoption researchers agree that telling the child early and often about the adoption is essential to the child's adjustment (Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003).

However, the current conceptualization of adoption-related communication is insufficient due to an emphasis on the quantity rather than the quality or nature of parent-child interactions. The implications of such a narrow view of communication cannot be underestimated given the degree to which adoptive families depend on communication to construct their family relationships. No other influence has been shown to be greater for adoptees' understanding of their role in their family than adoptive parents (Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003), and the quality and nature of the communication between adoptive

parents and children are among the most important factors to consider in the ability of a child to integrate his or her adoptive status into an overall sense of self (Brodzinsky, 2006).

In that adoptive families depend on discourse, it is essential that practitioners, adoption researchers, and adoptive family members have an accurately informed understanding of the communicative constructs present in high quality adoptive family relationships. Communication scholars, with their unique insight into the centrality and complexity of communication, are in an ideal position to inform the research on the relationship between parents and adopted children. Thus, my purpose in the current study is to enhance scholarly understanding of the role of adoptive parents in facilitating the formation of developed adoptive identity. In the following section, I review adoptive identity research.

Adoptive Identity Research

Identity development, defined as "achieving a cohesive definition of the self while individualizing from parents or family" (Kohler, et al., 2002, p. 93), is an important developmental task in which all individuals engage. Scholars have long noted the importance of identity formation to individual well-being and its relation to career choices, relationships, religious beliefs, and political affiliations (Erikson, 1968; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). In addition to the typical identity development issues individuals face, adoptees have the added task of developing an *adoptive identity*, or an understanding of what it means to be an adopted person (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004). Dunbar and Grotevant describe *developed* adoptive identities as those identities in which adoptees incorporate both positive and negative aspects of their adoption into a sense of

self that includes but is not overly preoccupied with their adopted status. Researchers

have conducted limited research on the topic to date, so consequently our knowledge

about developed adoptive identity is in its infancy. The research to date, however,

suggests that exploration of and commitment to one's adoption represents progress

toward the resolution of adoption-related issues and thus is a central component of

adoptee adjustment (Brodzinsky, 1987). The current study aims to further validate this

relationship by determining the degree to which the formation of a developed adoptive

identity is a positive experience for adoptees.

The identity development process for some adoptees can be complex and possibly

problematic as adoptees integrate their adopted status into their identity (Grotevant,

Dunbar, Kohler, & Esau, 2000). Nearly all adoptees face some sort of difference

compared to their adoptive family including, but not limited to, differing ethnic and

cultural orientations, personalities, appearances, and physical abilities (Dunbar &

Grotevant, 2004). Even more, Dunbar and Grotevant note that adoptees often have

incomplete or ambiguous information regarding their genealogical roots. Because of

these "layers of differentness" (Grotevant, 1997, p. 4) as well as missing or unclear

information about their origins, adoptees are at risk for identity confusion (Dunbar &

Grotevant, 2004).

Despite the complexities involved with the identity formation process, researchers

continually find that many adopted individuals are able to effectively negotiate the

complexities surrounding their identity work and form positive adopted identities

(Brodzinsky, 1987). Studies have shown that adoptees have similar scores as their non-

adopted counterparts on measures of general identity development (Stein & Hoopes,

1985), and many adoptees operate within a normal range of psychological functioning (Wegar, 2000). Accounts of adoptees experiencing normal mental and emotional health indicate that developed adoptive identities are within the range of possibility for adopted individuals. At the same time, numerous adoptees are not able to come to terms with their adopted status (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004), and although the number of adoptees with emotional and behavioral problems may have been inflated due to the use of clinical rather than representative samples in adoption research (Wegar, 2000), many adoptees struggle to make sense of the meaning of adoption in their life (Lanz, Iafrate, Rosnati, & Scabini, 1999). In that there are significant associations between healthy adoptive identities and psychological health in adulthood (Grotevant, 1997; McRoy, Grotevant, & Zurcher, 1988), it is important to understand how such identities are formed as well as contributing factors not present when the development of an adoptive identity is stunted. Therefore, my first goal in the current project is to examine the manner in which parent-child interactions contribute to developed adoptive identity.

In order to further an understanding of the process of the formation of developed adoptive identity, I place precedence on the communicative forces at work in the parent-child relationship that facilitate the formation of developed adoptive identity. A limited number of studies have examined the factors related to the process of adoptive identity development, however research points toward (a) the influence of parental communication and (b) the relationship between adoptive identity and adoptee adjustment.

Parent-child communication and developed adoptive identity. Currently, adoption research offers insight into some of the factors contributing to identity

development. Central among these factors is the role that adoptive parents play in assisting their children in adjusting to their adoptive status, and researchers have identified a number of parental communication behaviors that are important for the adopted child's development (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002; Schoenberg, 1974; Sobol, et al., 1994). Parents contribute to their child's identity development by establishing a family environment of information-sharing and communicative openness about the child's adoptive status (Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003). Additionally, parents can facilitate contact with birth parents, allowing the adoptee to gather information regarding his or her genealogical roots and the situations surrounding their adoption placement (Von Korff, 2008). In this sense, the adopted child's personal identity needs can be served as the adoptive parents construct and maintain a relationship with the birth parents.

Adoption researchers have laid the foundation for understanding the basics of adoptive identity formation (e.g. Dunbar, 2003; Grotevant, 1997), but gaps in the extant research remain regarding how adoptive identities are formed throughout an adopted child's upbringing. It is important to understand how adoptive identities are developed given the importance of identity formation to individual well-being and its relation to future functioning in adulthood (Erikson, 1968; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985).

Within these literatures, parent-child communication has been tangentially included as one of many variables contributing to the process of adoptive identity development. As explained previously, when communication has been included in adoption research, scholars have tended to oversimplify the communicative forces in adoptive families (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998; McRoy, et al., 1990). Specifically,

communication has been limited to unidimensional variables indicating amounts of information sharing or quality of communication ranging from good to poor communication. Extant research has not accounted for the constitutive and nuanced role that communication phenomena play in the construction of adoptive family relationships. Additionally, research has focused on adoption-specific communication in the parent-child relationship, ignoring the communication between parents and children in a general sense.

It is necessary to integrate adoption-specific and general parent-child communication literatures as well as communication theorizing into the research on adoptive identity formation. I will build on existing adoption research in the current project by bringing a communication lens to adoption identity development. Therefore, the current project aims to address the first main goal of describing the process of adoptive identity formation by employing communication principles to guide the understanding of parent-child communication as it relates to adoptive identity formation with a specific focus on both adoption-related communication and general parenting communication, specifically parental confirmation and affectionate communication.

A number of communication theories exist that inform the role of communication in facilitating personal identity formation, and many of these theories have been applied to adoptive families. To date, communication researchers have not examined the process of identity development holistically using a developmental approach. Rather, communication researchers have used theories such as social construction and relational dialectics to examine specific communicative aspects of adoption (Harrigan, 2009; Suter, 2008). These studies highlight the importance of communication in adoptive family

relationships particularly as it pertains to identity, yet these studies examine just part of the process of identity development. I will assess the process of adoptive identity development in a holistic manner by integrating existing literature, bringing together communication behaviors shown to be important for advancing identity development from an initial stage of unawareness to an integration of adoption issues in order to build a process-level view of identity development for adopted individuals.

Adoptive identity and well-being. In addition to a focus on the process of developed adoptive identity formation in the parent-child relationship, I will also focus the current project on the degree to which developed adoptive identity relates to individual and relational well-being. Although research has not directly tested how developed adoptive identity relates to individual health and relational quality, researchers have demonstrated that factors related to the process of adoptive identity development consistently relate to positive outcomes for adoptees. For example, open and honest communication about the adoption as well as age appropriate disclosures have explained increased adjustment for adoptees (Brodzinsky, 2006; Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003). In the current study, the formation of developed adoptive identity is positioned as a link between parental communication about the adoption and well-being. Therefore, a second goal of the current project is to describe the way in which developed adoptive identity relates to individual well-being as well as relational well-being with the adoptive and birth parents. This second goal in particular aims to address a crucial aspect of knowledge presenting missing in adoption literature by further validating the degree to which the formation of a developed adoptive identity is an important aspect of an individual's development.

Conclusion and Preview

My purpose in the current study is to enhance scholarly understanding of the role of adoptive parents in facilitating the formation of developed adoptive identity, referring to identities in which adoptees incorporate both positive and negative aspects of their adoption into a sense of self that includes but is not overly preoccupied with their adopted status. Two specific goals address this overarching purpose. My first goal is to demonstrate how parent-child communication contributes to the formation of developed adoptive identity. My second goal is to describe the way in which developed adoptive identity relates to individual well-being as well as relational well-being with the adoptive and birth parents. In addressing the two main goals guiding the present study, I integrate adoption, identity, and communication literature to develop a holistic understanding of the process of adoptive identity development from a communication perspective.

In the following chapter, I review research and theory pertaining to the formation of developed adoptive identity. Specifically, I review theorizing on identity development and existing research on adoptive identity, both of which provide a basis for my conceptualization of developed adoptive identity in the present study. I also review advances in research on adoptive family communication in the areas of birth parent contact, family communication about adoption, communication openness, and general parent-child communication. Finally, I pull these literatures together to make initial steps toward a communication-based model of the process of adoptive identity development by posing specific hypotheses about the associations between parental communication, developed adoptive identity development, and individual and relational well-being.

In the third chapter, I report on two pilot studies conducted to assess the validity and reliability of a scale I created to measure developed adoptive identity in the main study. In the fourth chapter, I detail my operationalization of the constructs included in the hypothesized model, give information about my sampling and recruiting procedures, and overview my data analysis plan. In the fifth chapter, I give a detailed report of the results of the study. In the sixth chapter, I revisit the developed adoptive identity construct, refining the conceptual and operational meaning of this construct, and present a new round of analysis using the revised construct. In the seventh chapter, I provide a discussion of the findings and implications for future research on adoptive identity.

CHAPTER TWO

RATIONALE FOR CURRENT STUDY

The purpose of the current study is to enhance scholarly understanding of the role of adoptive parents in facilitating the formation of developed adoptive identity. As such, I set out to demonstrate how parent-child communication contributes to the formation of developed adoptive identity in areas such as birth parent contact facilitation, frequency of talk about the adoption, information sharing, communication openness, parental confirmation, and affectionate communication. Additionally, I examine the association between developed adoptive identity and well-being.

In this chapter, I first discuss theorizing on identity development. In doing so, I address both the adoptive identity literature and theorizing on communication and identity with a specific emphasis on how each body of work can inform one another. Second, I discuss research on the process of adoptive identity development. Specifically, in this section I describe existing research on adoptive identity before I provide a conceptualization of developed adoptive identity in the present study. Third, I demonstrate advances in research on adoptive family communication in the areas of (a) structural openness and birth parent contact, (b) family communication about adoption, (c) communication openness, and (c) non-adoption related parent-child communication. In this third section, I pull these literatures together to make initial steps toward a communication-based model of the process of adoptive identity development by posing specific hypotheses about the associations between parental communication, developed adoptive identity, and individual and relational wellbeing.

Theorizing on Identity Development

Perhaps no other need is more human than the need to feel a sense of uniqueness and belonging (Adams & Marshall, 1996). Personal identity formation is the primary way individuals differentiate and integrate themselves with others in their social world, thus providing a means to be both unique and connected to others (Erikson, 1968). Most scholars agree that identity serves a number of key functions for individuals. Adams and Marshall (1996) synthesize the functions of identity into five main points. First, identity provides a structure for understanding the self and who one is as a person. Second, identity provides meaning and direction for individuals by highlighting commitments, values, and goals. Third, personal identity provides a sense of personal control and allows individuals to exercise free will in decisions about their present and future selves. Fourth, identity construction is a pathway to consistency, coherence, and harmony concerning one's values, beliefs, and commitments. Finally, identity allows an individual to recognize potential selves through consideration of the future, other possibilities, and alternative choices. Clearly identity is central to human existence and is universally experienced in the social world. Given the importance of identity, a number of scholars have spent considerable time researching how identities are formed. In the following section, I discuss the foundations of identity development as established by two theorists: Erikson and Marcia. In doing so, I highlight the significance of this theorizing to the process of adoptive identity development.

Foundations of identity development. Erikson (1968) is perhaps the most prominent identity development scholar of the last four decades, and his work laid the foundation for recent understandings of identity. Erikson defined identity as that in a

person that is stable, coherent, and integrated. He theorized that all individuals begin life

unaware of the need to have a personal identity. As individuals engage in social life, a

number of forces including psychological, social, historical, and developmental changes

come together to propel an individual to create a concrete sense of self (Perosa, Perosa, &

Tam, 1996). Erikson viewed these combined forces as creating a crisis in which an

individual faced confusion about who he or she is, an inability to commit to larger values,

difficulty in intimate relationships, and overall uncertainty about one's worldview. Such

a development crisis serves as a catalyst, spurring the desire to achieve a concrete sense

of identity.

Identity development begins, then, as a response to a crisis and continues as a

process over the course of several years, usually beginning in adolescence and extending

into the early years of adulthood (Erikson, 1968). Erikson describes the identity

development process as one of "simultaneous reflection and observation" in which an

individual engages in critical judgments of him- or herself and of society from multiple

perspectives (p. 22). Through this time of critical reflection, individuals explore possible

options for personal identity and subsequently commit to or reject the various options for

defining the self.

Marcia (1966) elaborated on Erikson's conceptualization of identity development

by delineating four stages individuals experience in the identity development process.

The stages are based on the degree of exploration and commitment enacted by the

individuals. Those in an *identity-achieved* status have resolved the forces creating a crisis

by exploring various options and committing to a set of values. Individuals are in a

moratorium status when the exploration process has presented too many options and

individuals instead are at a stand still as they attempt to decide on a set of values to which

they can commit. Individuals are in a *foreclosure* state when they have committed to a

set of values without fully exploring the various options that are available to them.

Usually these values come from parental influences, and individuals accept these

influences wholesale without experiencing a crisis, which in turn prompts an exploration

process. Finally, individuals who are *identity-diffused* have not engaged in exploration

and/or made a commitment to a set of goals or values.

Together referred to as an Eriksonian perspective of identity, Erikson (1968) and

Marcia's (1966) theories of identity development naturally share a number of parallels.

Both views of identity theorize that identity emerges from a process of exploration and

commitment. In this sense, identity development is considered to be a life-long process,

yet the bulk of the process is experienced in adolescence. Marcia in particular

emphasizes the cyclical as opposed to linear nature of identity development. As new

opportunities arise for committing to values and/or goals throughout the lifespan as a

result of individual or contextual changes, individuals undergo new efforts of exploration

to embrace the possibility for reformation of their personal identity.

Erikson (1968) and Marcia's work (1966) provided a firm foundation for identity

research. They were the first to position identity as a developmental process driven by

identity work consisting of exploration and commitment. Identity scholars have

confirmed the validity of the Eriksonian perspective over the last several decades

(Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Higgins, 1987), and this body of work has been

influential in adoption research to date. In the following section, I detail the role that the

Eriksonian perspective has played in theorizing on the process of adoptive identity development.

Theorizing on adoptive identity development. Building on the Eriksonian perspective, Grotevant and colleagues (2000) narrowed identity development theorizing from global assessments of identity to focus specifically on the process of *adoptive* identity development. According to Grotevant, adoptive identity is defined as one's understanding of what it means to be an adopted person. Adoptive identity relates to one's overall identity in the sense that both answer primal questions concerning definitions of self, but adoptive identity gives precedence to how an individual makes sense of him- or herself despite genetic kinship ties. Individuals in mainstream society draw heavily from blood relations to explain aspects of the self and make decisions about future commitments and goals during the process of identity development. Adopted individuals, in the absence of genetic ties to their adoptive family, must undergo a unique identity exploration process to understand their difference from and similarity to their adoptive family and their birth family in addition to the global identity process required of all individuals. In this sense, adoptive identity formation is part of, yet distinct from, global identity formation.

Erikson (1968), Marcia (1966), and Grotevant and colleagues (2000) give a great deal of insight into the overall process by which adoptive identities are prompted and achieved. Missing from this theorizing are the ways in which adoptive identity exploration, commitment, and overall development is dependent upon interaction with the social world and particularly the family. In that the definition of identity involves differentiation and integration with others in the social world, social interaction is a key

component of the identity development process. There is currently a need to further apply a broader understanding of the communicative process of identity development over the life-course. In the following section, I turn to theories rooted in a communication perspective to demonstrate the important role of communication in general identity development.

Communicative perspectives on identity development. Communication theorists have done much work to advance the notion that the self is constructed in interaction with others in the social world. The earliest theoretical roots of a communicative perspective of identity can be found in the first half of the twentieth century with Mead, Burke, and Goffman who provided the foundation for understanding identity as socially constructed through interactions (Bergen & Braithwaite, 2009). To date, a number of perspectives exist concerning the interplay between communication and identity, varying in paradigmatic commitment and conceptual framework. Among these perspectives are theories emphasizing the constitutive role of communication in identity building (e.g., Relational Dialectics), theories situating identity in light of personal and social identity (e.g., Communication Theory of Identity, Communication Accommodation Theory, Co-cultural Communication Theory), theorizing examining the narrative nature of identity (e.g. Koenig Kellas, 2008), and theories focusing on language use (e.g., Symbolic Interaction, Social Construction). Although these theories provide nuanced assessments of the interplay between communication and identity, each of these communication-focused theories share a core contention, namely that a "person's sense of self is part of his or her social behavior, and the sense of self emerges and is defined and redefined in social behavior" (Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2005, p. 260).

Communication theorizing about identity brings important insight to the current literature on the process of identity development in general and adoptive identity development in particular. Theories informing the interplay between communication and identity attend to the communicative process of identity formation that is currently lacking in much of the identity development literature, and application of such theories to existing identity research could bolster the shortcomings of Erikson (1968) and Grotevant's (1997) conceptualizations of identity. At the same time, communication theorizing on identity does not speak to the larger process of identity development as put forth by the Eriksonian perspectives. Rather, communication theories speak to aspects of identity development as it is influenced by interactions with others. Combining these literatures will give important insight in the process of identity development as it unfolds over time.

In short, three literatures speak to the process of adoptive identity development, each with their own strength and weakness. Eriksonian (1968) perspectives of identity give valuable insight into the process of identity formation, yet this perspective applies to general but not adoptive identity development. Grotevant and colleauges' (2000) application of Erikson's work to the process of adoptive identity development sheds important light on the identity work unique to adopted individuals, yet this work does not position communication as the means of creating and maintaining identity. Communication theorizing highlights the integral force that communication brings to identity construction, yet current communication research does not provide insight into the developmental process of identity construction. It is necessary to incorporate these literatures into a more holistic account of the process of adoptive identity development

from a communication perspective. As such, I will discuss the theoretical role that communication has in the process of adoptive identity development. First, however, I will give context to the process of the process of adoptive identity development by (a) reviewing adoptive identity research to date and (b) describing adoptive identity as it is conceptualized in the current project.

Research on Adoptive Identity

Grotevant (1997) pioneered adoptive identity theorizing by extending the Eriksonian perspective to highlight the importance of exploration and commitment as an individual progresses toward an understanding of the meaning of adoption in his or her life. Although identity is conceptualized to be a developmental process, Grotevant does not position identity development as progressing from less mature to more mature in a linear process. Rather, identity development is described as an "iterative and integrative process," meaning that adoptive identities are not "achieved" but rather useful for explaining particular aspects of the self for certain periods of time (Grotevant, et al., 2000, p. 382). A limited number of adoption researchers have empirically assessed adoptive identity. In the following section, I will overview the progression of the adoptive identity construct as it was (a) established, (b) confirmed, and (c) refined.

Establishing adoptive identity. Dunbar (2003) conducted the first known empirical investigation of adoptive identity. Using data from the Minnesota/Texas Adoption Project, Dunbar created a typology of adoptive identities by rating interviews with adoptees on six factors: depth of exploration, salience of adoption status, inclusion of positive and negative affect, internal consistency, and flexibility of the adoption narrative.

Exploration was the first factor used in creating an adoptive identity typology. Exploration, similar to the Eriksonian perspective, concerned the degree to which an individual reflected on his or her experience as an adopted person, ranging from no or minimal exploration to considerable depth of exploration with significant thinking devoted to adoption-related issues. Second, Dunbar (2003) examined the inclusion of *positive and negative affect*, measuring positive and negative affect separately. Positive affect included feelings of interest, excitement, pride, joy, and love toward one's adoption, and negative affect included feelings of hostility, sadness, shame, anger, or fear about one's adoption. *Salience* was the third factor, focusing on the importance and meaning of adoption in the adoptees' identity. Adoptees ranged from thinking that their adoption had no bearing on who they were as a person, to placing a moderate amount of importance on their adoption by acknowledging that the adoptive identity exists but is balanced with other identities, to indicating that that their adoption consumes a great deal of their mental and emotional energy because the adoption was the most important part of who the adoptee was.

Exploration, salience, and positive and negative affect assessed the content and process of adoptive identity formation. Dunbar (2003) also examined narrative aspects of adoptive identity by assessing two structure elements of adoptive narratives. *Internal consistency* included the completeness of the adoption narrative by placing focus on the level of consistency and contradictions included in one's adoption narrative. *Flexibility* assessed the adoptees' ability to view alternative viewpoints and consider new ideas.

Dunbar (2003) rated the interviews on each of the six factors of identity then identified four distinct adoptive identities: unexamined, limited, unsettled, and integrated.

Unexamined identities were held by individuals who showed little to no depth in exploration of their adoptive identity, demonstrated low salience for their adopted identity, and showed little emotion about their adoption. *Limited identities* were present in adoptees who indicated that they were open to thinking about their adoption but did not perceive adoption to be an important aspect of their sense of self; individuals with limited adoptive identities demonstrated modest exploration and little salience attached to their adoptive status. *Unsettled identities* were held by individuals whose adoption narratives were characterized by high levels of negative affect and salience of adoptive status with substantial exploration. Finally, individuals with *integrated identities* demonstrated balanced levels of both positive and negative affect about their adoption and attached moderate salience to their adoptive status. Individuals with integrated identities indicated a resolution of adoption issues that allowed the adoptee to form a sense of self that included but was not preoccupied with his or her adopted status.

Dunbar's (2003) research was the first instance of identifying different types of adoptive identity. Dunbar demonstrated that adoptees vary greatly in the degree to which they have explored and given meaning to their adoptive identity. This research laid important groundwork for future research on the process of adoptive identity development.

Confirming adoptive identity. Following Dunbar's (2003) establishment of measuring adoptive identity, Donahue (2008) set out to confirm and further explain the four types of adoptive identity by asking adult adoptees to identify which adoptive identity type they possessed. Donahue's (2008) work was an important confirmation of Dunbar's (2003) typology, demonstrating that there were more individuals in the

integrated and unsettled types, yet individuals were also represented in the unexamined and limited type. These findings provide additional evidence that adoptees vary in the degree to which they have developed an adoptive identity.

Refining adoptive identity. The final researcher to continue the examination of Dunbar's adoptive identity types marked a transition in the conceptualization of adoptive identity. Von Korff (2008) refined Dunbar's typology by narrowing the factors constructing adoptive identity. Originally, Dunbar and Donahue used exploration, salience, negative affect, positive affect, internal consistency, and flexibility to assess adoptive identity. Von Korff presented theoretical reasoning to position positive and negative affect as outcomes rather than components of adoptive identity. Drawing from affect theories, Von Korff explained that emotions are the consequences of making sense of lived events, meaning that as adoptees interpret and give meaning to their adoption, they will undergo changes in the way in which they emotionally relate to the adoption. In this sense, affect is not a part of adoptive identity formation but closely related to the identity work required for identity development.

This line of adoption research creates a heuristic foundation for the examination of adoptive identity development. In the current study, I build off this adoptive identity literature by (a) conceptualizing adoptive identity as a formative process with a specific focus on developed adoptive identity and (b) operationalizing developed adoptive identity with a new, continuous, self-report measure. I give details on the operationalization of developed adoptive identity in the following chapter, and in the following section I detail my conceptualization of adoptive identity.

Adoptive identity in the present study. Building on existing literature in which adoptive identity is defined as one's understanding of what it means to be an adopted person (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004), I conceptualize adoptive identity in the current study as varying between a state of unawareness to developed. *Developed adoptive identities* are those identities in which adoptees incorporate both positive and negative aspects of their adoption into a sense of self that includes but is not overly preoccupied with their adopted status (Grotevant, 1997).

My conceptualization of developed adoptive identity in the current project relies heavily on the notion of integration. Dunbar's (2003) integrated adoptive identity type represents the most advanced stage of adoptive identity development in that individuals have done considerable exploration and have resolved issues related to their adoption. Unsettled, unexamined, and limited adoptive identity types inform the development of identity in that they represent a lack of integration and hence a lack of progress in adoptive identity development; these adoptive identities are peripheral to developed adoptive identities, however, in that they do not directly explain aspects of developed adoptive identity. Integrated adoptive identity is most closely associated to my definition of developed adoptive identity and is therefore central to my reasoning in the present study.

Integration is a central component of other identity theorizing as well. Multiethnic individuals face similar questions of identity as adoptees in that both groups of people have to reconcile issues of difference and incorporate divergent aspects of the self into a larger whole (Phinney, 1996). Phinney (1989) posed a model of ethnic identity development wherein individuals move from an unexamined identity to identity

achievement in which individuals integrate divergent categories into a larger sense of self to develop an ethnic identity. Just as multiethnic individuals have more than one ethnicity, adoptees have more than one familial connection and face the option of identifying with the adoptive family, the birth family, or both. Multiethnic and adoptive families have to consider the uniqueness of their identity when compared to mainstream families. Paralleled to multiethnic identity development, an adoptee is able to integrate the aspects of the birth and adoptive family that explain portions of his or her self-definition through active decision-making and self-exploration. In this way, multiethnic identity development provides a model that translates into the identity development process faced by adopted individuals. Dunbar (2003) and Phinney's (1989, 1996) research reiterates the role of integration in identity development, and I continue in this reasoning in emphasizing the importance of integrating divergent aspects of self into the larger whole in my conceptualization of developed adoptive identity. In the following section, I discuss the specific factors included in developed adoptive identity.

Dimensions of developed adoptive identity. Two factors are included in developed adoptive identity: exploration and salience. Exploration is a key component in the adoptive identity development process. Exploration refers to how deeply the adoptee has thought about or reflected on his/her adoption (Dunbar, 2003). Similar to identity development in a general sense as theorized by Erickson (1968), exploration marks a transition between an initial state of unawareness or lack of conflict to actively engaging in identity work (Grotevant, 1997). Grotevant describes the process of adoptive identity development as motivated by a series of sensitizing experiences, often within the family, in which one's adoption status becomes incongruent or confusing, prompting an

individual to question his or her fundamental sense of self and explore "possible selves" as an attempt to resolve the tension (p. 16).

Exploration specific to adoption identity development includes both reflective and behavioral elements. *Reflective exploration* involves thinking about the details of one's adoption at length. Dunbar describes adoptees reflecting most often about their birth parents' characteristics, possible alternatives to their life had they not been adopted, and the reasons for their birth parents' decision to place them in an adoptive family. Consideration of these adoption-related issues enables adoptees to make sense of their experiences as adopted individuals, and reflection often allows individuals to come to terms with some of the negative aspects of their adoption and form a developed adoptive identity (Von Korff, 2008).

Individuals also engage in *behavioral exploration*. Reflecting on the events leading up to one's placement in an adoptive family often leads to unanswered questions about an individual's origins and relationship to members of the birth and adoptive family (Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010). Dunbar and Grotevant (2004) uncovered a number of questions that adoptees face concerning their adopted status including questions such as: "Where did I come from? Who were my birthparents? Why was I placed for adoption? Do my birthparents think of me now? Do I have birth siblings? What does adoption mean in my life?" (p. 135). Behavioral exploration involves actively seeking out answers to such questions in order to better understand one's own adoption experience. Adoptees engage in a number of behaviors in the exploration process through information-seeking, particularly through indirect communication with birth

parents, strategic communication with birth parents, gaining cultural knowledge, and utilizing Internet support groups (Powell & Afifi, 2005).

A second important component of the adoptive identity development process is the salience one places on his or her adoption. Salience refers to the prominence, importance, and meaning of the adoption as it relates to one's personal identity (Dunbar, 2003). Adoptees place various levels of salience on their adoption, but balanced salience has consistently emerged as a marker of fully developed identities. Dunbar found that individuals who placed low levels of importance on the role of adoption in their overall sense of self tended to also have low to moderate levels of exploration about their adoption, indicating that adoptees had not entered into identity development. Individuals who do not see their adoption as explaining important aspects of their personal identity likely have not transitioned from the initial state of unawareness into the process of identity work (Grotevant, 1997). Individuals, then, should view their adoption as having some role in defining their personal identity as an indicator of entrance into the process of identity construction.

At the same time, Dunbar (2003) noted that it is important that the salience placed on one's adoption in relation to the overall sense of self be balanced with other aspects of the self. Individuals who placed too much emphasis on their adoption tended to be preoccupied with their adoption. In other words, some individuals viewed their personal identity as exclusively explained by their adopted status, thus neglecting other important aspects when developing an overall sense of self. Preoccupation with adoption is a marker of a lack of integration of the adoption to other aspects of the self and is commonly associated with feelings of uneasiness, negative affect about the adoption, and

a lack of resolution of adoption issues (Grotevant, et al., 2000). Therefore, balanced levels of salience in which adoption has some prominence in one's personal identity but is not the only indicator of the individual is a marker of developed adoptive identity.

Taking all this together, it is clear that the process of adoptive identity development is a central component of adoptive family relations. Scholars have provided a theoretical context for understanding adoptive identity development (e.g. Erikson, 1968; Grotevant, 1997; Marcia, 1966), and researchers have done important work to measure and assess adoptive identity (e.g. Donahue, 2008; Dunbar, 2003; Von Korff, 2008). Building off of this work, I position adoptive identity as one's understanding of what it means to be an adopted person, varying between a state of unawareness to *developed adoptive identities* in which adoptees incorporate both positive and negative aspects of their adoption into a sense of self that includes but is not overly preoccupied with their adopted status. Exploration and salience are the two components of the adoptive identity development process.

Now that I have given theoretical and empirical context to the process of adoptive identity development, I will present research describing how parents facilitate the formation of developed adoptive identity. Although there is substantive work on what adoptive identity is (e.g. Donahue, 2008; Dunbar, 2003; Grotevant, 1997; Von Korff, 2008), much less exists concerning how adoptive identities are developed. Theories of communication and identity demonstrate the central role of communication in identity formation, and this work is relevant to the current discussion of the formation of developed adoptive identity. In the following section, I review research on adoption that identifies communication constructs at work in adoptive families.

Advances in Communication Research on Adoptive Families

Researchers have demonstrated that a number of sources are important for

identity development including peer relationships, media influences, and social

environments such as schools, community events, and religious organizations, as well as

family interactions (King, Furrow, & Roth, 2002; Martin, White, & Perlman, 2003).

Among these contributing forces, parents consistently emerge as the strongest predictor

of identity development. The role of parents in facilitating identity development is

particularly important in adoptive families as children depend on their parents' discourse

to understand their connection to the adoptive and birth families (Galvin, 2003). Given

the central role of adoptive parents in facilitating the formation of developed adoptive

identity, the current project focuses primarily on parent-child communication. I rely on

research and peripheral theorizing from communication literature to supplement the

adoption and identity literatures in order to provide a foundation for a communication-

based approach to the process of adoptive identity development.

Researchers have long understood the centrality of communication in family

relationships (Galvin, 2006a). Although not focusing on adoption identity development,

a number of researchers have investigated the role of parental communication in

facilitating adoptee adjustment (Brodzinsky, 2006; Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003). This

line of research consistently demonstrates the pivotal role that parents play in their

adopted children's ability to adjust to adoption. Wrobel, Grotevant, Berge, Medenhall,

and McRoy (2003) identified a number of adoption-related communication behaviors that

parents coordinate with their children such as telling the child details about the adoption,

relating information about the birth parents, and helping the child negotiate curiosity of

friends. Other researchers have broadened their perspective on the parent-child relationship by conceptualizing communication about adoption in terms of openness about adoption (Brodzinsky, 2005, 2006; Sobol, et al., 1994). Researchers explain that parents can meet their adopted children's informational needs by creating an open atmosphere in which children are able to ask questions, and thus enabling their children to become more comfortable with their adoptive status and form a cohesive identity (Schoenberg, 1974; Stein & Hoopes, 1985). Clearly, parental communication about adoption is a central part of the adoptive identity development process.

Although this research lays the groundwork for understanding the parents' role in adoptive identity formation, adoption scholars have largely conceptualized the role of parental communication about adoption as answering questions about their children's adoptive status (Grotevant, 1997; Sobol, et al., 1994; Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003). This insight provides a valuable framework for understanding the informational needs of adopted individuals, yet the research is insufficient for understanding the scope of parent-child communication concerning adoptive identity formation. Due to the centrality of communication in establishing and maintaining identity (Bergen & Braithwaite, 2009), it is important that scholars have an informed understanding of the communicative environment of adoptive families.

Family communication scholars are in an ideal position to contribute to the adoption literature in meaningful and necessary ways. Communication scholars have done valuable work in some areas of adoption research (e.g. Docan-Morgan, 2008; Galvin, 2003; Harrigan, 2009; Harrigan & Braithwaite, 2010; Suter, 2008). Families formed through international adoption have a number of complexities not present in

domestic adoptive families such as divergent cultures, restricted access to biological information, and fewer opportunities to interact with birth families (Galvin, 2003). Further, the identity-work inherent in families formed through visibly different adoption is highly complex and involves discourses from numerous sources (Harrigan, 2009; Harrigan & Braithwaite, 2010). This established line of literature has played an important role in scholar's understanding of adoptive families. At the same time, these researchers have primarily focused on the negotiation of family identity within international adoption and visibly different families. It is necessary to further develop general adoption research which can benefit domestic and to some degree international adoptees, especially given the unique discourse-dependent nature of adoptive families.

To date, researchers outside of the communication discipline have pursued family adoption research much more vigorously (e.g. Brodzinsky, 2006; Passmore, Feeney, & Foulstone, 2007; Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003). In the following section, I review five main areas of research on communication in adoptive families: (a) structural openness and birth parent contact, (b) frequency of talk about adoption, (c) communication openness, (d) acknowledgement of difference, and (e) the communication between adoptive and birth families.

It is also important to understand the general framework of parent-child communication in order to have a macro view of parent-child relations; understanding how parents communicate apart from the child's adopted status will shed insight on the parents' ability to meet the child's general identity development needs. As such, I review factors related to general parent-child communication, specifically parental confirmation and affectionate communication. In the following review of these literatures, I will

incorporate the existing research by posing hypotheses in order to develop a more nuanced and holistic assessment of parental communication in adoptive families.

Structural openness and birth parent contact. Structural openness refers to the degree of contact existing between the birth family, the adoptive family, and the adopted child (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998). Researchers characterize openness as a continuum ranging from confidential adoptions in which there is no contact with or knowledge of the birth family, to mediated adoptions in which agencies facilitate contact between birth and adoptive parents, to open adoptions in which the birth family engages in ongoing communication with the adoptive family (Wrobel, et al., 1996).

Researchers have demonstrated in numerous studies that birth parent contact is valuable to adoptees as they make sense of their experience (Atwood, 2007; Berry, 1993; Gritter, 1998). Open adoptions provide a pathway in which adoptees are able to interact with birth relatives (Mendenhall, et al., 2004). Adoptees with the ability to communicate with the birth parents are in a position to understand aspects of their origins and reasons for their placement in an adoptive family (Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010; Powell & Afifi, 2005). Therefore, individuals in open adoptions tend to demonstrate a greater degree of identity work, which likely involves the exploration and commitment needed to form a developed adoptive identity. As such, I offer the following hypothesis:

H1: Structural openness is positively related to developed adoptive identity.

Although open adoptions provide the potential for interaction with birth families, individuals in open adoptions do not necessarily have contact (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998). Each adoption triad negotiates a relationship differently, based on the needs and preferences of the adoptive family, the birth family, and the adopted child. The decisions

and subsequent actions to meet and form a relationship with the birth parents stem from a number of other family-level factors, and the amount of contact between the birth and adoptive families varies based on the adoptive parents' decision to initiate and continue contact (Mendenhall, et al., 2004). In this sense, even in fully disclosed adoptions, there is the possibility that the adopted child would have no contact with the birth family.

Given this variety of open adoption arrangements, it is necessary to look beyond structural openness to the nature of birth parent contact. Researchers suggest that communication with birth parents offers a pathway to developed adoptive identity (Jones & Hackett, 2008; Melina & Roszia, 1993). Individuals in open adoptions who have access to birth parents are able to reduce uncertainty about aspects of their background such as health information, birth parent characteristics, and reasons that the birth parent selected adoption (Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010; Powell & Afifi, 2005). Adopted individuals who have direct contact with their birth parents tend to have identities that demonstrate a greater degree of exploration and resolution of adoption issues (Von Korff, 2008). Increased contact with birth parents allows adopted individuals greater access to information and thus the opportunity to resolve adoption issues and integrate the adoption into a holistic sense of self (Grotevant, et al., 2007; Von Korff, 2008). Thus, birth parent communication seems to encourage the development of an adoptive identity.

In that communication with the birth parent varies from family to family even in open adoption arrangements, it is important to assess both structural openness and frequency of contact. To assess the role of birth family contact in the adoptive identity development process, the following hypothesis is offered:

H2: Frequency of birth parent contact is positively related to developed adoptive identity.

Frequency of talk about adoption. A substantive line of research supports that idea that early and ongoing conversations about adoption are important for an individual's understanding of his or her adoption. Frequency of talk is at the heart of the Family Adoption Communication (FAC) Model, the most widely cited conceptualization of adoptive parent communication in the family adoption communication literature (Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003). The central premise of the FAC is that ongoing adoption disclosures are important considering the changing needs of the child (Brodzinsky, Singer, & Braff, 1984). Brodzinsky and colleagues determined that children's informational needs change over time as children develop cognitively and begin to understand biological processes of reproduction as well as the difference between adopted and non-adopted children. In this sense, the ability to understand one's own adoption is dependent on developmental factors. Thus, early disclosures may be only effective insofar as they correspond to the child's developmental capabilities. Such a finding demonstrated the need for ongoing adoption disclosures (Brodzinsky, et al., 1984). Therefore, the authors of the FAC suggest that communication about adoption is dynamic as the adopted child's needs change over time (Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003).

Wrobel, Kohler, and colleagues (2003) offer a three-phase model to explain the communication between parents and adopted children as it changes throughout the child's development. Phase one occurs primarily during the child's preschool years in which the parents provide unsolicited information to the child about the adoption. Numerous researchers agree that the most important task for the adoptive family during

preschool period is telling the child details about the adoption in order to provide a

foundation for the child to draw upon in later stages of development (Brodzinsky, et al.,

1984; Sobol, et al., 1994; Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003).

As the child develops mentally and emotionally and comes to a deeper

understanding of adoption, the child's curiosity grows. This curiosity prompts the second

phase of the model in which the child approaches his or her adoptive parents with

questions about the adoption. Communication about adoption within the family ebbs and

flows in this stage commensurate with the child's curiosity, meaning that communication

about the adoption increases as the child's curiosity increases (Wrobel, Kohler,

Grotevant, & McRoy, 1998). In this phase, the child's curiosity about birth history is

considered normative rather than the result of problematic development (Mendenhall, et

al., 2004).

The final phase emerges when the child seeks out information about the adoption

independently of the parents either through legal means or direct contact with birth

parents. This phase occurs between the later years of adolescence and the early years of

adulthood. Adoptive parents play an inactive role in this phase, instead providing support

and assistance as needed in the child's independent search. At each phase of the FAC,

the parents must decide how much or how little to disclose to the child based on the

child's emotional and intellectual development and the nature of the information being

disclosed (Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003).

The Family Adoption Communication (FAC) model suggests that increased

frequency of adoption conversations is important to the child's adjustment (Wrobel,

Kohler, et al., 2003). Early and frequent disclosures about the adoption serve to

normalize the adoption within the family and support the child's cognitive and emotional

acceptance of the adoption. Communication in the FAC primarily focuses on the

frequency with which adoptive parents share information with the adopted child. Based

on this research, the following hypothesis is offered:

> H3: Adoptive parents' frequency of talk about the adoption is positively related to
>
> developed adoptive identity.

Communication openness. Wrobel, Kohler, et al. (2003) provide a valuable

framework for understanding the information-exchange pertaining to adoption within the

adopted family, but the FAC model gives insight into just one aspect of parental

communication about adoption. The model focuses solely on information exchange,

neglecting the emotion-based communication also occurring in home. Additional

information on the quality and content of parental communication about adoption will

add rich insight into the role of adoptive parents as they facilitate the formation of

developed adoptive identity.

In addition to information sharing, Brodzinsky (2005) introduced the concept of

communication openness to highlight the ability of the child to approach the adoptive

parents concerning adoption issues. *Communication openness* refers to the content,

quality, and overall ease of adoption-related communication, pertaining specifically to

open, direct, empathic, and sensitive communication in which the parents support the

child's emotions about the adoption. Brodzinsky based the concept of communication

openness on Kirk's (1964) theory of adoption relations, which asserted that adoptive

parents have the option to either suppress or acknowledge the adoption ties existing

within a family. Kirk emphasized the need to openly address the unique bonds adoption

created within parent-child relationships. Instead of pretending to be the same as biological families, he urged adoptive parents to be open about the child's adoption to aid the child in adjustment from an early age.

Brodzinsky (2005) expands upon Kirk's notion of acknowledgment of difference by reiterating the importance of open communication. Such communication should encourage the adopted child to feel as though his or her adoption-related thoughts and feelings are accepted and understood within the adoptive family. Whereas previous adoption researchers focused solely on frequency of communication (e.g. Von Korff, 2008) or information-based communication (e.g. Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003), Brodzinsky emphasized the need to investigate the process and context in which parents talk to the child about his or her adoption.

Brodzinsky (2006) assessed the relationship between communication openness, structural openness, and the adopted children's adjustment, concluding that communication openness was a better predictor of adjustment than structural openness. This finding suggests that the way in which families communicate about the adoption may be more consequential for the child's development than situations surrounding the adoption, thus confirming the importance of process variables within the parent-child relationship.

Brodzinsky's (2005, 2006) research opened up a productive line of research on communication openness in adoptive families. Donahue (2008) extended Brodzinsky's work to specifically address the association between communication openness and adoptive identity formation. Donahue discovered that individuals with integrated adoptive identities reported the highest levels of communication openness as compared to

individuals with unexamined, limited, or unsettled identities. Communication openness seems to provide a pathway to identity development, and "such attuned responsiveness might improve the child's psychological development and emotional well-being" (p. 93). As communication openness increases in the parent-child relationship, parents are able to facilitate the acknowledgement and grieving of adoption-related loss in their child's identity development.

Passmore and colleagues (2007) conducted a similar study on the role of openness in the adoptive family. Although these authors did not assess communication openness as Brodzinsky (2005) defined it, Passmore examined the degree to which adoption was discussed, ranging from open and honest discussions, discussions occurring on a need-to-know basis, and secrecy. They found that secrecy was related to a lack of emotional closeness, perception of limited care, higher levels of loneliness, increased sense of risk in relationships, and anxious/avoidant attachment, as well as a reduction of relationship quality with adopted parents. Openness was related to resolution of adoption issues, greater likelihood to search out birth parents, and increased relationship quality with individuals outside the family. Passmore and colleagues support the value of open communication in adoptive family relationships.

Clearly communication openness is important for developed adoptive identity as it facilitates the adopted child's acknowledgement and grieving of adoption-related loss (Donahue, 2008) and provides a pathway for the resolution and integration of adoption-related issues (Passmore, et al., 2007). Given the importance of communication openness in the adopted child's identity work, the following hypothesis is posed:

H4: Adoptive parents' communication openness about adoption is positively

related to developed adoptive identity.

Acknowledgement of difference. Related to communication openness is the

adoptive family's acknowledgement of difference. Kirk's (1964) theory of adoptive

relations posited that adoptive parents could better serve the needs of the adopted child by

acknowledging the difference between adoptive families and consanguineous families.

Acknowledgement of difference facilitates the adopted child's adjustment from an early

age by providing the child with a safe structure within the family to develop an

understanding of his or her adoption.

Sobol and colleagues (1994) drew directly from Kirk's theory of adoption

relations in saying that "the success of the adoptive family is related to the

acknowledgement of their unique status when compared to the consanguineous family

and the degree of open acceptance and nurturing of the uniqueness of adopted children"

(p. 386). They determined that the family's ability to effectively acknowledge the

differences inherent in adoptive relations was related to cohesion and adaptability in

adopted families throughout the life stages. Sobol and colleagues describe effective

acknowledgement of difference as occurring when difference is acknowledged but not

overly emphasized. Too much attention to differences may serve to isolate the child from

the family, particularly if there are biologically related children in the adoptive family.

At the same time, a suppression of the unique aspects of the adoptive parent-child

relationships likely contributes to confusion and denial of adoption-related issues. As

such, Sobol et al. demonstrate that it is important that families acknowledge the

difference of adoptive relations in balance with other aspects of familial connections.

Donahue (2008) carried on this reasoning and determined that balanced levels of acknowledgement of difference stimulate the formation of developed adoptive identity. Specifically, Donahue found that individuals with unexamined identities rejected the notion that there were differences between adoptive and birth families and believed instead that adoption made no difference in family structure. Denial of the differentness in this sense indicates a lack of exploration of adoptive identity. Conversely, individuals with integrated adoptive identities reported balanced levels of acknowledgement of difference in their adoptive family. Adoptive parents' acknowledgement of the unique family bond provides an example to the child of how to view his or her adoption. As adoptive parents demonstrate the special relationship adoption creates, children may be able to develop a positive view of their role in the adoptive family. In this way, moderate levels of acknowledgement of difference in which parents balance discussion of difference with discussions of inclusion and belongingness provide a pathway for an adopted child to reconcile and accept his or her status as an adoptee. Therefore, the following hypothesis is posed:

> H5: Adoptive parents' *balanced* acknowledgement of difference is positively related to developed adoptive identity.

Communication between adoptive and birth families. Adoptive parents play a key role in facilitating contact between birth parents and the adopted child. Adoptive parents face a number of difficult decisions such as the degree to which the birth parents will be included in the family system, the content and frequency of the child's conversations with the birth parents, and the communicative functions they will enact before and after birth parent communication to help the child process the interaction

(Wrobel, et al., 1996). Willingness on the part of the adoptive parents is key in making contact with the birth parents appear normative, and the way in which adoptive parents communicate about the relationship with the birth parents will be consequential for the adopted child (Mendenhall, et al., 2004).

Von Korff (2008) looked specifically at the adoptive parents' facilitation of contact between the birth parents and adopted child, assessing the frequency of contact between all members of the birth and adoptive families as well as the type of contact taking place including telephone calls, letters, and face-to-face visits. Results indicated that adoptive parents' facilitation of contact with the birth parents was associated with adoptive identity development, particularly when adoptive parents actively created meaningful social interactions with the birth parents. Social interactions with birth parents provided an opportunity for adoptive parents to engage in conversations about the adoption in which adoptees were able to experience and express high levels of emotion about the adoption. Statistical modeling demonstrated that conversations about birth parent interactions fully mediated the relationship between contact with the birth parents and adoptive identity development. This research suggests that the context in which contact with birth relatives occurs may be more important than the frequency of contact.

Adoptive parents are the linchpins connecting the adopted child to the birth parent. Adoptive parents negotiate the nature of communication between birth family members and the adopted child including the amount of contact and the nature of the social interactions the birth parents have with the adopted child (Wrobel, et al., 1996). Adoptive parents are a key component of birth parent contact in preparing the adopted child for meeting with the birth parent and debriefing with the child after the interaction

(Von Korff, 2008). Adoptive parents are responsible for explaining the nature of the birth parent relationship to the child and providing the child with expectations for the interaction (Grotevant, et al., 2007). Researchers have established that birth parent contact is important to adopted children's adjustment and identity work (Grotevant, et al., 2007; Silber & Dorner, 1990). Yet given the importance of the adoptive parents in the birth parent relationship, it is important to understand the degree to which adoptive parents may attenuate contact between the birth parents and the adopted child. The FAC indicates that frequent interactions about the adoption will help the child better understand his or her adoption (Mendenhall, et al., 2004), and conversations about the adoption with the adoptive parents likely provides the adoptee the context and support to process birth parent interactions. In this sense, frequent adoptive parent communication about the adoption may enhance the adoptee's contact with his or her birth family. Therefore the following hypothesis is posed:

> H6: The association between (a) structural openness and (b) frequency of birth
> parent contact and developed adoptive identity will be stronger when there are
> high levels of adoptive parents' frequency of talk about the adoption.

Von Korff (2008) gives valuable insight into the role that birth family contact plays in adoptive identity formation. Important to consider, however, is the limited assessment of communication included in Von Korff's study. Communication with both the birth family and the adoptive family was measured in terms of frequency, ranging from no communication to monthly communication. Missing from this research is the quality of communication occurring within the kinship network. Understanding the

substantive content and tone of communication with and about birth parents will shed important insight on the role of birth parent contact in adoptive identity formation.

Communication openness literature reminds researchers that the quality of adoption-related communication is perhaps more important than the quantity of the communication (Brodzinsky, 2005). Open environments in which the child and the adoptive parents are able to freely discuss the adoption will likely heighten the value of the child's interactions with his or her birthparents. Therefore, the following hypothesis is offered:

> H7: The association between (a) structural openness and (b) frequency of birth parent contact and developed adoptive identity will be stronger when there are high levels of adoptive parents' communication openness about the adoption.

In addition to parental communication focused on adoption, it is also important to consider how non-adoption related communication facilitates the formation of individuals' developed adoptive identity. In the following section I introduce two parental communication constructs that are likely important to identity development: parental confirmation and affectionate communication.

Non-adoption related parent-child communication. To date, research on communication in adoptive families has focused exclusively on adoption-related communication (e.g. Brodzinsky, 2006; Sobol, et al., 1994; Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003). Although communication about the child's adoption is an important aspect of constructing adoptive-family relationships, providing the means of understanding both the legitimacy of the adoptive family form (Galvin, 2003) and the child's understanding of his or her adoption (McRoy, et al., 1990), adoption is just one aspect of the parent-

child relationship. Adoptees report that adoption-related conversations tend to occur with varying levels of frequency throughout their development, but adoption is not the most important or most regular topic of conversation (Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010). Adoptive parents have a unique tie to their children in that the relationship is formed through legal rather than genetic means, yet adoptive parents remain first and foremost parents to their children. Therefore, adoption-related talk is just one aspect of parent-child communication. In order to understand how adoptive parents communicatively create an environment in which the child is able to integrate his or her adoption into a larger sense of self, we must attend to aspects of parent-child communication that foster development of the child as a person in addition to the development of the child's understanding of his or her adoption. To inform an understanding of the larger context of the process of adoptive identity development, I draw from two constructs in the parent-child communication literature known to be important to children's development of self-concept: parental confirmation (Ellis, 2002) and affectionate communication (Floyd & Morman, 2005). Parental confirmation and affectionate communication should provide a basis for a child to explore who he or she is and commit to a set of values defining the self, thus developing an identity for the child. Development of adoptive identity is intricately tied to one's general identity development process (Grotevant, 2000). Attention to constructs that researchers have demonstrated are important to adolescent's individual development, such as parental confirmation and affectionate communication, will contribute to the present study's goals of understanding the parental communication behaviors important to the formation of developed adoptive identity. In the following

section, I review the research on (a) parental confirmation and (b) affectionate communication as it pertains to child development.

Parental confirmation. Parental confirmation involves positive and supportive communication that allows others to feel "endorsed, recognized, and acknowledged as valuable, significant individuals" (Ellis, 2002, p. 321). Ellis explains that confirming communication allows others to feel connected and enhances an individual's value as a human being. Ellis builds upon the writings of Martin Buber (1958) who positioned confirming communication as among the most important features of human interaction. Ellis applies Buber's perspective specifically to parent-child communication, determining that parental confirmation is a significant predictor of children's feelings of global self-worth. Schrodt and colleagues (2007) further demonstrated the important role that parental confirmation plays in the social development of children by relating significantly to child's health and well-being. These findings suggest that parental confirmation behaviors cannot be underestimated for the healthy and normative development of children.

Confirmation seems to be a particularly important component of the process by which individuals discover and establish a sense of identity (Ellis, 2002). Communication that serves to foster feelings of worth and importance provides important affirmation of the humanness of the relational other (Buber, 1958). Confirming communication encourages individuals to develop a firm sense of self-worth, thus encouraging individuals to develop a personal identity.

Developed adoptive identities are those identities in which adoptees incorporate both positive and negative aspects of their adoption into a sense of self that includes but

is not overly preoccupied with their adopted status. Parental confirmation will likely

encourage an adopted child to focus on aspects of the self that do not depend on his or her

status as an adopted individual. Ellis (2002) discovered that parents can encourage social

development in their children by acknowledging the child's thoughts and opinions,

supporting the child in his or her activities, and validating the child's input through active

listening. Parental behaviors such as these likely encourage the child to develop a sense

of self that is not overly dependent on his or her status as an adopted individual by

emphasizing the global worth of the child. Therefore, the following hypothesis is posed:

H8: Adoptive parents' parental confirmation is positively related to developed

adoptive identity.

Affectionate communication. Another important communication behavior

parents enact to encourage relational development is affection. Floyd and Morman

(1998, 2000, 2005) have established a productive line of research highlighting the central

role that affection plays in healthy parent-child relationships. Floyd and Morman

specifically focus on *affectionate communication*, referring to a parent's "intentional and

overt enactment or expression of feelings of closeness, care, and fondness" for their

children (Floyd & Morman, 1998, p. 145). Affectionate communication is among the

most important behaviors in close relationships to establish feelings of belonging and

security (Floyd & Morman, 2005). Children view their parents' expressions of affection

as reflections of their relationship closeness (Floyd & Morman, 2000). Affection from

parents is an important predictor of children's social development in areas such as self-

esteem (Schrodt, et al., 2007), relationship satisfaction (Floyd & Morman, 2000), and life

satisfaction (Young, Miller, Norton, & Hill, 1995). Given the important role that

affection provides in facilitating a child's development of a sense of self, the following hypothesis is presented:

H9: Adoptive parents' affectionate communication is positively related to developed adoptive identity.

In the previous sections, I presented evidence for the relationship between parental communication and developed adoptive identity. In the following section, I shift my focus to the relationship between developed adoptive identity and well-being.

Developed adoptive identity and well-being. Research to date indicates that individuals who have adjusted to their adoption and have undergone identity work tend to have healthier relationships, improved personal well-being, and a more positive outlook on their experience as an adopted individual (Brodzinsky, 2006; Mendenhall, et al., 2004). The bulk of this research has examined the association explicitly between communication about the adoption and feelings about the self and others related to the adoption. In the present study I take a different view of the role of communication and individual and relational well-being. I propose that communication relates to the developed adoptive identity that in turn has significant associations with individual and relational factors. In this way, developed adoptive identity is a link between parental communication about the adoption and well-being. The limited research conducted to date provides initial support for this postulation, and adoption-related communication literature gives tangential evidence for such an association in demonstrating the interplay between communication and well-being. I include four areas related to developed adoptive identity: affect about adoption, individual well-being, relational well-being with the adoptive parents, and relational well-being with the birth parents.

Affect about adoption. Adoption researchers originally believed positive and negative affect to be a component of adoptive identity (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004), yet recent advances in adoption identity research have demonstrated that affect may actually be a product of rather than part of identity. Von Korff (2008) drew from affect theory to describe that emotions come to be as consequences of making sense of lived events. Applying this to adoption literature, adoptees' experience changes in the way in which they emotionally relate to the adoption as they interpret and give meaning to their adoption. Similar findings have been established in multiethnic identity development literature. Phinney (1990) describes multiethnic individuals as coming to terms with their multiple ethnicities by integrating divergent categories into a larger sense of self. Identity achievement in Phinney's model is related to feelings of acceptance of and appreciation for one's cultural heritage.

Adoptive identity development research to date has determined that individuals with integrated adoptive identities tend to have high levels positive affect and low levels of negative affect about their adoption (Dunbar, 2003). Presumably, adopted individuals have resolved feelings of loss, grief, rejection, and shame about their adoption in the process of adoptive identity exploration (Grotevant, et al., 2000), thus enabling individuals to experience more positive feelings toward the adoption. Therefore, the following hypothesis is posed:

H10: Developed adoptive identity is positively related to positive affect about
adoption.

Individual well-being. The formation of developed adoptive identity is a likely pathway to individual well-being in that developed adoptive identity reflects an adoptee's

ability to come to terms with the realities of his or her adoption (Dunbar, 2003).

Individuals who have not progressed toward developed adoptive identity may experience

an inability to make sense of their past or may be unable to reconcile the motivations and

events leading up to their transfer from a birth family to an adoptive family (Von Korff,

2008). In previous research, adoptees with a lack of clarity surrounding their origins also

experienced confusion of identity, low self-esteem, and depression (Friedlander, 1999).

These findings demonstrate the important role that identity exploration and balanced

salience may play for individual well-being. Therefore, an individual with a clear sense

of the role of adoption in his or her life will likely be well adjusted in many regards.

Specifically, self-esteem and life satisfaction will likely improve as the adopted

individual is able to accept and appreciate their place within the adoptive family,

integrate adopted-related issues into a larger sense of self, and balance aspects of the self

related to adoption with other unique qualities. Therefore, the following hypothesis is

posed:

> H11: Developed adoptive identity is positively related to individual well-being as
>
> indicated by high levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction.

Relational well-being with adoptive parents. Developed adoptive identity likely

has similar ties to relational well-being. Research has demonstrated numerous

associations between adoptees' feelings about adoption and relationship quality with

adoptive family members. For example, individuals experiencing preoccupation with

their adoption tend to have decreased relationship satisfaction with their adoptive parents

(Kohler, et al., 2002). Additionally, families in which adoption was considered a

secretive or stigmatized topic of conversation often have diminished relational quality.

Specifically, researchers have discovered that secrecy about adoption was related to a lack of emotional closeness, perception of limited care, higher levels of loneliness, increased sense of risk in relationships, and anxious/avoidant attachment, as well as an overall reduction of relationship quality with adopted parents (Passmore, et al., 2007). In that secrecy may inhibit exploration and resolution of adoption issues, open communicative behaviors likely facilitate the adoptive identity development process that may in turn have beneficial implications for an individuals' sense of placement and belonging in the adoptive family. Therefore, individuals with developed adoptive identities likely experience positive affect toward their adoptive parents as well as increased relational satisfaction.

Developed adoptive identity also likely shares an association with shared family identity with the adoptive family. Shared family identity is defined as the degree to which an individual perceives him- or herself to be a member of his or her family and/or share a common family identity with other members of the family (Soliz, 2007). As an individual grows in an understanding of the way in which his or her adoption provides a connection to the adoptive family, increased identification with the adoptive parents as shared family members likely increases. Therefore, the following hypothesis is posed:

H12: Developed adoptive identity is positively related to relational quality with adoptive parents as indicated by positive affect toward adoptive parents.

Relational well-being with birth parents. Finally, developed adoptive identity may also relate to an increased likelihood of feelings of positive affect toward birth parents. Individuals with developed adoptive identities are more likely to have engaged in acts of behavioral exploration such as gathering information about and meeting with

their birth parents (Dunbar, 2003). Individuals who have contact with birth parents have higher satisfaction with their contact status than people without contact (Mendenhall, et al., 2004). Conversely, individuals who are preoccupied with their adoption tend to have a desire for increased contact with one or both birth parents (Kohler, et al., 2002). As such, identity exploration and balanced salience seems to relate to positive relationships with birth parents.

Additionally, individuals who have sufficiently explored and resolved issues related to their adoption have demonstrated a greater ability to think fluidly, consider multiple alternatives, and understand their birth parents' perspective (Dunbar, 2003). Such consideration of the decision made by his or her birth parents often enables an adoptee to develop positive feelings, resolve negative emotions, and come to a better understanding about the birth parents' experiences leading up to the adoption (Von Korff, 2008). Taken together, these findings indicate that actions taken to facilitate the identity work inherent in developed adoptive identity may have positive associations with birth family relationships. Therefore, the final hypothesis is offered:

H13: Developed adoptive identity is positively related to positive affect toward birth parents.

In the previous section, I outlined hypotheses about the relationship between parental communication, developed adoptive identity, and well-being. Table 2.1 provides a list of these hypotheses. Taking these hypotheses together, I propose a model of adoptive identity development from a communication perspective. See Figure 2.1 for a pictorial representation of the proposed model. The figure depicts the hypotheses, and in

Table 2.1

List of hypotheses

H1: Structural openness is positively related to developed adoptive identity.

H2: Frequency of birth parent contact is positively related to developed adoptive identity.

H3: Adoptive parents' frequency of talk about the adoption is positively related to developed adoptive identity.

H4: Adoptive parents' communication openness about adoption is positively related to developed adoptive identity.

H5: Adoptive parents' *balanced* acknowledgement of difference is positively related to developed adoptive identity.

H6: The association between (a) structural openness and (b) frequency of birth parent contact and developed adoptive identity will be stronger when there are high levels of adoptive parents' frequency of talk about the adoption.

H7: The association between (a) structural openness and (b) frequency of birth parent contact and developed adoptive identity will be stronger when there are high levels of adoptive parents' communication openness about the adoption.

H8: Adoptive parents' parental confirmation is positively related to developed adoptive identity.

H9: Adoptive parents' affectionate communication is positively related to developed adoptive identity.

H10: Developed adoptive identity is positively related to positive affect about adoption.

Table 2.1

List of Hypotheses (cont.)

H11: Developed adoptive identity is positively related to individual well-being as

indicated by high levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction.

H12: Developed adoptive identity is positively related to relational quality with adoptive

parents as indicated by positive affect toward adoptive parents.

H13: Developed adoptive identity is positively related to positive affect toward birth
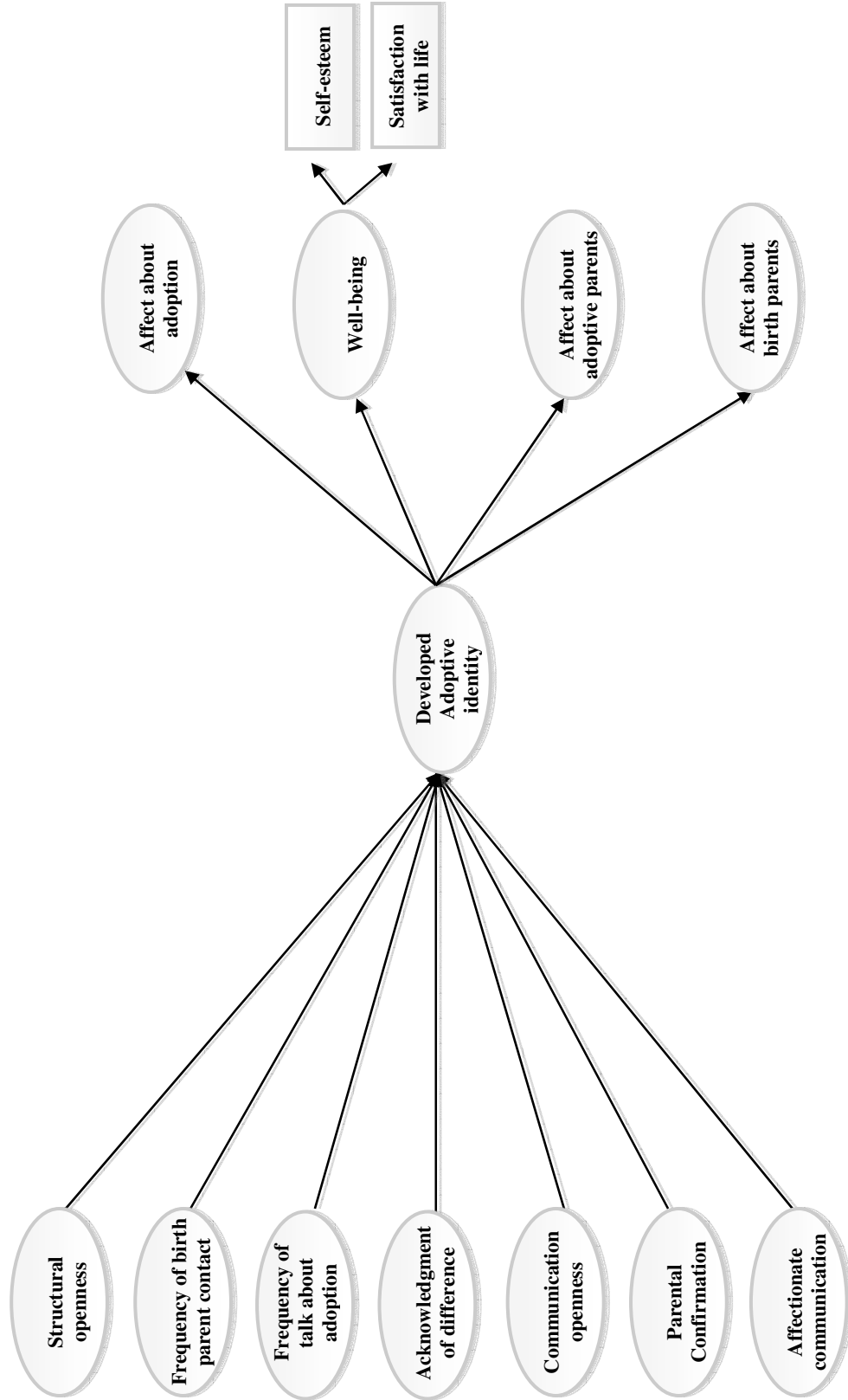
parents.

Figure 2.1. *Hypothesized model*

doing so presents a model in which developed adoptive identity mediates the relationship between parental communication and adoptee adjustment variables. As such, part of testing this model will include examining the nature of this mediation. In presenting this hypothesized model, I aim to both move beyond the assessment of relationships between individual parental communication constructs and adoptive identity to a holistic view of the role of adoptive parents in facilitating the formation of developed adoptive identity.

Summary of proposed model. The proposed hypotheses integrate research and peripheral theorizing from identity, adoption and communication literatures to develop a holistic model of the way in which adoptive parents facilitate the formation of developed adoptive identity. The model employs a new conceptualization of developed adoptive identity based on Grotevant and colleagues's (2000) model of adoptive identity development with a specific focus on integrated adoptive identity type and identity integration literature. Predictions about factors related to developed adoptive identity are supported with existing adoption-related communication literature including research on birth parent contact, the Family Adoption Communication Model, and communication openness. Factors related to general parent-child communication are included as well. The proposed model aims to expand upon existing conceptualizations of communication in adoptive families by privileging a nuanced understanding of family communication. In advancing researchers' understanding of the importance of communication in the process of adoptive identity development, the proposed model emphasizes the content, nature, and process of communication. The main purpose in the proposed model is to highlight the role of parental communication in facilitating the formation of developed adoptive identity.

Conclusion

In the current study, I examine the role of parental communication in facilitating the formation of developed adoptive identity, or identities in which adoptees incorporate both positive and negative aspects of their adoption into a sense of self that includes, but is not overly preoccupied with, their adopted status. In this chapter, I offered empirical and theoretical evidence for (a) the association of parent-child communication and the formation of developed adoptive identity as well as (b) the association between developed adoptive identity and individual well-being as well as relational well-being with the adoptive and birth parents.

In demonstrating these associations, I integrated adoption, identity, and communication literature to develop a holistic understanding of the process of adoptive identity development from a communication perspective. Predictions about factors related to developed adoptive identity are supported with existing adoption-related communication literature including research on birth parent contact, the Family Adoption Communication Model, and communication openness. I also drew from general parent-child communication research on parental confirmation and affectionate communication. The hypothesized model aims to expand upon existing conceptualizations of communication by emphasizing the content, nature, and process of communication in an effort to highlight the role of parental communication in facilitating the formation of developed adoptive identity.

In the following chapter, I report on two studies conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the Developed Adoptive Identity Scale (DAIS), a measure created for use in the current study to assess the degree to which an individual has formed a developed

adoptive identity. It was essential that I had a sound means of measuring individual's developed adoptive identities given the integral role of this variable in the present study. I detail my rationale for creating the DAIS, describe how the measure was developed and tested in study one, and explain how the measure was revised and reevaluated in study two in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE

CREATION AND VALIDATION OF THE DEVELOPED ADOPTIVE IDENTITY

SCALE: TWO PILOT STUDIES

In this chapter, I report on two studies conducted to create and validate the

Developed Adoptive Identity Scale (DAIS). The DAIS is a measure assessing an

individual's level developed adoptive identity, defined as an identity in which an

individual incorporates both positive and negative aspects of their adoption into a sense

of self that includes but is not overly preoccupied with their adopted status. In the

following chapter, I first provide a rationale for the creation of the DAIS. Next, I report

on two studies conducted to establish the reliability and validity of this newly developed

scale. The DAIS will be used in the main study as an indicator of participants' developed

adoptive identity.

Rationale for Creating the Developed Adoptive Identity Scale

To date, a continuous, self-report measure of developed adoptive identity is not

available to researchers. Rather, two scales exist for measuring adoptive identity – a

rating manual for qualitative interviews with adoptees and a coarse measurement of

adoptive typologies. In this section, I will provide a critique of these existing measures,

thus providing a rationale for the development of the Developed Adoptive Identity Scale.

Adoptive identity was first assessed by Grotevant and colleagues as part of the

Minnesota/Texas Adoption Project (Grotevant, Dunbar, & Kohler, 1999). Based on the

extensive longitudinal data gathered in the study in which qualitative interviews were

conducted with 720 adopted children over 20 years, Grotevant and colleagues developed

the *Manual for Coding Identity in Adopted Adolescents*. Grotevant's methods rely on

coding qualitative interviews by a team of researchers on five aspects of adoptive identity: *depth of exploration*, or the clarity, intensity, and thoughtfulness an adoptee exhibits about his or her adoption; *salience*, or the level of importance his or her adoption status holds for the adoptee; *narrative coherence,* or how well the individual is able to organize and construct a story; *internal consistency*, or the completeness of the content of the narrative; *flexibility,* or the adoptees' ability to explore new ideas and alternatives; and *valence of affect*, or the level of positive or negative affect an adoptee attaches to his or her adoption. Adoption researchers have used Grotevant's manual to create both continuous (Von Korff, 2008) and categorical (Dunbar, 2003) measures of adoptive identity.

This research establishes the ability to measure adoptive identity and sets the foundation for the components comprising adoptive identity. At the same time, this methodology needs to be complemented with additional methodologies for both practical and validity reasons. Practically speaking, this methodology presents some challenges for adoption researchers. Specifically, this methodology is labor intensive in that researchers must arrange a time to meet with adoptees, transcribe interviews, and recruit a team of researchers willing to be trained to rate the qualitative data. Many researchers lack the resources to execute such an involved and labor-intensive data collection process. Creating a quality self-report measure of adoptive identity will present another option for adoption researchers interested in examining adoptive identity.

Additionally, a self-report measure can increase our confidence in knowledge about adoptive identity by providing methodological diversity. Findings generated from an alternative methodology that are consistent with established findings provide evidence

of valid and reliable research for both studies (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). In this case, findings based on self-reports of developed adoptive identity compliment findings that are based on researchers' inferences of adoptee identity from qualitative interviews, thus triangulating knowledge about adoptive identity formation.

The second available measure of adoptive identity stems from Donahue's (2008) research. Donahue created a self-report measure based on Dunbar's (2003) establishment of four adoptive identities: *unexamined*, characterized by little to no depth in exploration, low salience, and lack of emotion about one's adoptive identity; *limited*, characterized by modest exploration and little salience attached to one's adoptive status; *unsettled*, marked by high levels of negative affect and salience of adoptive status with substantial exploration; and *integrated*, characterized by balanced levels of both positive and negative affect about their adoption and moderate salience to their adoptive status. Donahue's (2008) measure consisted of four paragraphs, one for each of the types of adoptive identity. The paragraphs did not give the names of the adoptive identity types, but each paragraph had several sentences describing levels of exploration, salience, affect, internal consistency, and flexibility respective to each identity type. Participants rated each paragraph according to the degree to which the identity type described their experience, and then selected the paragraph that most closely described their feelings about and experiences with adoption. Based on this data, Donahue assigned each participant one of the four identity types and used the adoptive identity classifications to test associations between adoptive identity types and family and individual factors.

Donahue's study provides an important stepping-stone in creating a self-report of adoptive identity development research. However two limitations in conceptualizing

adoptive identity remain. First, there is a lack of sound operationalization of adoptive identity in Donahue's (2008) research. Participants responded to several sentences simultaneously, forcing respondents to commit wholesale to one type of adoptive identity. Such measurement of adoptive identity is a rather coarse assessment of identity types in that only four options exist. Separating the paragraphs into statements containing a single idea to which adoptees respond would improve the measurement of adoptive identity. Such a measure would provide a refined and more specific assessment of adoptive identity and would allow for individual differences on the key dimensions of adoptive identity.

A second limitation concerns the categorization of adoptive identity. As with Dunbar's (2003) quantification of adoptive identity, Donahue (2008) places adoptees into categories of adoptive identity. Conceptually, such use of categorical data poses a problem for representing the progression of adoptive identity from a state of unawareness to a developed state. Von Korff (2008) recognized the need to represent Grotevant and colleague's (2000) identity progression using a continuous measure of identity with high scores indicating greater progress in adoptive identity development. In presenting adoptive identity as a progression from minimal to considerable identity work, Von Korff presents a developmental model of adoption identity formation. This continuous measure of adoptive identity more accurately represents Grotevant and colleague's (2000) theorization of the process of adoptive identity development than does categorical operationalizations. Von Korff's measurement, however, relied upon rating qualitative data and does not allow individuals to report on their own perceptions of adoptive identity.

In short, existing research provides a foundation for measuring adoptive identity development (Donahue, 2008; Dunbar, 2003; Von Korff, 2008), yet it is necessary to continue to develop this work by creating a continuous, self-report measure of the formation of developed adoptive identity. Towards these ends, I conducted two studies to develop the Developed Adoptive Identity Scale (DAIS), a self-report measure resulting in a continuous score of the degree to which an individual has integrated his or her adoption into a larger sense of self that includes but is not overly preoccupied with his or her adopted status. In the following sections, I detail my efforts to establish the reliability and validity of this newly formed measure.

Study One: Scale Development and Modifications

Adoption researchers have developed existing measures of adoptive identity with varying levels of reliability and validity, ranging from sound (Grotevant, Dunbar, & Kohler, 1999) to problematic (Donahue, 2008) operationalization. Using these existing measures and the corresponding findings as a foundation for the newly formed scale, I set out to form a self-report, continuous measure of developed adoptive identity, described below in the measurement development portion of the method section.

Given that the newly formed scale is measuring a similar construct present in previous studies, it follows that findings from the present study would reflect findings using established scales. Donahue's (2008) Adoptive Identity Questionnaire (AIQ) rates the degree to which an individual agrees with the four adoptive identity types. If the Developed Adoptive Identity Scale is a valid measure of one's identity progress, then findings between the two scales should be similar, thus establishing concurrent validity

(Frey, et al., 2000). Therefore, I pose the following hypothesis as a validity check for the newly developed DAIS:

H1: Individuals indicating that they have an integrated adoptive identity on the AIQ should have high scores on the DAIS.

Additionally, scores on the DAIS should be similar to established measures of similar concepts (Frey, et al., 2000). Donahue (2008) used the Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire (ADQ; Benson, Sharma, & Roehlkepartain, 1994) to demonstrate construct validity with her scale. The ADQ measures specific aspects of adoptive identity such as preoccupation with adoption as well as affect about adoption. Although the ADQ does not set out to measure adoptive identity per se, the similarity of constructs provides an opportunity to further assess the validity of the newly developed measure. Donahue (2008) found that integrated adoptive identity was positively associated with positive affect and negatively associated with preoccupation and negative experience with adoption. If the DAIS is valid, similar findings should be established in the present study. Therefore, the following hypotheses is posed:

H2a: Developed adoptive identity as measured by the DAIS is positively associated with positive affect about adoption as measured by the ADQ.

H2b: Developed adoptive identity as measured by the DAIS is negatively associated with preoccupation about adoption as measured by the ADQ.

H2c: Developed adoptive identity as measured by the DAIS is negatively associated with negative experience with adoption as measured by the ADQ.

Finally, examining known correlates of adoptive identity in existing research provides the opportunity to establish predictive validity (Frey, et al., 2000). Adoption

researchers have demonstrated that individuals with a greater understanding of the events

surrounding their adoption tend to have higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of

depression (Brodzinsky, 1993; Friedlander, 1999). Therefore, the following hypothesis is

offered:

H3: Developed adoptive identity as measured by the DAIS is positively

associated with (a) self-esteem, (b) personal well-being, and (c) mental health.

Methods.

Participants and procedures. The participants in study one were 181 adults (45

men, 136 women) adopted by an individual other than a step-parent. Ages ranged from

19 to 70 (M = 39.99, SD = 11.86). Participants were recruited from communication

courses and online forums focused on adoption issues (see Appendix A for the

recruitment script). Before posting the recruitment script to an Internet forum, I first

asked the moderator for permission using a form letter (see Appendix B). Individuals

interested in completing the study were directed to the online survey posted using Survey

Monkey where they first read and agreed to an Internal Review Board informed consent

form (see Appendix C) then completed the online questionnaire (see Appendix D). A

small amount of extra credit was available to individuals enrolled in participating courses

for completing the survey, although participation was voluntary.

Generation of scale items. The initial step in this study was to develop a set of

questions to comprise the Developed Adoptive Identity Scale. I developed 30 questions

to assess developed adoptive identity. I drew from the *Manual for Coding Identity in*

Adopted Adolescents (Grotevant, Dunbar, et al., 1999) to construct the items, specifically

focusing on the exploration, salience, and affect categories the manual. I did not,

however, include items from the narrative components of the manual (flexibility and internal consistency) in the scale development due to the self-report nature of the scale. Grotevant and colleague's manual contains detailed descriptions of high, moderate, and low levels of each category as well as corresponding interview excerpts to exemplify each level of each category. I used these descriptions and examples to develop 11 items measuring exploration (e.g. "I have spent a lot of time thinking about why my birth parents placed me into an adoptive family"), five items measuring salience (e.g. "The fact that I was adopted only explains part of who I am"), four items measuring negative affect (e.g. "I feel rejected by my birth parents"), and 10 items measuring positive affect (e.g. "I respect my birth mother for making the choice to place me in an adoptive family"). All items were measured on 5-point Likert-type format ranging from (1) *Not at all true* to (5) *Very true*. See Table 3.1 for a complete list of original survey items.

   Measures for validity checks.

   Adoptive Identity Questionnaire. Donahue's (2008) Adoptive Identity Questionnaire (AIQ) was used to establish concurrent validity. The AIQ has five items, four of which are paragraphs describing Dunbar's (2003) adoptive identity types: unsettled, limited, unexplored, and integrated. Participants rate each paragraph based on how they feel the paragraph describes them, ranging from (1) *not at all like me* to (7) *very much like me*. In the final question, the participant selects the paragraph that describes them the best. In the current study, only the paragraph selection question was used to determine the relationship between the AIQ and the DAIS.

   Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire. The preoccupation, positive affect, and negative experience with adoption subscales of the Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire

Table 3.1

DAIS Items

Factor Scale Item	(*M*, *SD*)
Exploration	
1. I have spent a lot of time thinking about my adoption	(3.90, 1.26)
2. Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has helped me understand my status as an adopted child	(3.55, 1.30)
3. I have spent a lot of time thinking about why my birth parent(s) placed me into an adoptive family	(3.39, 1.47)
4. I think a lot about my birth parent(s)' characteristics	(3.91, 1.21)
5. Knowing my birth parent(s) was/is important to me in order to understand who I am	(3.87, 1.34)
6. Sometimes I cannot stop thinking about my adoption even if I try	(3.26, 1.49)
7. I am frustrated by the unanswered questions I have about my adoption	(2.36, 1.49)
8. I have thought about how my life would have been different if my birth parent(s) would have raised me	(3.98, 1.30)
9. I have spent time trying to find out more about my birth parent(s)	(4.20, 1.26)
10. I think that some of my personality can be explained by the fact that I was adopted	(4.04, 1.14)
11. I think that some of my personality can be explained by my adoptive parent(s)	(3.96, 1.15)
Salience	
12. My adoptive status is an important part of who I am, but is not the most important thing about me	(4.14, 1.06)
13. The fact that I was adopted only explains part of who I am	(4.01, 1.09)
14. I have a clear sense of what my adopted status means for me	(4.14, 1.10)
15. I am not very clear about the role of my adoption in my life	(3.90, 1.23)
16. I change my mind often about what I think about my adoption	(2.22, 1.32)
Negative Affect	
17. I have strong negative feelings about the fact that I was adopted	(3.66), 1.46)
18. I feel rejected by my birth parent(s)	(3.48, 1.51)
19. Thinking about my adoption too much makes me feel bad	(3.60, 1.37)
20. I blame my adoption for problems I had in my relationship with my adoptive parent(s)	(3.80, 1.43)
Positive Affect	
21. I don't have any strong positive feelings about the fact that I was adopted	(3.60, 1.39)
22. I am grateful that my birth parent(s) placed me in an adoptive family	(3.79, 1.37)

Note. Items 6, 7, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21 are reverse coded.

Table 3.1

DAIS Items (cont.)

Factor	(*M*, *SD*)
Scale Item	
Positive Affect, cont.	
23. I think that my life is better because my birth parent(s) decided to have me adopted	(3.80, 1.32)
24. I view my adoptive parent(s) to be my real parent(s)	(4.05, 1.41)
25. The love that parent(s) have for adopted children is the same as the love parent(s) have for their biological children	(3.74, 1.39)
26. I think that my adoptive parent(s) love me just as much as they would if I was biologically related to them	(4.10, 1.32)
27. I respect my birth mother for making the choice to place me in an adoptive family	(4.01, 1.22)
28. I would be open to adopting children myself in the future	(3.39, 1.55)
29. I think my birth mother must have loved me to have made the decision to place me in an adoptive family	(3.59, 1.36)
30. I have fond feelings for my birth parent(s)	(3.49, 1.29)

Note. Items 6, 7, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21 are reverse coded.

(ADQ; Benson, et al., 1994) were used to establish construct validity. All responses

ranged from (1) *not true* to (5) *very true*. Twelve items measured positive affect about

adoption (e.g. "I think my parents are happy that they adopted me"). This subscale

generated acceptable reliability rates, *alpha* = .93. Four items measured negative

experience with adoption (e.g. "I get tired of having to explain adoption to people"). This

subscale generated acceptable reliability rates, *alpha* = .61. Eight items measured

preoccupation about adoption (e.g. "It bothers me that I may have brothers and sisters I

don't know"). This subscale generated acceptable reliability rates, *alpha* = .86.

Self-esteem. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1985)

assessed the participants' level of self-esteem. The RSES measures an individual's sense

of his or her overall worth by posing questions such as "I feel that I'm a person of worth,

at least on an equal plane with others." There are 10 items, five of which are reverse

coded. High scores on this scale indicate high levels of self-esteem. This scale generated

acceptable reliability rates, *alpha* = .93.

Personal well-being. The Affectometer 2 (Kammann & Flett, 1983) assessed the

participants' level of personal well-being. The Affectometer 2 measures an individual's

sense of his or her overall worth by posing questions such as "I smile and laugh a lot."

There are 20 items, 10 of which are reverse coded, to be answered on a scale ranging

from *not at all* (1) to *all the time* (5). High scores on this scale indicate high levels of

well-being. This scale generated an acceptable reliability estimate, *alpha* = .94.

Mental health. The mental health subscale of Dornbusch, Mont-Reynaud, Ritter,

Chen, and Steinberg's (1991) physical and mental health symptom instrument was used

to measure mental health. This eight-item scale elicits frequencies of mental health

stressors such as irritability (e.g. "felt tense or irritable") and loneliness (e.g. "felt alone or apart"). Responses are possible on a four-point scale ranging from (0) never to (3) three or more times a month, but responses were reverse-coded such that higher scores indicated increased mental health. Reliability rates were acceptable, *alpha* = .85.

Data analysis. To test the factor structure of the newly formed Developed Adoptive Identity Scale, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using M*plus* 5.1 (Muthén & Muthén, 2008) to examine the degree to which individual items match the four predetermined theoretical concepts: exploration, salience, positive affect, and negative affect. Statisticians recommend using CFA to explore the underlying factor structure of a scale when there is an a priori assumption of which items measures specific constructs (Levine, 2005). Whereas exploratory factor analysis relies on the data to determine how many factors are present in a set of items, CFA allows researchers to base assumptions about factors on research and theory.

Results. The original, four-factor model demonstrated relatively poor model fit: χ^2 ($N = 196, 399$) $= 1079.85, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 2.71, \text{CFI} = .73; \text{RMSEA} = .09; (CI = 0.09 - 0.10)$. Although the items loaded onto the four factors as expected, modification indices suggested a number of conceptual and statistical modifications. See Table 3.2 for a correlation matrix of these 30 items.

First, modification indices demonstrated that the three items listed below were loading on more than one factor:

> 2. "Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has helped me understand my status as an adopted child"

Table 3.2

Correlation of DAIS Items

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. I have spent a lot of time thinking about my adoption	--									
2. Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has helped me understand my status as an adopted child	0.15*	--								
3. I have spent a lot of time thinking about why my birth parent(s) placed me into an adoptive family	0.53*	0.01	--							
4. I think a lot about my birth parent(s)' characteristics	0.52*	0.13	0.49*	--						
5. Knowing my birth parent(s) was/is important to me in order to understand who I am	0.52*	0.22*	0.37*	0.50*	--					
6. Sometimes I cannot stop thinking about my adoption even if I try	0.56*	0.13	0.42*	0.42*	0.37*	--				
7. I am frustrated by the unanswered questions I have about my adoption	0.44*	-0.08	0.47*	0.42*	0.44*	0.46*	--			
8. I have thought about how my life would have been different if my birth parent(s) would have raised me	0.42*	0.02	0.42*	0.31*	0.27*	0.30*	0.21*	--		
9. I have spent time trying to find out more about my birth parent(s)	0.47*	0.20*	0.29*	0.53*	0.56*	0.39*	0.34*	0.30*	--	
10. I think that some of my personality can be explained by the fact that I was adopted	0.42*	0.24*	0.33*	0.31*	0.38*	0.38*	0.29*	0.39*	0.25*	--

*$p < .05$

(table continues on next page)

Table 3.2

Correlation of DAIS Items (cont.)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11. I think that some of my personality can be explained by my adoptive parent(s)	0.16*	0.23*	0.10	0.13	0.15*	0.12	0.11	0.10	0.16*	0.37*
12. My adoptive status is an important part of who I am, but is not the most important thing about me	-0.08	0.24*	-0.21*	-0.18*	-0.08	-0.27*	-0.18*	-0.09	-0.10	0.06
13. The fact that I was adopted only explains part of who I am	0.12	0.24*	-0.05	-0.01	0.01	-0.05	-0.09	-0.08	-0.02	0.11
14. I have a clear sense of what my adopted status means for me	0.03	0.33*	-0.05	0.01	0.03	-0.07	-0.17*	0.02	0.07	0.17*
15. I am not very clear about the role of my adoption in my life	-0.09	0.07	-0.15*	-0.14*	-0.13	-0.23*	-0.16*	-0.01	-0.02	0.02
16. I change my mind often about what I think about my adoption	-0.14	0.00	-0.32*	-0.12	-0.12	-0.25*	-0.24*	-0.18*	-0.02	-0.11
17. I have strong negative feelings about the fact that I was adopted	-0.33*	0.06	-0.32*	-0.33*	-0.31*	-0.45*	-0.44*	-0.29*	-0.17*	-0.27*
18. I feel rejected by my birth parent(s)	-0.33*	0.06	-0.39*	-0.26*	-0.22*	-0.35*	-0.43*	-0.22*	-0.06	-0.26*
19. Thinking about my adoption too much makes me feel bad	-0.34*	0.18*	-0.41*	-0.24*	-0.23*	-0.49*	-0.44*	-0.28*	-0.17*	-0.18*
20. I blame my adoption for problems I had in my relationship with my adoptive parent(s)	-0.27*	0.00	-0.26*	-0.33*	-0.33*	-0.34*	-0.28*	-0.29*	-0.19*	-0.32*

*$p < .05$

(table continues on next page)

Table 3.2

Correlation of DAIS Items (cont.)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
21. I don't have any strong positive feelings about the fact that I was adopted	-0.15*	0.07	-0.16*	-0.12	-0.16*	-0.29*	-0.23*	-0.11*	0.06	-0.06
22. I am grateful that my birth parent(s) placed me in an adoptive family	-0.23*	0.13	-0.29*	-0.22*	-0.26*	-0.32*	-0.33*	-0.27*	-0.11	-0.16*
23. I think that my life is better because my birth parent(s) decided to have me adopted	-0.21*	0.13	-0.25*	-0.20*	-0.29*	-0.35*	-0.34*	-0.20*	-0.14*	-0.16*
24. I view my adoptive parent(s) to be my real parent(s)	-0.21*	0.05	-0.22*	-0.27*	-0.32*	-0.35*	-0.23*	-0.24*	-0.15*	-0.21*
25. The love that parent(s) have for adopted children is the same as the love parent(s) have for their biological children	-0.28*	0.09	-0.28*	-0.30*	-0.38*	-0.36*	-0.30*	-0.30*	-0.19*	-0.28*
26. I think that my adoptive parent(s) love me just as much as they would if I was biologically related to them	-0.21*	0.10	-0.25*	-0.28*	-0.33*	-0.24*	-0.29*	-0.25*	-0.13	-0.20*
27. I respect my birth mother for making the choice to place me in an adoptive family	-0.13	0.19*	-0.25*	-0.12	-0.15*	-0.24*	-0.31*	-0.20*	-0.02	-0.19*
28. I would be open to adopting children myself in the future	-0.12	0.02	-0.16*	-0.15*	-0.20*	-0.15*	-0.09	-0.14*	-0.08	-0.05
29. I think my birth mother must have loved me to have made the decision to place me in an adoptive family	-0.21*	0.22*	-0.24*	-0.17*	-0.08	-0.22*	-0.37*	-0.23*	-0.09	-0.16*
30. I have fond feelings for my birth parent(s)	0.16*	0.15*	0.01	0.23*	0.43*	0.12	-0.04	0.10*	0.34*	0.05

*$p < .05$

(table continues on next page)

Table 3.2

Correlation of DAIS Items (cont.)

	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
11. I think that some of my personality can be explained by my adoptive parent(s)	--									
12. My adoptive status is an important part of who I am, but is not the most important thing about me	0.22*	--								
13. The fact that I was adopted only explains part of who I am	0.32*	0.46*	--							
14. I have a clear sense of what my adopted status means for me	0.17*	0.18*	0.13	--						
15. I am not very clear about the role of my adoption in my life	-0.01	0.07	-0.11	0.39*	--					
16. I change my mind often about what I think about my adoption	-0.08	0.16*	0.02	0.27*	0.41*	--				
17. I have strong negative feelings about the fact that I was adopted	0.13	0.36*	0.17*	0.18*	0.21*	0.23*	--			
18. I feel rejected by my birth parent(s)	-0.05	0.21*	0.07	0.18*	0.23*	0.25*	0.46*	--		
19. Thinking about my adoption too much makes me feel bad	0.04	0.32*	0.16*	0.33*	0.28*	0.36*	0.54*	0.39*	--	
20. I blame my adoption for problems I had in my relationship with my adoptive parent(s)	0.1	0.27*	0.1	0.15*	0.1	0.20*	0.50*	0.22*	0.41*	--

*$p < .05$

(table continues on next page)

Table 3.2

Correlation of DAIS Items (cont.)

	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21. I don't have any strong positive feelings about the fact that I was adopted	0.17*	0.29*	0.18*	0.25*	0.21*	0.25*	0.46*	0.34*	0.38*	0.25*
22. I am grateful that my birth parent(s) placed me in an adoptive family	0.21*	0.29*	0.21*	0.28*	0.05	0.16*	0.53*	0.27*	0.41*	0.46*
23. I think that my life is better because my birth parent(s) decided to have me adopted	0.33*	0.32*	0.21*	0.23*	0.11	0.15*	0.52*	0.33*	0.37*	0.42*
24. I view my adoptive parent(s) to be my real parent(s)	0.19*	0.21*	0.16*	0.18*	0.09	0.08	0.49*	0.20*	0.34*	0.40*
25. The love that parent(s) have for adopted children is the same as the love parent(s) have for their biological children	0.15*	0.33*	0.20*	0.11	0.06	0.12	0.51*	0.32*	0.30*	0.58*
26. I think that my adoptive parent(s) love me just as much as they would if I was biologically related to them	0.19*	0.11	0.16*	0.11	0.05	0.07	0.43*	0.21*	0.30*	0.49*
27. I respect my birth mother for making the choice to place me in an adoptive family	0.19*	0.27*	0.21*	0.29*	0.11	0.20*	0.50*	0.45*	0.41*	0.35*
28. I would be open to adopting children myself in the future	0.29*	0.16*	0.11	0.06	0.12	0.06	0.27*	0.12	0.19*	0.26*
29. I think my birth mother must have loved me to have made the decision to place me in an adoptive family	0.07	0.29*	0.14*	0.28*	0.11	0.14*	0.49*	0.44*	0.43*	0.30*
30. I have fond feelings for my birth parent(s)	0.08	0.09	0.01	0.16*	0.1	0.12	0.09	0.25*	0.08	-0.06

*$p < .05$

(table continues on next page)

Table 3.2

Correlation of DAIS Items (cont.)

	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
21. I don't have any strong positive feelings about the fact that I was adopted	--									
22. I am grateful that my birth parent(s) placed me in an adoptive family	0.45*	--								
23. I think that my life is better because my birth parent(s) decided to have me adopted	0.44*	0.84*	--							
24. I view my adoptive parent(s) to be my real parent(s)	0.37*	0.63*	0.61*	--						
25. The love that parent(s) have for adopted children is the same as the love parent(s) have for their biological children	0.37*	0.61*	0.61*	0.59*	--					
26. I think that my adoptive parent(s) love me just as much as they would if I was biologically related to them	0.35*	0.59*	0.55*	0.66*	0.72*	--				
27. I respect my birth mother for making the choice to place me in an adoptive family	0.41*	0.59*	0.56*	0.39*	0.47*	0.43*	--			
28. I would be open to adopting children myself in the future	0.28*	0.30*	0.33*	0.29*	0.31*	0.23*	0.23*	--		
29. I think my birth mother must have loved me to have made the decision to place me in an adoptive family	0.28*	0.51*	0.45*	0.28*	0.39*	0.31	0.71*	0.15*	--	
30. I have fond feelings for my birth parent(s)	0.14*	-0.02	-0.03	0.01	-0.03	0.00	0.30*	-0.02	0.32*	--

*$p < .05$

11. "I think that some of my personality can be explained by my adoptive parent(s)"

23. "I think that my life is better because my birth parent(s) decided to have me adopted"

Items that represent more than one factor are problematic because the factors are no longer distinct from one another, thus conflating results from the subscales. These items were dropped from the scale to ensure that the factors are measuring a single construct.

Second, the positive and negative affect items were combined into one factor reflecting general affect about adoption. The decision to combine positive and negative affect items was based on modification indices that demonstrated that the items were loading on both the positive and negative affect factor and were essentially measuring one factor (affect) rather than two distinct factors (positive and negative affect).

Third, modification indices suggested allowing measurement errors of several items to co-vary within the same factor. See Table 3.3 for a list of co-varying items.

After these modifications, model fit was drastically improved: χ^2 ($N = 196, 308$) = 529.16, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 1.72$; CFI = .90; RMSEA = .06; ($CI = 0.05 - 0.07$). As such, the final version of this scale included 27 questions (*alpha* = .75) representing three factors: exploration (*alpha* = .42), salience (*alpha* = .55), and affect (*alpha* = .87). A composite developed adoptive identity variable was formed using all the items from the DAIS to obtain a global assessment of developed adoptive identity.

To get a sense of the validity of the original scale, additional analysis was performed to establish construct, predictive, and concurrent validity. Hypothesis 1

Table 3.3

Co-varying Items in CFA Analysis

Factor	Co-varying Items	
Exploration	4	9
	4	5
	5	9
	7	8
Salience	13	12
	15	16
Affect	17	18
	17	27
	18	19
	18	28
	19	17
	20	22
	24	25

predicted that individuals who indicated that they have an integrated adoptive identity on

the AIQ would have high scores on the DAIS. A one-way ANOVA revealed that DAIS

did differ by significantly by identity as assessed by the AIQ, F (3, 179) = 21.37, $p < .05$,

$\eta^2 = .26$. LSD post-hoc tests revealed significant differences on DAIS between

integrated ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .40$) and unsettled ($M = 3.46$, $SD = .42$). Integrated was not

significantly different from limited ($M = 3.51$, $SD = .53$) or unexamined ($M = 3.73$, $SD = $

.42). Thus, individuals with integrated adoptive identities have the highest scores on the

DAIS, although this difference is only significant when compared with individuals with

unsettled identities. These results provide partial support for hypothesis 1, providing

some concurrent validity for the DAIS.

Hypotheses 2 examined construct validity by predicting a positive relationship

between DAIS and positive affect (H2a) as well as a negative relationship with

preoccupation (H2b) and negative experience about adoption (H2c) as measured by the

ADQ. A positive correlation was discovered between DAIS and positive affect about adoption, r (182) = .70, p < .05, thus supporting H2a. A negative correlation was discovered between preoccupation with adoption, r (181) = -.31, p < .05, as well as negative experience about adoption, r (182) = -.51, p < .05, thus supporting hypotheses 2b and 2c. These results suggest that individuals with high scores on the DAIS tend to have positive feelings about their adoption, tend to not be preoccupied with their adoption, and tend to not have a negative experience with their adoption, thus providing construct validity for the DAIS.

Hypotheses 3 examined predictive validity by predicting positive relationships between DAIS and self-esteem, personal well-being, and mental health. A positive correlation was discovered between the DAIS and self-esteem, r (170) = .48, p < .05; personal well-being, r (168) = .53, p < .05; and mental health, r (171) = .28, p < .05, thus supporting hypotheses 3. These results indicate that individuals with high scores on the DAIS tend to have high self-esteem, personal well-being, and mental health and provide predictive validity for the DAIS.

Discussion of pilot study one. Study one was the first attempt at establishing a scale to measure levels of developed adoptive identity, or the degree to which an individual incorporates both positive and negative aspects of their adoption into a sense of self that includes but is not overly preoccupied with their adopted status. Results from the initial study provide early support for the creation of such a scale but also illuminate several areas for improvement. In terms of support for the scale, reliability analysis indicate that the scale directs participants to respond in consistent ways as a whole, and validity analyses indicate that the DAIS is indeed a measure of one's developed adoptive

identity. Results from the CFA, however, indicate that there are underlying issues with individual items, and reliability estimates were low on the exploration and salience subscales. To address the measurement issues specific to the individual items, I instigated a round of revisions to the scale items and collected additional data to further examine the factor structure, reliability, and validity of the revised DAIS.

Study Two: Testing the Modified Scale

After examining the model structure and modification indices from study one, three main revisions to the scale became necessary. First, two different factors seemed to be present in the exploration factor. One set of questions revolved around the level of thinking an individual had devoted to his or her adoption whereas a second of items queried the degree to which an individual sought out answers to questions he or she had about the adoption. These two groups of items were then separated into *reflective exploration,* involving thinking about the details of one's adoption at length, and *behavioral exploration,* involving actively gathering information in order to better understand one's own adoption experience. I adapted the original questions from study one to reflect these two specific factors. For reflective exploration, I retained one question, revised previously existing items into 11 questions, and added one new question measuring perceptions of spending a healthy amount of time reflecting on his or her adoption for a total of 14 items measuring reflective exploration. For behavioral exploration, I developed three new items to better represent item 7 from the original scale ("I am frustrated by the unanswered questions I have about my adoption"). Rather than asking about one's level of frustration about unanswered questions, I developed three questions that assessed the extent to which there was additional information that the

participant could gather if he or she desired (e.g. "There is more information I could get about my adoption if I wanted to") based on the adoptive typology descriptions in previous research (Donahue, 2008; Dunbar, 2003) as well as the descriptions of the exploration dimension in the *Manual for coding identity in adoptees* (Grotevant, Dunbar, et al., 1999). I also revised previously existing items into seven questions for a total of 10 items measuring behavioral exploration.

Second, two groups of questions also emerged in the salience factor. One group of questions addressed the degree to which one's adoption represents *one aspect* of one's identity without comprising one's entire sense of self. The second set of items addressed the degree to which one's adoption occupies a large portion of mental and emotional energy. These groups of questions were separated into two components: *salience,* referring to the prominence, importance, and meaning of the adoption as balanced with other aspects of the self, and *preoccupation*, reflecting a lack of integration of the adoption to other aspects of the self. I revised previous items into six questions measuring salience and developed six new items to measure preoccupation based on the descriptions and examples of preoccupation from previous adoption research (Dunbar, 2003; Grotevant, 1997).

The final change emerging from the initial CFA involved removing positive and negative affect from the developed adoptive identity factor structure and positioning affect as a correlate of identity. Understanding affect as a correlate rather than a component of adoptive identity makes good theoretical sense in light of the most recent research on adoptive identity. Von Korff (2008) drew from affect theory in describing positive and negative feelings about one's adoption as a consequence of the identity work

inherent in identity development and removed the affect constructs from her

measurement of adoptive identity. Von Korff's research provides a strong rationale for

my removal of affection from the developed adoptive identity construct. See Table 3.4

for a complete list of items for study two.

In addition to testing the factor structure of the revised scale, it is important to

demonstrate that the scale continues to be valid even in light of the changes to the scale.

My second goal in study two is to replicate study one findings for predictive, construct,

and concurrent validity.

 Based on the reasoning provided in study one, I offer the following hypotheses:

H1: Individuals indicating that they have an integrated adoptive identity on the

AIQ should have high scores on the DAIS.

H2a: Developed adoptive identity as measured by the DAIS is positively

associated with positive affect about adoption as measured by the ADQ.

H2b: Developed adoptive identity as measured by the DAIS is negatively

associated with preoccupation about adoption as measured by the ADQ.

H2c: Developed adoptive identity as measured by the DAIS is negatively

associated with negative experience with adoption as measured by the ADQ.

H3: Developed adoptive identity as measured by the DAIS is positively

associated with self-esteem.

Hypothesis 3 contains only one measure to establish predictive validity rather

than three measures used in study one to shorten the survey as to avoid participant

fatigue. Self-esteem is the most established of the three measures, as researchers have the

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1985) in numerous studies over decades of

Table 3.4

Revised DAIS items

Factor	(*M, SD*)
Item	
Reflective Exploration	
1. I have reflected on the situations surrounding my birth*	(4.64, .72)
2. I have reflected on the situations surrounding my placement in my adoptive family*	(4.35, 1.06)
3. Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has been helpful to me*	(3.62, 1.28)
4. Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has helped me understand how I relate to my birth parent(s)*	(3.36, 1.29)
5. Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has helped me understand how I relate to my adoptive parent(s)*	(3.59, 1.29)
6. I have a clear understanding of why my birth parent(s) placed me into an adoptive family*	(3.53, 1.54)
7. I have thought about my birth parent(s) characteristics*	(4.35, 1.01)
8. I have never really had a desire to know information about my birth parents*	(4.25, 1.25)
9. I feel that I have spent an appropriate amount of time thinking about my adoption*	(4.03, 1.07)
10. I think I have spent a healthy amount of time reflecting on my adoption**	(4.00, 1.14)
11. I have thought about how my life would have been different if my birth parent(s) would have raised me	(4.21, 1.00)
12. I have thought about how my life would have been different if I hadn't been adopted*	(4.23, .94)
13. I have thought about which aspects of my personality could be explained by my adoptive parent(s)' characteristics*	(4.18, .94)
14. I have thought about which aspects of my personality could be explained by my birth parent(s)' characteristics*	(4.03, 1.08)
Behavioral Exploration	
15. I have gathered information about my birth parents*	(3.77, 1.48)
16. I have sought out information about my birth parents*	(4.03, 1.42)
17. Meeting my birth parent(s) is/was important to me*	(3.94, 1.39)
18. Meeting my birth parent(s) helped/would help me understand my situation better*	(3.75, 1.41)

* Indicates items that were revised from original DAIS items.
** Indicates new items written for study two.
Note. Items 8, 21, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36 are reverse coded. The final version of the DAIS consists of items 3, 4, 5, 9, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, 29, 31, 33, 34, 35, and 36.

Table 3.4

Revised DAIS items (cont.)

Factor Item	(*M*, *SD*)
Behavioral Exploration, cont.	
19. Gathering information about my birth parent(s) is/was important to me*	(4.10, 1.29)
20. Gathering information about my birth parent(s) helped/would help me understand my situation better*	(3.98, 1.31)
21. There is more information I could get about my adoption if I wanted to**	(2.95, 1.32)
22. I think my questions about my adoption are answered as much as is possible**	(3.10, 1.32)
23. I know everything that can be known about my adoption**	(2.47, 1.30)
24. I have spent time trying to find out more about my birth parent(s)*	(3.92, 1.37)
Salience	
25. I think my adoption is an important *part* of who I am*	(4.20, 1.05)
26. I think my experiences as an adopted child have shaped who I am as a person*	(4.05, 1.19)
27. If I hadn't been adopted, I think I would be pretty much the same person I am now*	(2.43, 1.10)
28. The fact that I was adopted explains *some* aspects of who I am as a person*	(4.02, .94)
29. I think that my adoption has played a *part* in why I am the way that I am*	(4.10, .98)
30. *Some* of my personality is the way that it is because of my status as an adopted child*	(3.84, 1.10)
Preoccupation	
31. My adoption is the most important thing about me**	(3.97, 1.13)
32. I am first and foremost an adopted individual**	(3.78, 1.34)
33. It is difficult to have any part of my life detached from my adopted status**	(3.64, 1.33)
34. My adoption affects the way I see everything in the world**	(3.42, 1.37)
35. I feel like nearly every aspect of who I am is the way that it is because of my adoption**	(3.60, 1.32)
36. People cannot understand anything about me if they do not know I am adopted**	(3.92, 1.21)

* Indicates items that were revised from original DAIS items.
** Indicates new items written for study two.
Note. Items 8, 21, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36 are reverse coded. The final version of the DAIS consists of items 3, 4, 5, 9, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, 29, 31, 33, 34, 35, and 36.

research with consistently reliable and valid results (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001); therefore, this measure was used rather than mental health or personal well-being in the second pilot study.

Methods.

  Participants and procedures. The participants in study two were 119 adults (33 men, 78 women, 8 unidentified) adopted by an individual other than a step-parent. Ages ranged from 18 to 63 ($M = 33.68$, $SD = 12.81$).

  Recruitment was conducted similarly to study one, using communication courses and online forums focused on adoption (see Appendix E for recruitment script). Before posting the recruitment script to an Internet forum, I first asked the moderator for permission using a form letter (see Appendix F). Additionally, I invited 86 individuals from study one who indicated they were willing to complete additional surveys, of which 75 individuals accepted (see Appendix G for invitation). Individuals interested in completing the study were directed to the online survey posted using Qualtrics where they first read and agreed to an Internal Review Board informed consent form (see Appendix H) then completed the online questionnaire (see Appendix I). As in study one, participation was voluntary, however a small amount of extra credit was available to individuals enrolled in participating courses for completing the survey.

  Measures.

  Developed adoptive identity. The revised DAIS consisted of 36 questions in 4 factors: reflective exploration, behavioral exploration, salience, and preoccupation.

  Adoptive Identity Questionnaire. Donahue's (2008) Adoptive Identity Questionnaire (AIQ) was once again used to establish concurrent validity.

Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire. The preoccupation, positive affect, and negative experience with adoption subscales of the Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire (ADQ; Benson, et al., 1994) were once used to establish construct validity. Reliability rates were again acceptable for the preoccupation (*alpha* = .83), positive affect (*alpha* = .94), and negative experience (*alpha* = .66) subscales.

Self-esteem. I again used the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1985) to assess the participants' level of self-esteem to establish predictive validity. Reliability rates were again acceptable, *alpha* = .83.

Results. The new four-factor model indicated a poor fit when compared to the data: χ^2 (N = 100, 588) = 1271.66, $p < .001$; χ^2/df = 2.16; CFI = .69; RMSEA = .108; (*CI* = 0.10 - 0.12). See Table 3.5 for a correlation matrix of these 36 items.

Again, many of the items loaded into the factors as expected, yet some items emerged as problematic. Modification indices suggested that the questions listed below were problematic due to dual loading in other factors; these items were dropped from the scale.

1. "I have reflected on the situations surrounding my birth"

2. "I have reflected on the situations surrounding my placement in my adoptive family"

6. "I have a clear understanding of why my birth parent(s) placed me into an adoptive family"

7. "I have thought about my birth parent(s) characteristics"

8. "I have never really had a desire to know information about my birth parents"

Table 3.5

Correlation of Revised DAIS Items in Pilot Study Two

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. I have reflected on the situations surrounding my birth	--									
2. I have reflected on the situations surrounding my placement in my adoptive family	0.70*	--								
3. Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has been helpful to me	0.46*	0.53*	--							
4. Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has helped me understand how I relate to my birth parent(s)	0.43*	0.44*	0.72*	--						
5. Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has helped me understand how I relate to my adoptive parent(s)	0.30*	0.26*	0.55*	0.55*	--					
6. I have a clear understanding of why my birth parent(s) placed me into an adoptive family	0.23*	0.22*	0.37*	0.46*	0.24*	--				
7. I have thought about my birth parent(s) characteristics	0.54*	0.45*	0.53*	0.41*	0.13	0.16	--			
8. I have never really had a desire to know information about my birth parents	0.39*	0.35*	0.28*	0.25*	-0.01	0.14	0.51*	--		
9. I feel that I have spent an appropriate amount of time thinking about my adoption	0.32*	0.23*	0.25*	0.27*	0.28*	0.18*	0.16	0.04	--	
10. I think I have spent a healthy amount of time reflecting on my adoption	0.33*	0.20*	0.35*	0.25*	0.26*	0.26*	0.20*	0.10	0.70*	--

*$p < .05$

(table continues on next page)

Table 3.5

Correlation of Revised DAIS Items in Pilot Study Two (cont.)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11. I have thought about how my life would have been different if my birth parent(s) would have raised me	0.36*	0.36*	0.18*	0.14	0.16*	0.12	0.24*	0.04	0.10	0.15
12. I have thought about how my life would have been different if I hadn't been adopted	0.38*	0.29*	0.19*	0.12	0.09	0.03	0.22*	-0.01	0.14	0.10
13. I have thought about which aspects of my personality could be explained by my adoptive parent(s)' characteristics	0.40*	0.23*	0.26*	0.18*	0.23*	0.20*	0.38*	0.17	0.18*	0.18*
14. I have thought about which aspects of my personality could be explained by my birth parent(s)' characteristics	0.37*	0.35*	0.34*	0.33*	0.09	0.13	0.47*	0.30*	0.12	0.10
15. I have gathered information about my birth parents	0.49*	0.43*	0.49*	0.45*	0.19*	0.36*	0.58*	0.59*	0.09	0.22*
16. I have sought out information about my birth parents	0.46*	0.41*	0.49*	0.43*	0.14	0.19*	0.67*	0.67*	0.02	0.09
17. Meeting my birth parent(s) is/was important to me	0.52*	0.50*	0.44*	0.44*	0.14	0.19*	0.63*	0.72*	0.05	0.06
18. Meeting my birth parent(s) helped/would help me understand my situation better	0.39*	0.40*	0.32*	0.28*	0.06	0.10	0.54*	0.57*	-0.02	-0.03
19. Gathering information about my birth parent(s) is/was important to me	0.58*	0.51*	0.45*	0.45*	0.15	0.18*	0.62*	0.71*	0.14	0.17
20. Gathering information about my birth parent(s) helped/would help me understand my situation better	0.33*	0.25*	0.29*	0.30*	0.09	0.14	0.49*	0.41*	0.03	-0.01

*$p < .05$

(table continues on next page)

Table 3.5

Correlation of Revised DAIS Items in Pilot Study Two (cont.)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
21. There is more information I could get about my adoption if I wanted to	0.02	0.05	0.14	0.06	0.00	-0.09	0.08	0.29*	-0.17	-0.07
22. I think my questions about my adoption are answered as much as is possible	0.01	-0.01	0.07	0.13	0.11	0.34*	-0.14	-0.15	0.22*	0.26*
23. I know everything that can be known about my adoption	0.08	0.17	0.13	0.19*	0.11	0.31*	-0.06	-0.01	0.12	0.19*
24. I have spent time trying to find out more about my birth parent(s)	0.44*	0.41*	0.48*	0.43*	0.15	0.16	0.66*	0.58*	0.09	0.14
25. I think my adoption is an important part of who I am	0.46*	0.37*	0.35*	0.36*	0.35*	0.19*	0.33*	0.29*	0.18*	0.22*
26. I think my experiences as an adopted child have shaped who I am as a person	0.35*	0.27*	0.24*	0.25*	0.19*	0.05	0.19*	0.18*	0.12	0.07
27. If I hadn't been adopted, I think I would be pretty much the same person I am now	0.03	0.08	0.10	0.09	0.12	0.00	-0.02	-0.06	-0.04	0.02
28. The fact that I was adopted explains some aspects of who I am as a person	0.46*	0.43*	0.25*	0.25*	0.30*	0.26*	0.31*	0.17	0.20*	0.21*
29. I think that my adoption has played a part in why I am the way that I am	0.31*	0.32*	0.20*	0.27*	0.30*	0.25*	0.18*	0.08	0.17	0.13
30. Some of my personality is the way that it is because of my status as an adopted child	0.24*	0.25*	0.09	0.11	0.18*	0.03	0.19*	0.11	0.08	-0.07

*p < .05

(table continues on next page)

Table 3.5

Correlation of Revised DAIS Items in Pilot Study Two (cont.)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
31. My adoption is the most important thing about me	-0.23*	-0.23*	-0.13	-0.16	-0.11	0.03	-0.20*	-0.21*	-0.07	0.00
32. I am first and foremost an adopted individual	-0.10	-0.09	-0.13	-0.09	-0.16	0.21*	-0.07	-0.03	-0.04	0.04
33. It is difficult to have any part of my life detached from my adopted status	-0.23*	-0.16	-0.18*	-0.08	-0.12	0.10	-0.19*	-0.13	-0.06	0.08
34. My adoption affects the way I see everything in the world	-0.20*	-0.18*	-0.06	-0.08	-0.07	0.05	-0.20*	-0.18*	0.01	0.19*
35. I feel like nearly every aspect of who I am is the way that it is because of my adoption	-0.08	-0.04	0.00	0.07	-0.02	0.15	-0.12	-0.14	0.13	0.22*
36. People cannot understand anything about me if they do not know I am adopted	-0.14	-0.20*	-0.08	-0.08	-0.02	0.07	-0.22*	-0.17	0.05	0.17

*$p < .05$

(table continues on next page)

Table 3.5

Correlation of Revised DAIS Items in Pilot Study Two (cont.)

	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
11. I have thought about how my life would have been different if my birth parent(s) would have raised me	--									
12. I have thought about how my life would have been different if I hadn't been adopted	0.78*	--								
13. I have thought about which aspects of my personality could be explained by my adoptive parent(s)' characteristics	0.37*	0.43*	--							
14. I have thought about which aspects of my personality could be explained by my birth parent(s)' characteristics	0.35*	0.21*	0.42*	--						
15. I have gathered information about my birth parents	0.07	0.07	0.19*	0.45*	--					
16. I have sought out information about my birth parents	0.17	0.17	0.27*	0.48*	0.80*	--				
17. Meeting my birth parent(s) is/was important to me	0.23*	0.22*	0.24*	0.45*	0.68*	0.81*	--			
18. Meeting my birth parent(s) helped/would help me understand my situation better	0.21*	0.17	0.27*	0.40*	0.55*	0.66*	0.77*	--		
19. Gathering information about my birth parent(s) is/was important to me	0.27*	0.23*	0.24*	0.42*	0.66*	0.78*	0.81*	0.71*	--	
20. Gathering information about my birth parent(s) helped/would help me understand my situation better	0.19*	0.17	0.30*	0.41*	0.43*	0.60*	0.64*	0.65*	0.62*	--

*$p < .05$

(table continues on next page)

Table 3.5

Correlation of Revised DAIS Items in Pilot Study Two (cont.)

	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21. There is more information I could get about my adoption if I wanted to	0.09	0.14	0.06	0.18*	0.24*	0.29*	0.29*	0.20*	0.24*	0.11
22. I think my questions about my adoption are answered as much as is possible	0.09	0	0.02	-0.06	-0.01	-0.14	-0.18*	-0.13*	-0.16	-0.06
23. I know everything that can be known about my adoption	0.13	0.02	0.05	0.08	0.28*	0.01	0.02	0.09	0.01	-0.07
24. I have spent time trying to find out more about my birth parent(s)	0.15	0.17	0.26*	0.47*	0.69*	0.78*	0.72*	0.55*	0.78*	0.49*
25. I think my adoption is an important part of who I am	0.15	0.14	0.41*	0.40*	0.40*	0.36*	0.44*	0.40*	0.48*	0.36*
26. I think my experiences as an adopted child have shaped who I am as a person	0.08	0.16	0.22*	0.33*	0.23*	0.27*	0.40*	0.31*	0.35*	0.43*
27. If I hadn't been adopted, I think I would be pretty much the same person I am now	0.04	-0.07	0.01	0.04	0.11	0.11	0.04	0.16*	-0.02	-0.17
28. The fact that I was adopted explains some aspects of who I am as a person	0.24*	0.22*	0.38*	0.37*	0.32*	0.32*	0.36*	0.32*	0.39*	0.24*
29. I think that my adoption has played a part in why I am the way that I am	0.17	0.14	0.25*	0.19*	0.20*	0.19*	0.27*	0.21*	0.29*	0.26*
30. Some of my personality is the way that it is because of my status as an adopted child	0.07	0.13	0.19	0.21*	0.17	0.22*	0.36*	0.27*	0.25*	0.19*

*$p < .05$

(table continues on next page)

Table 3.5

Correlation of Revised DAIS Items in Pilot Study Two (cont.)

	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
31. My adoption is the most important thing about me	-0.07	-0.16	-0.21*	-0.24*	-0.13	-0.24*	-0.35*	-0.33*	-0.25*	-0.37*
32. I am first and foremost an adopted individual	-0.03	-0.15	-0.23*	-0.09	-0.04	-0.14	-0.20	-0.19*	-0.14	-0.23*
33. It is difficult to have any part of my life detached from my adopted status	-0.04	-0.15	-0.27*	-0.22*	-0.08	-0.21*	-0.29*	-0.32*	-0.29*	-0.40*
34. My adoption affects the way I see everything in the world	-0.19*	-0.32*	-0.26*	-0.19*	-0.10	-0.27*	-0.38*	-0.39*	-0.37*	-0.46*
35. I feel like nearly every aspect of who I am is the way that it is because of my adoption	-0.13	-0.25*	-0.18*	-0.04	-0.09	-0.25*	-0.28*	-0.30*	-0.29*	-0.29*
36. People cannot understand anything about me if they do not know I am adopted	-0.09	-0.17	-0.13	-0.24*	-0.14	-0.26*	-0.39*	-0.29*	-0.28*	-0.22*

*p < .05

Table 3.5

Correlation of Revised DAIS Items in Pilot Study Two (cont.)

	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
21. There is more information I could get about my adoption if I wanted to	--									
22. I think my questions about my adoption are answered as much as is possible	-0.17	--								
23. I know everything that can be known about my adoption	0.14	0.57*	--							
24. I have spent time trying to find out more about my birth parent(s)	0.25*	-0.26*	-0.07	--						
25. I think my adoption is an important part of who I am	0.06	-0.11	-0.05	0.48*	--					
26. I think my experiences as an adopted child have shaped who I am as a person	0.05	-0.01	-0.05	0.26*	0.56*	--				
27. If I hadn't been adopted, I think I would be pretty much the same person I am now	0.13	0.04	0.24*	0.06	-0.12	-0.44*	--			
28. The fact that I was adopted explains some aspects of who I am as a person	0.04	0.06	0.14	0.40*	0.72*	0.43*	-0.07	--		
29. I think that my adoption has played a part in why I am the way that I am	-0.11	0.02	0.00	0.27*	0.65*	0.48*	-0.21*	0.75*	--	
30. Some of my personality is the way that it is because of my status as an adopted child	0.08	-0.10	0.07	0.19*	0.47*	0.54*	-0.17	0.51*	0.55*	--

*$p < .05$

(table continues on next page)

Table 3.5

Correlation of Revised DAIS Items in Pilot Study Two (cont.)

	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31. My adoption is the most important thing about me	-0.03	0.11	0.01	-0.23*	-0.31*	-0.31*	0.12	-0.24*	-0.27*	-0.30*
32. I am first and foremost an adopted individual	-0.04	0.14	0.09	-0.20*	-0.26*	-0.29*	0.14	-0.15	-0.24*	-0.25*
33. It is difficult to have any part of my life detached from my adopted status	-0.08	0.14	0.11	-0.29*	-0.37*	-0.38*	0.18*	-0.29*	-0.34*	-0.37*
34. My adoption affects the way I see everything in the world	-0.22*	0.18*	0.11	-0.36*	-0.36*	-0.37*	0.30*	-0.32*	-0.34*	-0.45*
35. I feel like nearly every aspect of who I am is the way that it is because of my adoption	-0.15	0.05	0.05	-0.30*	-0.37*	-0.30*	0.16	-0.34*	-0.30*	-0.48*
36. People cannot understand anything about me if they do not know I am adopted	-0.15	0.20*	0.16	-0.27*	-0.41*	-0.40*	0.19*	-0.39*	-0.30*	-0.50*

*$p < .05$

(table continues on next page)

Table 3.5

Correlation of Revised DAIS Items in Pilot Study Two (cont.)

	31	32	33	34	35	36
31. My adoption is the most important thing about me	--					
32. I am first and foremost an adopted individual	0.75*	--				
33. It is difficult to have any part of my life detached from my adopted status	0.70*	0.70*	--			
34. My adoption affects the way I see everything in the world	0.53*	0.51*	0.69*	--		
35. I feel like nearly every aspect of who I am is the way that it is because of my adoption	0.42*	0.51*	0.58*	0.65*	--	
36. People cannot understand anything about me if they do not know I am adopted	0.50*	0.43*	0.55*	0.47*	0.55*	--

*$p < .05$

13. "I have thought about which aspects of my personality could be explained by my adoptive parent(s)' characteristics"

14. "I have thought about which aspects of my personality could be explained by my birth parent(s)' characteristics"

21. "There is more information I could get about my adoption if I wanted to"

22. "I think my questions about my adoption are answered as much as is possible"

23. "I know everything that can be known about my adoption"

27. "If I hadn't been adopted, I think I would be pretty much the same person I am now"

30. "Some of my personality is the way that it is because of my status as an adopted child"

Modification indices also suggested that the errors of several items were co-varying within factors, suggesting that items were essentially measuring the same concept. In examining the wording of co-varying items, I retained the item that best embodied the essence of the factor it was measuring and dropped the less clear item except in the case of item 35 and item 36. Both of 35 and 36 were specific to the preoccupation factor and represented distinct aspects of this factor, so both items were retained in the final version of the scale. Table 3.6 below lists the items that co-varied.

After dropping problematic items and allowing two items to co-vary, model fit was acceptable: χ^2 ($N = 100$, 145) = 180.19, $p = .03$; $\chi^2/df = 1.24$; CFI = .97; RMSEA = .05, ($CI = .02 - .07$). The final version of the DAIS from this second round of revisions included 19 items in four factors. The reliability for this set of questions was acceptable,

Table 3.6

Co-varying Items in CFA Analysis.

Factor	Co-varying Items	
Reflective Exploration	9	10*
	12	11*
Behavioral Exploration	16	15*
Salience	29	28*
Preoccupation	32	31*
	35	31*
	35	36

Note. Items marked with * were dropped from the scale.

alpha = .74 as well as for the subscales for reflective exploration (*alpha* = .70),

behavioral exploration (*alpha* = .95), salience (*alpha* = .87), and preoccupation (*alpha* =

.90).

To demonstrate validity and replicate findings from study 1, analysis was

conducted to establish construct, predictive, and concurrent validity. Hypothesis 1

predicted that individuals who indicated that they have an integrated adoptive identity on

the AIQ would have high scores on the revised DAIS. A one-way ANOVA revealed that

DAIS did differ significantly by identity as indicated by the AIQ, $F (3, 105) = 4.57$, $p <$

.05, $\eta^2 = .12$. LSD post-hoc tests revealed significant differences on DAIS between

integrated (*M* = 4.04, *SD* = .55) and limited (*M* = 3.66, *SD* = .40) and unexamined (*M* =

3.54, *SD* = .63). Integrated was not significantly different from unsettled (*M* = 3.88, *SD*

= .43). Thus, individuals with integrated adoptive identities have the highest scores on

the revised DAIS, although this difference is only significant when compared with

individuals with limited and unexamined identities. These results provide partial support

for hypothesis 1, providing some concurrent validity for the DAIS.

Hypotheses 2 examined construct validity by predicting a positive relationship

between DAIS and positive affect (H2a) as well as a negative relationship with preoccupation (H2b) and negative experience about adoption (H2c) as measured by the ADQ. The revised DAIS was no longer correlated with positive affect about adoption, r (112) = .09, p = .175, or preoccupation with adoption, r (112) = .04, p = .328, thus hypotheses 2a and 2b were not supported. A negative correlation was discovered between the revised DAIS and negative experience with adoption, r (112) = -.21, $p < .05$, thus supporting hypotheses 2c. These results suggest that individuals with high scores on the DAIS tend not to have a negative experience with their adoption, thus providing some construct validity for the DAIS.

Hypothesis 3 examined predictive validity by predicting a positive relationship between the revised DAIS and self-esteem. A positive correlation was discovered between the revised DAIS and self-esteem, r (113) = .17, $p < .05$, supporting H3. This result indicates that individuals with high scores on the revised DAIS tend to have high self-esteem and provides predictive validity for the revised DAIS.

Discussion for pilot study two. Pilot study two attempted to assess the validity and reliability of the revised DAIS, a measure of developed adopted identity in adult adoptees. Results indicate that the final 19-item version of the DAIS is valid and reliable. CFA results support the proposed four-factor structure of the scale by demonstrating a good fit of the model to the data with scale items loading only in expected factors. Reliability estimates indicate that participants answered the DAIS in a consistent manner.

Analysis also gives an indication of the validity of the scale. The DAIS produced similar results as the AIQ, which was the only known self-report scale to measure adoptive identity. Individuals with high scores on the DAIS were most likely to identify

themselves as having an integrated adoptive identity in the AIQ. Further, individuals who identified themselves as having an integrated adoptive identity had the highest score on the DAIS. These results lend support for the concurrent validity by suggesting conceptual overlap between the two scales. In other words, it is highly likely from this analysis that the DAIS and the AIQ measure the same construct. The DAIS provides an advantage over the AIQ, however, in two regards. First, the DAIS produces a less coarse measure of adoptive identity by allowing individuals to respond to individuals items rather than responding to several sentences at once; whereas the latter measure forces individuals to select a set of statements in the aggregate, the DAIS gives individuals the flexibility to indicate the degree to which a series of focused statements represent their experience. Second, the DAIS provides a stronger representation of Grotevant and colleague's (2000) adoptive identity theorizing which positions adoptive identity as progressing from a state of awareness to a state of awareness, integration, and resolution. Because possible scores range from low to high, the DAIS captures the progression of identity development as established in Grotevant's theorizing.

Support for construct validity of the DAIS using the ADQ was somewhat mixed. The negative experience subscale of the ADQ was negatively correlated with the DAIS, suggesting that individuals with developed adoptive identities tend to have a positive outlook on their adoption. Such a finding is consistent with previous research (Donahue, 2008) as well as adoptive identity theorizing indicating that individuals with developed adoptive identities have made sense of and have come to terms with the events leading up to their adoption (Grotevant, 1997). This type of resolution of adoption-related issues likely provides a conduit to a more positive outlook on one's adoption.

The DAIS, however, was not correlated with the positive affect and preoccupation subscales of the ADQ in the second study, findings that contradict results from the first study in which DAIS was correlated with both positive affect and preoccupation. Reasons for a lack of a relationship between these constructs are likely specific to the individual subscales. In regards to the positive affect subscale, the initial factor structure of the DAIS included affect, with specific items addressing positive feelings about adoption. The similarity of these items likely explains the significant correlation in the first study. After items addressing affect were removed from the DAIS, the two scales were less conceptually similar and were no longer correlated in the second study.

In terms of the preoccupation, it seems unusual that there is no longer a correlation between the DAIS and the preoccupation subscale of the ADQ given that items specifically measuring preoccupation were included in the revised DAIS in the second study. However, closer examination of the items in the preoccupation subscale of the ADQ suggests that these scales are less similar than they appear to be on the surface. The ADQ items in the preoccupation subscale seem to measure satisfaction with one's level of knowledge. For example, questions such as "It bothers me that I may have brothers and sisters I don't know" and "I wish I knew more about my birthmother" specifically address levels of knowledge. The preoccupation items in the DAIS, however, measure the degree to which one's adoption consumes mental and emotional energy (e.g. "My adoption affects the way I see everything in the world"). Because these scales are less conceptually similar after revisions to the DAIS, it is not surprising that there is no longer a significant relationship between the constructs.

The nonsignificant findings between the DAIS and the ADQ do not offer support of

construct validity for the newly developed scale. I do not perceive these findings to take away from the validity of the DAIS, however. The DAIS possesses strong face validity in regards to adoptive identity theorizing as well as concurrent and predictive validity as supported by other analysis in this second study. These findings likely represent the conceptual distinctions between these two scales. Because the ADQ does not set out to specifically measure adoptive identity, these nonsignificant findings carry less weight.

A final evidence of the validity of the DAIS is based on findings supporting the relationship between developed adoptive identity and self-esteem. A long line of research indicates that adoptees who have explored the circumstances leading up to their adoption and have attached some meaning to their adoption status tend to experience higher levels of self-esteem (Brodzinsky, 1993; Friedlander, 1999). Similar findings in this second study suggest that the DAIS possesses predictive validity.

Considering these findings to establish the validity of the scale as a whole, the preponderance of evidence suggests that the DAIS is indeed a measure of developed adoptive identity. The DAIS produces scores that are similar to three sets of measures: established measures of adoptive identity (AIQ); measures of a similar concept to adoptive identity (negative experience with adoption, ADQ); and measures of known correlates of adoptive identity (self-esteem, RSES). Combining these findings with the reliability and CFA estimates from the second study, the DAIS appears to be a sound assessment of developed adoptive identity in adult adoptees.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described my rationale for establishing a self-report, continuous measure of developed adoptive identity as well as the two iterations of data collection and

analysis I conducted to establish the validity and reliability of the newly developed scale. This scale development process has resulted in a final set of 19-items measuring the four aspects of developed adoptive identity – behavioral exploration, reflective exploration, salience, and preoccupation. I use this final version of the DAIS in my dissertation study to measure developed adoptive identity. Because my dissertation positions developed adoptive identity as the mediator between parental communication and adoptee well-being, the DAIS plays a prominent role in my dissertation data analysis. I explain my research design in the following chapter, specifically describing my recruitment strategy and the measures used in the survey.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODS

My purpose in the current study is to advance research on the role of adoptive parents' communication in facilitating the formation of developed adoptive identity. Developed adoptive identities are those identities in which individuals incorporate both positive and negative aspects of their adoption into a sense of self that includes but is not overly preoccupied with their adopted status development. Pulling from adoption, identity, and communication literature, I give theoretical and empirical evidence for the association between parental communication and developed adoptive identity development as well as the relationship between developed adoptive identity development and well-being. Taking this together, I aim to develop a holistic understanding of the process of adoptive identity development from a communication perspective.

In this chapter, I explain my design to test the hypotheses in the current study. I first describe the recruitment procedures by presenting my sampling criteria and procedures. Second, I describe the measures used in the current study.

Participants

Participants included 220 (39 men, 166 women, 15 unknown/other) adults adopted by an individual other than a step-parent. Ages ranged from 19 to 75 ($M = 40.48$, $SD = 12.93$). I offer additional participation information including age at adoption, foster care, and international adoption in the next chapter in the "Post-hoc Analysis" section.

I strove to collect responses from approximately 300 individuals, yet soliciting participation was difficult without compensation. Although my sample is smaller than desired, I am still within Kline's (2005) recommendation of 10 participants per observed variable. Given that the proposed model consists of 13 observed variables (see Figure 2.1), a minimum of 130 participants should provide sufficient power to assess the relationships put forth in the model, meaning that my sample of 220 is acceptable according to these standards.

Procedures: Recruitment

Participants were recruited from three sources using the recruitment script (Appendix J). First, participants were recruited in introductory communication courses for a small amount of course credit. Second, I emailed individuals who have participated in previous studies and have expressed an interest in being contacted in future studies the survey link along with two follow-up emails to encourage participation; of the 235 individuals I directly solicited, 77 completed the survey (see Appendix K for invitation). Third, I recruited extensively online. I contacted the moderators of 106 forums geared at adoption-related issues to request permission to post the recruitment script in their forums using a form letter (Appendix L). Seventy-seven moderators granted me permission to post my call for participants and the survey link for their members to view.

Fourth, I contacted adoption agencies to request assistance with recruiting participants using a form letter (Appendix M). Because I had limited resources to use to support data collection, I selected four prominent adoption agencies with national programs. Although agencies were unable to distribute the survey to their families, one

agency agreed to post my call for participants on their website, and a case worker at another agency agreed to share the call with the individuals in an adoption support group.

Procedures: Data Collection

Individuals interested in completing the study were directed to the online survey posted using Qualtrics. Participants first read and agreed to an Internal Review Board informed consent form (see Appendix N) then completed the online questionnaire (see Appendix O). The questionnaire consisted of six sections. Participants first reported on their perceptions of the role their adoption played in their life. Second, participants responded to a set of questions regarding their contact with birth family.

Third, individuals reported on their perceptions of their adoptive parents' communicative behaviors. In this section, two identical sets of questions were included, one for each parent. Participants indicated if one or two parents raised them. If the participant indicated that they were raised by just one parent, they were asked to identify if this parent was a mother or father and were directed to just one set of questions. If the participant indicated that they were raised by two parents, they were asked to select one parent, identify if this parent was a mother or father, and complete a set of questions on just this parent's communication. Upon completion of the first set of questions, participants were then asked to consider the other parent, identify if this parent was a mother or father, and complete the same set of questions on this parent. Using this approach not only allowed for the examination of a global parental effect, but it also allowed for inclusion of two-parent and single-parent families as well as same-sex families. One hundred eighty-three participants reported on both their mother's and father's communication, 25 reported on just their mother, eight reported on just their

father, and four reported on just one parent's communication but did not specify whether the parent was a mother or father.

The fourth section of the questionnaire included questions about how the participant thought about him- or herself. The fifth section included questions about how the participant felt about his or her adoption. The questionnaire concluded with a set of demographic questions.

Measures

In the following section, I give details for each of the scales used to measure the constructs in the present study. Possible responses for all items range from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree* and high scores on each of the measures indicate high levels of that construct unless otherwise noted.

Developed adoptive identity. The newly created Developed Adoptive Identity Scale (DAIS) was used to assess the degree to which adoptees had progressed in their developed adoptive identity formation. The DAIS contains 19 items representing four dimensions of developed adoptive identity. First, *Reflective exploration* pertains to the degree to which the adoptees had thought about the details of his or her adoption. Five items reflect the reflective exploration dimension such as "I have thought about how my life would have been different if I hadn't been adopted." Second, *behavioral exploration* assesses the degree to which the adoptee actively sought out information in order to better understand his or her own adoption experience with six items such as "I have spent time trying to find out more about my birth parents."

Third, *salience* referred to the prominence, importance, and meaning the adoptee places on his or her adoption as it relates to other aspects of the adoptee's personal

identity; three items assessed salience such as "I think that my adoption has played a *part*

in why I am the way that I am." Fourth, five items were included in the scale to reflect

preoccupation, or the degree to which one's adopted status is overly emphasized in one's

overall sense of self, such as "I feel like nearly every aspect of who I am is the way that it

is because of my adoption." Preoccupation is measured so that high scores indicate low

preoccupation to match the content of the other three subscales in the DAIS. As a global

measure (i.e., unidimensional), the DAIS demonstrated acceptable reliability, *alpha* =

.79. Reliability estimates for individual dimensions were also acceptable: reflective

exploration *alpha* = .84, behavioral exploration *alpha* = .95, salience *alpha* = .88, and

preoccupation *alpha* = .92.

Structural openness. I measured the structural openness of the adoptee's family

relationship using a modified version of the Family Structural Openness Inventory (FSOI,

Brodzinsky, 2006). The original FSOI was a 20-item parent report instrument regarding

the extent to which the adoptive parents had information about and communicated with

the birth family. Items include inquiries about the birth mother and birth father. Three

modifications were made to the scale to fit the current study. First, items were modified

in the current project to fit the perception of the child (e.g., "I know the name of my birth

mother" rather than "I know the name of my child's birth mother" and "I have met my

birth father" rather than "I have met my child's birth father"). Second, items that

referenced just the adoptive parents' actions were dropped. Third, the response options

were changed from true/false to a Likert-type scale with possible scores ranging from (1)

not at all true of me to (7) *very true of me*. In that adoption researchers characterize

openness as a continuum ranging from confidential to open adoption arrangements

(Atwood, 2007), this modification of response options more effectively represents the range of possible kinship relationships with higher scores indicating a progression to the open adoption end of the continuum.

The final version of the FSOI consisted of a 12-item measure with six questions referencing the birth mother and six referencing the birth father. The FSOI demonstrated reliability rates in the acceptable range, *alpha* = .88.

Frequency of birth parent contact. I measured the frequency of the adoptee's contact with the birth parents using a two-item scale, one item for both the birth mother and father. Specifically, the item asked: "How much contact did you have with your birth mother/father?" with responses ranging from (1) no contact, (2) very little contact, (3) some contact, (4) quite a bit of contact, and (5) a great deal of contact.

Frequency of talk about the adoption. I measured the frequency of talk about adoption with a seven-item measure created for this project. The items for the scale were developed from existing literature (e.g. Benson, et al., 1994; Grotevant, Dunbar, et al., 1999) and assessed the degree to which adoption was a normal and regular topic of conversation throughout the child's development (e.g., "My parents have talked to me about my adoption for as long as I can remember" and "My adoption was a frequent topic of conversation when I was growing up"). Participants completed two versions of this scale, measuring both the mother's (*alpha* = .90) and father's (*alpha* = .93) frequency of talk.

Communication openness about adoption. I measured communication openness using the Communication Openness Scale (Brodzinsky, 2006), a 14-item measure of the degree to which the adoptee perceived his or her parents to be honest,

open, and approachable about discussing adoption issues (e.g., "It is easy for me to express my thoughts and feelings about being adopted to my mother."). Participants completed a version of this scale for both parents (*alpha* = .91 for mothers, *alpha* = .91 for fathers).

Acknowledgement of difference. I measured acknowledgement of difference about adoption within the family using the Acknowledgement of Difference Scale (Sobol, et al., 1994). This four-item scale assessed the degree to which the adoptee perceives the parents' belief that adoption presented unique issues and challenges as compared to consanguineous families with items such as "This parent never wanted me to think of myself as an adopted child." Participants answered each question based on both parents' acknowledgement of difference separately (*alpha* = .82 for mothers, *alpha* = .86 for fathers).

The Acknowledgement of Difference Scale is a unidimensional scale with possible scores ranging from high to low. Because I have hypothesized that balanced levels of acknowledgement of difference are related to adoptive identity development, I assessed both a linear and curvilinear relationship between these variables. In the model, the undimensional, linear term is used. I also conduct post-hoc analysis using a quadratic term to determine if a curvilinear relationship between the variables exists.

Parental confirmation. I measured parental confirmation using the Parent Confirmation Behavior Indicator (PCBI, Ellis, 2002). The PCBI is a 28-item scale assessing the degree to which participants feel as though their parents made them feel valued as human beings (e.g., "Made statements that communicated to me that I was a

unique, valuable human being). Participants completed a version of this scale for the both parents' confirmation separately (*alpha* = .98 for mothers, *alpha* = .97 for fathers).

Affectionate communication. I measured the degree to which participants perceived their parents as offering affectionate communication using the Affectionate Communication Index (ACI, Floyd & Morman, 1998). The ACI is a 19-item measure with three subscales relating to verbal expressions of affection (e.g., Say how important relationship is), direct nonverbal expression (e.g., Hug each other), and affectionate social support (e.g., Help each other with problems. Participants responded to this survey based on perceptions of both of their parents' affectionate communication separately (*alpha* = .96 for mothers, *alpha* = .95 for fathers).

Positive affect about adoption. I measured positive affect about adoption using a new 10-item scale. This scale assessed the degree to which the adoptee attaches positive feelings to his or her adoption (e.g., "I think that my adoption was a positive thing for me") and has resolved negative feelings about the adoption (e.g., "I blame my adoption for problems I had in my life"). Scale items are based on the rating materials used in the Minnesota/Texas Adoption Project (Grotevant, 1997) as well as the Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire (Benson, et al., 1994). The scale demonstrated acceptable reliability, *alpha* = .93.

Self-esteem. I used the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES, Rosenberg, 1985) to assess the participants' level of self-esteem. The RSES measures an individual's sense of his or her overall worth by posing questions such as "I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others." The 10-item scale demonstrated acceptable reliability, *alpha* = .92 (Rosenberg, 1985).

Life satisfaction. I measured life satisfaction using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS, Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), a five-item measure assessing the participant's overall judgment of the quality of his or her life with items such as "If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing." The SWLS demonstrated acceptable reliability levels, *alpha* = .92.

Positive affect toward adoptive parents. I measured the participant's feelings about his or her adoptive parents using a scale created for the current project. The eight scale items, based on the rating materials used in the Minnesota/Texas Adoption Project (Grotevant, Dunbar, et al., 1999) and the Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire (Benson, et al., 1994), pertain to feelings about the legitimacy of the adoptive parents (e.g., "Adoption is a legitimate way to form a family") as well as the degree to which the adoptee has positive regard for the adoptive parents (e.g., "I feel close to my adoptive parents"). This scale demonstrated acceptable reliability, *alpha* = .92.

Positive affect toward birth parents. The measure for affect toward birth parents is also based on the rating materials used in the Minnesota/Texas Adoption Project (Grotevant, Dunbar, et al., 1999) and the Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire (Benson et al., 1994). The six-item scale created for the current project assesses the degree to which the participant ascribes prosocial motives to the birth parents (e.g., I think my birth parents must have loved me to have made the decision to place me in an adoptive family) and has formed positive feelings toward the birth parents (e.g., "I have fond feelings for my birth parents"). This scale demonstrated acceptable reliability, *alpha* = .70.

Conclusion

  This chapter provided a detailed description of the participants, recruitment procedures, data collection procedures, and the measures used in the current study. The research design described here resulted in a sample of 220 adult adoptees who reported on their adoptive identity, contact with their birth parents, adoptive parent communication, and individual well-being as well as their affect about their adoption, birth parents, and adoptive parents. In the following chapter, I detail the analysis and results of the data collected from the questionnaire.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

In the previous chapters, I outlined my recruitment strategies and survey

measures. In this chapter, I describe my method of analysis for the data in the current

project and present my findings. I first discuss how I handle separate mother and father

scores for the parental communication behaviors. Second, I review my handling of

missing data. Third, I discuss how I statistically assess the hypothesized model. Fourth,

I present my findings. Fifth, I present post-hoc analysis to give additional context to the

findings of the present study.

Method of Analysis

In this section I overview my method of analysis. I specifically discuss my

handling of parent scores, describe the structural equation modeling analysis used in the

present study, and explain my handling of missing data.

Parent communication measures. The main analysis focuses on overall

parental behaviors and, as such, scores from parents are averaged when testing the

hypothesized model. In cases in which an adoptee has only one parent on which to

report, the score of that single parent is used in analysis. Using this approach not only

allows the ability to examine a global parental effect, but it also allows for inclusion of

two-parent and single-parent families in the overall analysis.

Structural equation modeling analysis. Structural equation modeling

conducted in M*plus* 6.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010) was used to estimate the relationships

among the variables. In order to account for measurement error, I positioned the

observed variables as latent constructs in the statistical model. In doing so, I took the

following steps in my data analysis. First, I conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to evaluate the fit of the indicators to the latent variables. All latent constructs were free to vary in this step. To account for measurement error of single indicator latent variables (and, thus, estimating a more conservative model), I set measurement error using the formula $(1-\alpha) *$ variance (Stephenson & Holbert, 2003). Second, I evaluated the fit of the model to the data by examining the chi-square statistic. In examining the chi-square, I used a cutoff criterion of $\chi^2/df < 3$ to assess if the χ^2 was affected by sample size (Kline, 2005). I also examined three other indices based on Kline's guidelines. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) should be between .05 and .08 for an acceptable fit, and .05 or less for a close fit. Confidence intervals are also presented for RMSEA. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI), should be .90 or greater for acceptable fit and .95 or greater for good fit. The SRMR should be less than .08 for acceptable fit.

In the hypothesized model, I position developed adoptive identity as a mediator between parental communication behaviors and the various outcome variables. However, developed adoptive identity may act as a partial or full mediator. Therefore, I tested for direct paths and indirect effects between parental communication behaviors and the outcome variables as a way to assess the nature of the meditation.

Missing data. Missing data was handled using the Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) approach in which missing data, parameters, and standard errors are estimated in a single step (Graham, 2009). The FIML approach is regarded as an effective and reliable method of handling missing data (Graham, Taylor, Olchowski, & Cumsille, 2006; Schafer & Graham, 2002), especially in cases of small sample sizes, large regression models, and up to 50% of data missing (Graham, 2009). Consistent with

previous research, I deleted cases from the sample that had more than 50% of the data missing to avoid bias in model estimates.

Two hypotheses (H6 and H7) predict that there is a moderation effect among parental communication variables in relation to the formation of developed adoptive identity. There are various approaches to assessing moderation at the latent level with no consensus among statisticians (Kline, 2005). In the current project, these hypotheses are tested using regression analysis to examine the interactions between the specific constructs based on procedures recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986). These interactions were not included in the hypothesized model due to the fact that they were not central to the global model.

Preliminary Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Prior to running a CFA, I examined correlation coefficients to check for issues of collinearity (see Table 5.1 for a correlation matrix of all variables). Correlations between variables in a structural model approaching .80 are an indicator of collinearity and can affect model parameter estimates (Kline, 2005). The analysis revealed a strong correlation between two sets of variables: communication openness was strongly correlated with frequency of talk about adoption, r (220) = .79, p < .01, and affect about adoption was strongly correlated with affect about adoptive parents r (220) = .80, p < .01. Kline suggests removing one of the correlated variables from the model to address collinearity. I opted to retain the variable with the stronger correlation to developed adoptive identity. Communication openness had a stronger correlation to developed adoptive identity, r (220) = -.11, than frequency of talk, r (220) = .02; therefore, frequency of talk was removed from the model. Affect about adoption had a stronger

correlation to developed adoptive identity, r (220) = .04 than affect about adoptive parents, r (220) = -.03, therefore affect about adoptive parents was removed from the model. Rather than assessing the relationship between these two variables and developed adoptive identity in the hypothesized model, I report on the bivariate relationship between the variables using Pearson's correlation when testing the relevant hypothesis.

An initial round of analysis revealed some issues with the latent indicators of developed adoptive identity. In the initial CFA, the model fit was not acceptable, χ^2 (N = 220, 40) =170.98, p = .00, χ^2/df = 4.27, CFI = .88; RMSEA = .12; (CI = 0.10 - 0.14), SRMR = .09. Examination of the latent indicators of developed adoptive identity revealed that preoccupation was negatively loading on developed adoptive identity (-.56), suggesting that low preoccupation was operating opposite of what was expected and differently than reflective exploration (.25), behavioral exploration (.62), and salience (.67). Although recoding preoccupation and including the recoded version of preoccupation in the model would correct this issue, doing so would change the conceptual meaning of developed adoptive identity. Recall that developed adoptive identity is defined as an identity in which adoptees incorporate both positive and negative aspects of their adoption into a sense of self that includes, but is not overly preoccupied with, their adopted status. Including the recoded preoccupation construct in the developed adoptive identity latent would change this definition such that developed adoptive identity would be represented in part by high scores on the preoccupation subscale. Because developed adoptive identity includes *low* preoccupation, recoding preoccupation did not make theoretical sense. Therefore, preoccupation was not included in the latent for developed adoptive identity but rather was removed from the model. I

Table 5.1

Intercorrelations of variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Structural openness	--												
2. Frequency of birth parent contact	.61**	--											
3. Frequency of talk	.17*	0.11	--										
4. Communication openness	0.13	0.09	.79**	--									
5. Acknowledgement of difference	-0.02	0.01	-.28**	-.38**	--								
6. Parental Confirmation	0.07	-0.02	.43**	.68**	-.53**	--							
7. Affectionate communication	0.09	0.03	.55**	.66**	-.52**	.76**	--						
8. Developed adoptive identity	-0.03	-0.06	0.02	-0.11	-0.12	-0.08	-0.03	--					
9. Self-esteem	-0.02	-0.06	.14*	.22**	-.20**	.33**	.33**	.24**	--				
10. Satisfaction with life	0.01	0.04	.24**	.36**	-.29**	.42**	.41**	0.12	.66**	--			
11. Affect about adoption	0.01	-0.01	.43**	.59**	-.48**	.58**	.55**	0.04	.43**	.54**	--		
12. Affect about adoptive parents	0.01	-0.05	.43**	.57**	-.58**	.68**	.60**	-0.03	.26**	.43**	.80**	--	
13. Affect about birth parents	-.23**	-0.10	0.05	0.08	-.20**	0.13	.26**	.31**	.40**	.34**	.40**	.17*	--

*p < .05, **p < .01

discuss the validity of this three-factor developed adoptive identity construct in chapter six. Upon removal of preoccupation, developed adoptive identity had three latent indicators: reflective exploration, behavioral exploration, and salience. I present findings related to this variable in the remainder of this chapter.

Upon removing preoccupation, a subsequent CFA revealed an improved model fit, χ^2 (N = 220, 28) =75.71, p = .00, χ^2/df = 2.70, CFI = .95; RMSEA = .08; (CI = 0.06 - 0.11), SRMR = .07. However, the loading for the behavioral exploration indicator (.98) of DAI was notably larger than the loadings for reflective exploration (.30) and salience (.41). Because of the loadings, the developed adoptive identity latent construct would be driven primarily by behavioral exploration. Theoretically, developed adoptive identity encompasses all three components. Therefore, I created parcels as indicators of developed adoptive identity to make the loadings for the latent developed adoptive identity variable more evenly distributed, thus representing the fullness of this construct. I created three parcels for developed adoptive identity with an even number of items from reflective exploration, behavioral exploration, and salience in each parcel. Table 5.2 displays the items and the loadings for each of the three parcels. Following these revisions, the measurement model demonstrated very good fit, χ^2 (N = 220, 28) =44.77, p = .02, χ^2/df = 1.59, CFI = .99; RMSEA = .05; (CI = 0.02 - 0.08), SRMR = .03.

Analysis of Hypotheses

After assessing the CFA, I examined the hypothesized paths by testing a completely saturated model. In the saturated model, both hypothesized paths and direct paths from exogenous variables to outcome variables are estimated to assess direct and mediated relationships between variables. Because all possible parameters are estimated,

the goodness of fit for the CFA and structural (i.e., hypothesized) model are the same.
The amount of variance accounted for in the final structural model was 9% for developed
adoptive identity, 27% for well-being, 50% for affect about adoption, and 30% for affect
about birth parents. Completely standardized loading for the latent-indicator and residual
parameters are presented in Table 5.3, and structural parameters are presented in Table
5.4.

The first set of hypotheses focused on birth parent communication, predicting
that structural openness (H1) and frequency of birth parent contact (H2) was positively
associated with developed adoptive identity. Developed adoptive identity was not
predicted by structural openness, $\beta = .14$, or frequency of birth parent contact, $\beta = -.11$.
Results did not support the relationship for either hypothesis, indicating that individuals
with increased openness in their birth parent relationship and increased contact with their
birth parents were not more likely to have a developed adoptive identity.

The second set of hypotheses focused on adoptive parent communication about
one's adoption, predicting that increased frequency of talk about adoption (H3),
communication openness (H4), and balanced acknowledgement of difference (H5) was
positively associated with developed adoptive identity. Because of collinearity between
communication openness and frequency of talk about adoption, H3 was assessed at the
bivariate level. Correlation results revealed that frequency of talk about the adoption was
not associated with developed adoptive identity, $r (220) = .02$, p = .67. Therefore,
individuals who experience increased frequency of talk about adoption with their
adoptive parents are not more likely to have a developed adoptive identity. H4 and H5
were assessed using results from the structural model. Results indicated a significant

Table 5.2

Loadings for Parcels of Developed Adoptive Identity

Item	Loading
Parcel 1	.94
3. Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has helped me understand how I relate to my adoptive parents (Reflective)	
4. I feel that I have spent an appropriate amount of time thinking about my adoption (Reflective)	
13. Gathering information about my birth parents helped would help me understand my situation better (Behavioral)	
14. I have spent time trying to find out more about my birth parents (Behavioral)	
18. I think that my adoption has played a part in why I am the way that I am (Salience)	
Parcel 2	.90
2. Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has helped me understand how I relate to my birth parents (Reflective)	
7. I have thought about how my life would have been different if I hadn't been adopted (Reflective)	
9. I have sought out information about my birth parents (Behavioral)	
10. Meeting my birth parents is/was important to me (Behavioral)	
11. I think my experiences as an adopted child have shaped who I am as a person (Salience)	
Parcel 3	.90
1. Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has been helpful to me (Reflective)	
11. Meeting my birth parents helped would help me understand my situation better (Behavioral)	
12. Gathering information about my birth parents is was important to me (Behavioral)	
15. I think my adoption is an important part of who I am (Salience)	

Table 5.3

Estimates for Single Indicator Latent Variables and Latent-Indicator Parameters

Single Indicator Latent Variables or Latent-Indicator Parameter	Standardized Estimate	Residual Parameter
Structural openness	.94	.12
Frequency of birth parent contact	1.00	.00
Communication openness	.97	.07
Acknowledgement of difference	.93	.14
Parental confirmation	.99	.02
Affectionate communication	.98	.04
Developed adoptive identity – Parcel 1	.94	.12
Developed adoptive identity – Parcel 2	.90	.19
Developed adoptive identity – Parcel 3	.90	.18
Affect about adoption	.97	.07
Well-being-Self esteem	.77	.41
Well-being-Satisfaction with life	.86	.25
Affect about birth parents	.83	.32

Table 5.4

Estimates for Structural Parameters

Structural Parameters	Standardized Estimate	Est/S.E.
Structural openness→Developed adoptive identity	.14	1.43
Frequency of birth parent contact→Developed adoptive identity	-.11	-1.20
Communication openness→Developed adoptive identity	-.23**	-2.06
Acknowledgement of difference →Developed adoptive identity	-.14	-1.46
Parental confirmation→Developed adoptive identity	-.22*	-1.76
Affectionate communication→Developed adoptive identity	.11	.88
Developed adoptive identity→Affect about adoption	-.06	-1.06
Developed adoptive identity→Well-being	.04	.50
Developed adoptive identity→Affect about birth parents	.22**	2.67
Structural openness→Affect about adoption	-.04	-.44
Frequency of birth parent contact→Affect about adoption	-.02	-.29
Communication openness→Affect about adoption	.34***	3.62
Acknowledgement of difference →Affect about adoption	-.27***	-3.06
Parental confirmation→Affect about adoption	.15	1.43
Affectionate communication→Affect about adoption	.08	.74
Structural openness→Well-being	-.09	-.86
Frequency of birth parent contact→Well-being Identity	.06	.61
Communication openness→Well-being	.03	.20
Acknowledgement of difference →Well-being Identity	-.05	-.51
Parental confirmation→Well-being	.28**	2.18
Affectionate communication→Well-being	.22*	1.74
Structural openness→Affect about birth parents	-.42***	-3.94

*p < .10, **p < .05, ***p < .01

Table 5.4

Estimates for Structural Parameters (cont.)

Structural Parameters	Standardized Estimate	Est/S.E.
Frequency of birth parent contact→Affect about birth parents	.17	1.62
Communication openness→Affect about birth parents	-.14	-1.02
Acknowledgement of difference →Affect about birth parents	-.12	-1.07
Parental confirmation→Affect about birth parents	-.13	-.86
Affectionate communication→Affect about birth parents	.51***	3.63

*p < .10, **p < .05, ***p < .01

negative relationship between communication openness and developed adoptive identity,

β = -.23. Because H4 predicted a positive relationship between communication openness

and developed adoptive identity, this hypothesis is not supported. This finding suggests

as individuals experience increased communication openness with their adoptive parents,

they are less likely to have a developed adoptive identity. Results from the structural

model indicated that acknowledgement of difference was not associated with developed

adoptive identity, β = -.14. However, H5 predicted that balanced levels of

acknowledgement of difference would predict increases in developed adoptive identity.

To assess the curvilinear relationship between these variables, a hierarchical regression

was conducted in which acknowledgement of difference was entered as a linear variable

in first step and as a quadratic variable in the second step. This method controls for the

linear relationship between acknowledgement of difference and developed adoptive

identity to assess the curvilinear relationship of the variables. The linear model was not

significant, F (1, 218) = .00, p = .98. Upon adding the quadratic acknowledgement of

difference variable, neither the change in R^2, ΔR^2 = .00, p = .58, nor the model, F (2, 217)

= .16, p = .85, was significant. Acknowledgement of difference, whether at balanced or

increased levels, is not associated with developed adoptive identity.

In addition to examining the relationship of birth parent and adoptive parent

communication separately, the third set of hypotheses (H6 and H7) predicted that the

combination of birth and adoptive parent communication would explain variation in

developed adoptive identity. For H6a, structural openness and adoptive parent frequency

of talk about adoption did not explain variation in adoptive identity, F (2, 217) = .18, p =

.83. Addition of an interaction term of structural openness and adoptive parent frequency

of talk about adoption did not produce a significant change in R^2, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $p = .99$, and the model remained non-significant, $F(3, 216) = .12$, $p = .94$. For H6b, frequency of birth parent contact and frequency of adoptive parent talk about adoption did not explain variation in developed adoptive identity, $F(2, 214) = .20$, $p = .82$. Addition of an interaction term of frequency of birth parent contact and frequency of adoptive parent talk about adoption did not produce a significant change in R^2, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $p = .48$, and the model remained non-significant, $F(3, 213) = .30$, $p = .83$.

For H7a, structural openness and communication openness were as a set significant predictors of developed adoptive identity, $F(2, 217) = 5.33$, $p < .05$, however communication openness was the only significant predictor in the model, $b = -.26$, $t(217) = -3.25$, $p < .05$. Addition of an interaction term of structural openness and communication openness did not produce a significant change in R^2, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $p = .62$. The model remained significant, $F(3, 216) = 3.63$, $p < .05$, however, communication openness remained as the only significant predictor: $b = -.25$, $t(216) = -3.17$, $p < .05$.

Similar results emerged with H7b. As a set, frequency of birth parent contact and communication openness were significant predictors of developed adoptive identity, $F(2, 214) = 4.45$, $p < .05$, with communication openness being the only significant predictor: $b = -.23$, $t(214) = -2.93$, $p < .05$. Addition of an interaction term of frequency of birth parent contact and communication openness did not produce a significant change in R^2, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $p = .77$. The model remained significant, $F(3, 213) = 2.98$, $p < .05$, but again communication openness was the only significant predictor: $b = -.24$, $t(213) = -2.89$, $p < .05$. The results from hypotheses H1 through H7b as a whole suggest that neither increased birth parent communication nor increased adoptive parent communication,

alone or in combination, predict increases in developed adoptive identity. Communication openness, however, emerged as significant negative predictor of developed adoptive identity.

The fourth set of hypotheses examined adoptive parents' non-adoption related communication, suggesting that parental confirmation (H8) and affectionate communication (H9) predict increases in developed adoptive identity. Parental confirmation approached significance, but not in the predicted direction, $\beta = -.22$. Results suggest that increases in parental confirmation are associated with decreases in developed adoptive identity. Hypothesis 8 is not supported. Affectionate communication was not associated with developed adoptive identity, $\beta = .11$, thus H9 is not supported.

The fifth set of hypotheses examined the relationship between developed adoptive identity and personal and relational well-being. Results from the structural model did not support the association between developed adoptive identity and affect about adoption (H10), $\beta = -.06$, or individual well-being as indicated by self-esteem and life satisfaction (H11), $\beta = .04$. H12 predicted that individuals with developed adoptive identities would have increased positive affect for their adoptive parents. Affect about adoptive parents was removed from the structural model because it was strongly correlated with affect about adoption, thus the relationship between affect about adoptive parents and developed adoptive identity was assessed at the bivariate level. Correlation results reveal a negative relationship between developed adoptive identity and affect toward adoptive parents, $r (220) = -20$, p $< .01$. This result indicates that as developed adoptive identity increases, affect for adoptive parents is reduced. Because H12 predicted a positive relationship between affect about adoptive parents and developed adoptive identity, this

hypothesis is not supported. The final hypothesis (H13) predicted a positive relationship between developed adoptive identity and affect towards birth parents. Results from the structural model indicate a positive relationship between developed adoptive identity and affect toward birth parents, $\beta = .22$. This hypothesis was supported, meaning that as developed adoptive identity increases, positive affect towards birth parents also increases. Table 5.5 summarizes the hypotheses, detailing whether the hypothesized relationships were significant, the direction of the relationship, and whether the hypothesis was supported.

In addition to the hypothesized relationships in the structural model, a number of direct relationships emerged between the exogenous variables and the outcome variables. For affect about adoption, communication openness and acknowledgement of difference emerged as significant predictors. The results from the structural model suggest that increases in communication openness are associated with increases in affect about adoption, $\beta = .34$. Results also suggest a significant negative relationship between acknowledgement of differences and developed adoptive identity, $\beta = -.27$. Because I hypothesized about *balanced* acknowledgement of difference in relation to developed adoptive identity, I conducted additional analysis to assess whether there was a curvilinear relationship between acknowledgement of difference and affect about adoption. Both models were significant: linear model: $F (1, 203) = 61.69, p < .01$; quadratic model: $F (2, 202) = 30.70, p < .01$. However, the addition of acknowledgement of difference as a quadratic term did not significantly change the model ($\Delta R^2 = .00, p = .91$). These results suggest that acknowledgement of difference is not a significant

predictor at moderate levels, yet individuals who experience high levels of acknowledgement of difference tend to have lower positive affect about adoption.

Additionally, non-adoption related communication emerged as a significant predictor of well-being. Both parental confirmation, $\beta = .28$, and affectionate communication, $\beta = .22$, were significant positive predictors of well-being, suggesting that individuals with adoptive parents who are affectionate and confirming tend to have high levels of self-esteem and satisfaction with life.

Finally, two variables emerged as significant predictors of affect about birth parents. First, the structural model indicated that structural openness was a significant negative predictor of affect about birth parents, $\beta = -.42$, suggesting that individuals who had more contact with their birth parents tended to have lower levels of affect about their birth parents. Additionally, the structural model indicated that adoptive parents' affectionate communication was a significant positive predictor of affect about birth parents, $\beta = .51$. This finding demonstrates that individuals with adoptive parents who are highly affectionate tend to have positive affect about their birth parents. There were no significant indirect paths in the structural model.

With both structural openness and affectionate communication being significant predictors of affect about birth parents, I was curious to see whether these variables interacted to explain variance in affect about birth parents. As a set, structural openness and affectionate communication were significant predictors of developed adoptive identity, $F (2, 202) = 15.03$, $p < .05$, with both structural openness, $b = -.25$, $t (202) = -3.81$, $p < .05$, and affectionate communication, $b = .42$, $t (202) = 4.13$, $p < .05$, emerging as significant predictors. Addition of an interaction term of frequency of birth parent

Table 5.5

Summary of hypotheses and findings

Hypothesis	Significant	Direction of relationship	Supported
H1: Structural openness is positively related with developed adoptive identity.	No		No
H2: Frequency of birth parent contact is positively related with developed adoptive identity.	No		No
H3: Adoptive parents' increased frequency of talk about the adoption is positively related with developed adoptive identity.	No		No
H4: Adoptive parents' communication openness about adoption is positively related with developed adoptive identity.	Yes	Negative	No
H5: Adoptive parents' balanced acknowledgement of difference is positively related with developed adoptive identity.	No		No
H6: The association between (a) structural openness and (b) frequency of birth parent contact and developed adoptive identity will be stronger when there are high levels of adoptive parents' frequency of talk about the adoption.	No		No
H7: The association between (a) structural openness and (b) frequency of birth parent contact and developed adoptive identity will be stronger when there are high levels of adoptive parents' communication openness about the adoption.	No		No
H8: Adoptive parents' parental confirmation is positively related with developed adoptive identity.	Marginal	Negative	No
H9: Adoptive parents' affectionate communication is positively related with developed adoptive identity.	No		No
H10: Developed adoptive identity is positively related with positive affect about adoption.	No		No
H11: Developed adoptive identity is positively related with individual well-being as indicated by high levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction.	No		No

Table 5.5

Summary of hypotheses and findings

Hypothesis	Significant	Direction of relationship	Supported
H12: Developed adoptive identity is positively related with relational quality with adoptive parents as indicated by positive affect toward adoptive parents.	Yes	Negative	No
H13: Developed adoptive identity is positively related with positive affect about birth parents	Yes	Positive	Yes

contact and communication openness did not produce a significant change in R^2, $\Delta R^2 =$ .00, $p = .59$. The model remained significant, $F (3, 202) = 10.08$, $p < .05$, but structural openness, $b = -.28$, $t (202) = -3.67$, $p < .05$, and affectionate communication, $b = .42$, $t (202) = 4.13$, $p < .05$, were the only significant predictors.

Post-hoc Analysis

Adoptees who were over the age of 19 and adopted by a family member other than a step-parent were included in the present study. Due to my broad sampling criteria, individuals from a variety of personal and familial backgrounds are represented in the findings presented in this chapter. I conducted post-hoc analysis to assess the degree to which individual characteristics may attenuate the results surrounding the associations between family communication, adoptive identity, and personal and relational well-being. Below I present analysis on the degree to which family structure, participant age, age at adoption, foster care, and international adoption may be the source of variation in developed adoptive identity. Findings from this post-hoc analysis shed light on the findings presented previously in this chapter and allow for increased confidence in the significant associations found in the present study.

Family structure. Studies have demonstrated that mothers and fathers play different roles in the child's upbringing, particularly concerning the child's understanding of his or her adoption (Rosnati & Marta, 1997; Schwartz & Finley, 2006; Wrobel, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2004; Wrobel, et al., 1998). I conducted post-hoc analysis to determine if adoptees' reports of mothers' and fathers' communication are correlated differently with developed adoptive identity. Comparisons of correlated coefficients using Steiger's Z test (Steiger, 1980) revealed that mother and father communication are

not differently correlated with developed adoptive identity. Table 5.6 shows correlations

of mother and father communication to developed adoptive identity as well as Z values

for correlation coefficient comparison.

Table 5.6

Correlation coefficient comparison of mother and father communication to developed

adoptive identity

	Mother Communication	Father Communication	Steiger's Z
Frequency of Talk	-.04	.02	.20
Communication Openness	-.18**	-.12*	.60
Acknowledgement of difference	.02	-.02	.00
Parental Confirmation	-.22**	-.13*	.91
Affectionate Communication	-.20**	-.02	1.78

$**p < .01, *p < .10$
Note: Two-tailed Z-critical is 1.96 for $p < .05$.

Further, I conducted additional post-hoc analysis to determine the differences

between single- and two-parent families in relation to developed adoptive identity.

Individuals in families with two-parents ($N = 199$) had significantly higher scores on

developed adoptive identity ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.83$) than individuals in single parent

families ($N = 21$, $M = 4.97$, $SD = 1.10$), $t (218) = 1.98$, $p < .05$.

Participant age. Due to the considerable changes in adoption practice since the

introduction of open adoption in the 1970s (Henney, et al., 2003), it is important to

address the degree to which age may be a source of a significant variation in the current

study. Individuals adopted prior to the late 1970s are more likely to face either closed

adoption records, in which no identifying information is available for the entirety of the

adoptees' life, or a confidential adoption placement, in which information about the birth parent is not available until the child reaches a specific age determined by the state in which the child is adopted (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998). In that the bulk of adoption placements in recent years are open, data from individuals in closed or confidential adoptions may reflect a different experience than adoptees in the current era. I conducted post-hoc analysis to address the degree to which age is related to key constructs in the present study. Pearson's correlations revealed a significant positive relationship between participant age and developed adoptive identity, $r (220) = .24$, $p < .01$, as well as a significant negative relationship with structural openness, $r (220) = -.32$, $p < .01$, and frequency of contact with birth parents, $r (197) = -.35$, $p < .01$. These findings indicate that older individuals are more likely to have a developed adoptive identity and less likely to have had an open adoption and contact with their birth parents.

Age at adoption and foster care. The majority of participants indicated that they were adopted prior to one year of age (71%, $N = 165$; age 2, $N = 5$; age 3, $N = 8$; age 4, $N = 5$; age 5, $N = 4$; age 6, $N = 5$; age 8, $N = 2$; age 9, $N = 1$; age 13, $N = 1$; and age 15, $N = 1$, age not provided, $N = 23$). Pearson's correlations revealed, however, that age at adoption is not associated with variation in developed adoptive identity, $r (197) = .05$, $p = .53$.

Seventy-one individuals (32.3%) indicated that they were adopted through the foster care system; however, all but 10 of these individuals were adopted by their foster parents before the age of two years old. Researchers have demonstrated that differences exist between infant adoption and older child adoption as well as adoption occurring between foster and adoptive placements (Brodzinsky, 1993). According to current

adoption research, children do not begin to comprehend adoptive placements until they are approximately five years old at which point adoptive parents begin to construct an adoption story and answer questions about the child's adoptive placement (Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003). Because the majority of my sample was adopted by age two, adoptive parent communication is likely to be established well before the age at which adoption professionals perceive the child to begin making sense of his or her adoption. To make the most of my sample, I include individuals who were adopted through the foster care system and/or later in life.

To address potential bias in my sample due to foster care arrangements, I conducted post-hoc analysis to determine if individuals in foster care have different levels of developed adoptive identity. Results indicate that developed adoptive identity for individuals who were in the foster care ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.03$) is not significantly different from individuals adopted apart from foster care ($M = 5.37$, $SD = 1.26$), $t\ (203) = 1.51$, $p = .13$.

International adoption. Fifteen individuals indicated that they were adopted internationally from the following countries: Cambodia ($N = 1$), England ($N = 1$), Ireland ($N = 2$), Japan ($N = 1$), Korea ($N = 5$), Philippines ($N = 3$), Romania ($N = 1$), and South Korea ($N = 1$). Although domestic adoptees share similar experiences as international adoptees, characteristics of international adoption placements such as decreased contact with birth relatives and divergent ethnic backgrounds may attenuate the findings in the present study. I conducted post-hoc analysis to assess the degree to which variations in the racial and ethnic makeup of the adoptive family related to variations in developed adoptive identity. Results indicate that developed adoptive identity for individuals

adopted internationally ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.17$) is not significantly different from

individuals adopted domestically ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.32$), $t (203) = 1.87$, $p = .08$.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided a description of my data analysis, statistical findings,

and post-hoc analysis of demographic variables. Examination of the CFA revealed that

the preoccupation dimension of developed adoptive identity was loading negatively on

the developed adoptive identity latent; preoccupation was subsequently removed from the

model. Structural equation modeling, regression, and correlation analysis was used to

assess hypothesized relationships between parental communication, adoptive identity,

and adoptee adjustment.

Overall, the findings provide little support for the role of parental communication

in the formation of developed adoptive identity. Only one parental communication

behavior – communication openness – emerged as a significant predictor of developed

adoptive identity, but the relationship was in the opposite direction of what was expected

and accounted for only 9% of the variance in developed adoptive identity. Developed

adoptive identity was in turn related with positive affect about birth parents as expected

but was surprisingly related to negative affect toward adoptive parents.

Given the number of nonsignificant findings and those associations in the

opposite direction of what was predicted, it seems as though the removal of the

preoccupation dimension substantively changed the conceptual meaning of the developed

adoptive identity construct. In the following chapter, I re-evaluate the validity of the

developed adoptive identity construct used in the analysis reported in the chapter by

revisiting pilot study two data. After redefining the conceptual meaning of the developed

adoptive identity measure used in the current study, I conduct additional analysis to

explore associations between adoptive identity, preoccupation, parental communication,

and adoptee adjustment.

CHAPTER SIX

RECONSIDERING DEVELOPED ADOPTIVE IDENTITY

My purpose in the current study is to explore the role of adoptive parent communication in the formation of developed adoptive identity, or an identity in which individuals incorporate both positive and negative aspects of their adoption into a sense of self that includes but is not overly preoccupied with their adopted status. In previous chapters, I offered theoretical and empirical evidence from previous literature for the association between parental communication and the formation of developed adoptive identity as well as the relationship between developed adoptive identity development and adoptee adjustment, discussed two pilot studies conducted to establish a measure of developed adoptive identity, outlined my recruitment strategies and survey measures for the current study, and presented initial results.

In this chapter, I revisit my conceptualization and operationalization of developed adoptive identity. In conducting analysis for the present study, the CFA indicated that preoccupation was loading negatively on the developed adoptive identity latent, suggesting that high levels of preoccupation were more consistent with this construct than low levels based on the statistical results. Because strong theoretical support exists for developed adoptive identity having low levels of preoccupation, this dimension was removed rather than recoded as recoding would have been antithetical to the original theorizing. The developed adoptive identity latent used in the dissertation analysis, then, consisted of three indicators – reflective exploration, behavioral exploration, and salience. Findings surrounding this three-factor construct were unexpected, with many of the associations being significant in the opposite direction of what was hypothesized (e.g.

communication openness is a negative predictor of developed adoptive identity despite strong theoretical evidence that openness facilitates an adoptees understanding of his or her adoption). Given that the majority of the results about this construct were non-significant or opposite of what was predicted, it became important to clarify the conceptual and operational meaning of the developed adoptive identity construct. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, it is important to clarify the conceptual and operational meaning so we can more accurately investigate adoptive family communication.

In this chapter, I reassess the three-factor Developed Adoptive Identity Scale to determine if removing the preoccupation dimension considerably altered the developed adoptive identity construct such that the DAIS no longer represented developed adoptive identity. To do this, I replicate the validity and reliability analysis of the DAIS without the preoccupation dimension using data from pilot study 2 (see Chapter 3). The findings I report in this section are based on the same items that comprise the developed adoptive identity construct measured in the main analysis (see Chapter 5). Additionally, I conduct analysis to determine if the preoccupation subscale of the DAIS is valid and reliable as an independent, unidimensional measure.

In effort to ensure conceptual clarity, I will refer to the three-factor DAIS as the Adoptive Identity Scale (AIS) and the preoccupation subscale as the Preoccupation with Adoption Scale (PAS) for the remainder of the chapter. Using these names throughout the chapter will not only allow for consistency but will emphasize the distinct nature of these constructs. The Developed Adoptive Identity Scale (DAIS) will be used to reference analysis conducted in the pilot studies in which all four factors were included

(reflective exploration, behavioral exploration, salience, and preoccupation). Table 6.1

gives a summary of these three variations of the adoptive identity scale as well as two

scales used in the validity analysis in the next section.

Table 6.1

Summary of adoptive identity scales

Measure	Description
DAIS (Developed Adoptive Identity Scale)	Original scale developed in the pilot studies consisting of four dimensions: reflective exploration, behavioral exploration, salience, and preoccupation
AIS (Adoptive Identity Scale)	Revised scale used in the main study analysis consisting of three dimensions from the DAIS: reflective exploration, behavioral exploration, and salience
PAS (Preoccupation with Adoption Scale)	Revised scale consisting of just the preoccupation dimension from the DAIS
AIQ (Adoptive Identity Questionnaire)	Scale developed by Donahue (2008) measuring the degree to which an individual identifies with the four adoptive identity types (integrated, unsettled, unexamined, and limited) and used in the current study to assess the validity of the DAIS, AIS, and PAS
ADQ (Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire)	Scale developed by Benson, Sharma, & Roehlkepartain (1994) to assess three dimensions conceptually similar to adoptive identity: affect about adoption, negative experience with adoption, and preoccupation with adoption-related information

Validity of the Adoptive Identity Scale

I first conducted a CFA on the 14-item Adoptive Identity Scale to ensure that the

data fit the three-factor structure. The three-factor model indicated good fit when

compared to the data: χ^2 ($N = 100$, 74) = 95.49, $p = .05$; $\chi^2/df = 1.29$; CFI = .97; RMSEA

= .05; ($CI = 0.01- 0.08$), SRMR = .07. This set of questions also demonstrated acceptable

reliability, *alpha* = .90, when formed as a composited variable of adoptive identity.

In pilot study 2, scores on the DAIS were compared with scores from the Adoptive Identity Questionnaire to establish concurrent validity. As discussed in Chapter three, the Adoptive Identity Questionnaire is a self-report measure based on Dunbar's (2003) adoptive identity typology consisting of four adoptive identities: *unexamined*, characterized by little to no depth in exploration, low salience, and lack of emotion about one's adoptive identity; *limited*, characterized by modest exploration and little salience attached to one's adoptive status; *unsettled*, marked by high levels of negative affect and salience of adoptive status with substantial exploration; and *integrated*, characterized by balanced levels of both positive and negative affect about their adoption and moderate salience to their adoptive status. The AIQ consists of a paragraph for each adoptive identity type. Participants rate each paragraph according to the degree to which the identity type described their experience, and then select the paragraph that most closely described their feelings about and experiences with adoption. The AIQ was an initial step toward creating a self-report measure of adoptive identity. The measure, however, suffered from operational issues stemming from the use of four paragraphs rather than individual items. Additionally, the AIQ, as a categorical representation of adoptive identity, did not represent the identity development process inherent in Grotevant and colleague's (2000) theorizing. Results from the analysis in pilot study 2 revealed that individuals with integrated adoptive identities had the highest scores on the DAIS, although DAIS scores only significantly distinguished individuals with integrated adoptive identities from individuals with limited and unexplored adoptive identities.

I conducted this analysis again using the Adoptive Identity Scale (consisting of behavioral exploration, reflective exploration, and salience). A one-way ANOVA

revealed that AIS did differ significantly by identity, F (3, 105) = 7.50, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .17$

LSD post-hoc tests revealed significant differences on AIS between integrated ($M = 4.11$, $SD = .83$) and limited ($M = 3.37$, $SD = .58$) and unexamined ($M = 3.30$, $SD = .90$). Integrated was not significantly different from unsettled ($M = 4.16$, $SD = .59$), but unsettled was significantly different from limited and unexamined.

Although these results reveal a similar pattern to the results from the four-factor solution, an important detail suggests substantive changes to the adoptive identity construct upon removing the preoccupation dimension. In both analyses, integrated and unsettled were not significantly different, suggesting that neither the DAIS nor the AIS is able to distinguish between these types of identities. However, whereas individuals with an integrated adoptive identity had the highest scores on the four-factor DAIS, individuals with an unsettled adoptive identity have the highest scores on the three-factor AIS scale. These findings are consistent with Dunbar's (2003) adoptive identity types. Both integrated and unsettled adoptive identity types are characterized by high levels of exploration and salience, and limited and unexamined adoptive identity types are characterized by low exploration and salience. In comparing the mean scores on the AIS among the four identity types, this finding suggests that the three-factor AIS may not be a measure of developed adoptive identity but rather a measure of adoptive identity types with low scores indicating an unexamined identity, moderate scores indicating a limited identity, and high scores indicating either an integrated or unsettled identity. Because the AIS did not produce significantly different scores for individuals with integrated and unsettled identity types, the AIS is may not able to distinguish between the these two identity types.

In the original pilot studies, the scores on the DAIS were also compared with the scores on the Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire (ADQ; Benson, et al., 1994) to establish construct validity in pilot 2. The ADQ is not a measure of adoptive identity, but rather it measures three constructs similar to aspects of adoptive identity. The Positive Affect Scale and Negative Experience with Adoption Scale measures one's feelings about his or her adoption; ADQ's Preoccupation Scale measures satisfaction with one's level of knowledge about his or her adoption. The ADQ Preoccupation Scale is notably different from the Preoccupation with Adoption Scale. ADQ's Preoccupation Scale is centered on one's feelings about information about his or her adoption whereas the Preoccupation with Adoption Scale measures the degree to which one's adopted status is a primary aspect of his or her sense of self. Despite the fact that both of these scales use the word "preoccupation", the two measures are actually quite distinct in conceptual and operational meaning. Findings from pilot study 2 revealed that the four-factor DAIS was negatively correlated with negative experience with adoption but was not correlated with positive affect about adoption or preoccupation with adoption. In reassessing the relationships between the three-factor AIS and the ADQ, the only significant correlation was between the AIS and preoccupation with adoption, r (112) = .27, $p < .01$. The AIS was no longer correlated with negative experience with adoption, r (112) = -.06, $p = .51$. The AIS was still not correlated with positive affect about adoption, r (112) = -.12, $p = .20$. These results suggest that individuals who score high on the AIS tend to be preoccupied with their adoption. Researchers have demonstrated that individuals with an unsettled adoptive identity tend to be more preoccupied with their adoption and have more negative affect about their adoption than individuals in the other three identity types

(Donahue, 2008; Dunbar, 2003). Therefore, this finding showing that high scores on the AIS are correlated with high scores on ADQ's Preoccupation Scale points toward the three-factor AIS being a measure of unsettled adoptive identity rather than integrated adoptive identity. Specifically, whereas the AIS did not differentiate between integrated and unsettled types as measured by the AIQ, this finding demonstrates that individuals with high scores on the AIS tend to be preoccupied with the amount of information they have about their adoption, a finding more consistent with an unsettled adoptive identity than an integrated adoptive identity.

The final validity assessment of the AIS used a measure of self-esteem to establish predictive validity. In the four-factor DAIS, there was a positive correlation between the DAIS and self-esteem. In the three-factor AIS, however, there is a negative but non-significant correlation between the AIS and self-esteem, r (113) = -.12, p = .23. This lack of a relationship between AIS and self-esteem does not contribute to the validity of the AIS.

Taking these results together, the preponderance of evidence suggests that the AIS, consisting of reflective exploration, behavioral exploration, and salience, is not a measure of *developed* adoptive identity (as conceptualized in this dissertation) but rather of adoptive identity with high scores indicating an unsettled identity rather than an integrated identity as previously proposed. Scores on the AIS were highest for individuals indicating that they had an unsettled adoptive identity on the AIQ, although these scores were not significantly different from individuals with integrated adoptive identities. However, because the AIQ is a rather coarse measure of adoptive identity that relies upon participants responding to paragraphs rather than individual items, the AIQ

may not be a precise measure of adoptive identity and obscure the integrated and unsettled adoptive types. Regardless of distinguishing between integrated and unsettled, however, high scores on the AIS indicate that individuals have high levels of exploration and salience, both of which are characteristics of integrated and unsettled adoptive identities. Comparison of scores on the AIS to the ADQ, however, gives greater insight into the conceptual meaning of the AIS. Individuals with high scores on the AIS tended to be preoccupied with the amount of information they had about their adoption, a finding more consistent with the unsettled adoptive identity than the integrated adoptive identity.

Based on the preceding (re)analysis, removal of the preoccupation dimension substantively changes the conceptual definition of the construct as evidenced by the differing results stemming from the DAIS as compared to the AIS. Without preoccupation, the three-factor AIS becomes a measure of adoptive identity with high scores indicating unsettled adoptive identity rather than developed adoptive identity. However the validity of the preoccupation scale is still unknown. In the following section I present findings to support the validity of the Preoccupation with Adoption Scale and to clarify this scale's conceptual meaning.

Validity of the Preoccupation with Adoption Scale

The Preoccupation with Adoption Scale (PAS) was originally included as an indicator of developed adoptive identity as part of the four-factor DAIS. When examining the CFA for the hypothesized model, the Preoccupation with Adoption Scale loaded negatively onto the developed adoptive identity latent and was subsequently removed from the model. Given the importance of the preoccupation dimension to understanding adoptive identity (Donahue, 2008; Dunbar, 2003), analysis was conducted

to determine the validity of the PAS as an independent, unidimensional measure, again using pilot study 2 data.

This set of five questions demonstrated acceptable reliability, *alpha* = .90. A one-way ANOVA revealed that preoccupation did differ significantly by identity type, F (3, 105) = 8.07, p < .05, η^2 = .19 LSD post-hoc tests revealed that unsettled (M = 2.89, SD = 1.01) was significantly higher on the PAS than integrated (M = 2.14, SD = 1.04), limited (M = 1.54, SD = .55), and unexamined (M = 1.78, SD = .78). Integrated, limited, and unexamined were not significantly different from one another, however. These findings suggest that high scores on the PAS indicate that one has an unsettled adoptive identity, but low scores do not necessarily mean that one has an integrated adoptive identity because integrated, limited, and unexamined identities are all represented in the lower end of the scale.

Comparison of scores on the PAS with scores on the Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire further establishes construct validity. Preoccupation with Adoption as measured by the PAS was negatively correlated with positive affect about adoption, r (112) = -.40, p < .01, and positively correlated with negative experience with adoption, r (112) = .26, p < .01. Scores on the PAS were also positively correlated with scores on the ADQ's Preoccupation with Adoption Scale, r (112) = .43, p < .01. These results suggest that individuals who score high on the Preoccupation with Adoption scale tend have a unfavorable outlook on their adoption as indicated by low positive affect and high negative experience. They also tend to be preoccupied about the amount of information they have about their adoption.

Finally, assessing the relationship between preoccupation and self-esteem gives

evidence of predictive validity of the Preoccupation with Adoption Scale. A significant

negative correlation exist between preoccupation and self-esteem, r (113) = -.57, $p < .01$,

suggesting that individuals who are preoccupied with their adoption tend to have low

self-esteem. Given that adoption researchers have demonstrated that individuals with a

greater understanding of the events surrounding their adoption tend to have higher levels

of self-esteem and lower levels of depression (Brodzinsky, 1993; Friedlander, 1999), this

finding demonstrating that a lack of resolution of adoption-related issues relates to low

self-esteem further upholds the conceptual and operational definition of the PAS.

Reconsidering the Operationalization of Developed Adoptive Identity

Developed adoptive identity is defined as an identity in which adoptees

incorporate both positive and negative aspects of their adoption into a sense of self that

includes, but is not overly preoccupied with, their adopted status. Clearly, having low

preoccupation is an essential component of the construct that cannot be removed. This

preoccupation component differentiates individuals with integrated and unsettled

identities by indicating whether an individual has resolved issues stemming from his or

her adoption. In previous research, individuals with both unsettled and integrated

identities were identified as individuals with high levels of salience and exploration

(Dunbar, 2003). An individual with an integrated adoptive identity, however, was no

longer preoccupied with his or her adopted status due to a resolution of adoption issues.

Keeping the differences between the integrated and unsettled identity types in

mind, the validity analysis presented in this chapter reframes the conceptual definitions of

the Adoptive Identity Scale and the Preoccupation with Adoption Scale. Whereas high

scores on the DAIS previously indicated that an individual had an integrated adoptive

identity, the removal of the preoccupation subscale altered the conceptual meaning of the measure such that high scores indicated that an individual had an unsettled adoptive identity and moderate scores represent integrated adoptive identity. Also having low preoccupation, in tandem with moderate exploration and salience, further sets apart developed adoptive identity from an unsettled adoptive identity. Therefore, to get a fuller picture of developed adoptive identity, the AIS and the PAS should be considered together. Individuals with developed adoptive identities are those individuals who have moderate scores on the AIS and low scores on the PAS. It is important to consider both of the scales together because neither alone represents the fullness of the developed adoptive identity construct.

Understanding the AIS as a measure of adoptive identity with high scores indicating an unsettled adoptive identity, the findings in the main study take on new meaning. In the structural model, communication openness was a significant negative predictor of adoptive identity, and parental confirmation approached significance in the same direction as communication openness. These results suggest that individuals with parents who are high in communication openness and parental confirmation are less likely to have unsettled adoptive identities. Adoptive identity was also a significant positive predictor of affect about birth parents, meaning that individuals with unsettled adoptive identities are more likely to have positive feelings about their birth parents compared to individuals with limited or unexamined identities.

Because of the importance of considering preoccupation in conjunction with the exploration and commitment aspects of the AIS, I conducted another round of analysis by adding PAS to the model tested in the previous chapter. See Figure 6.1 for a picture of
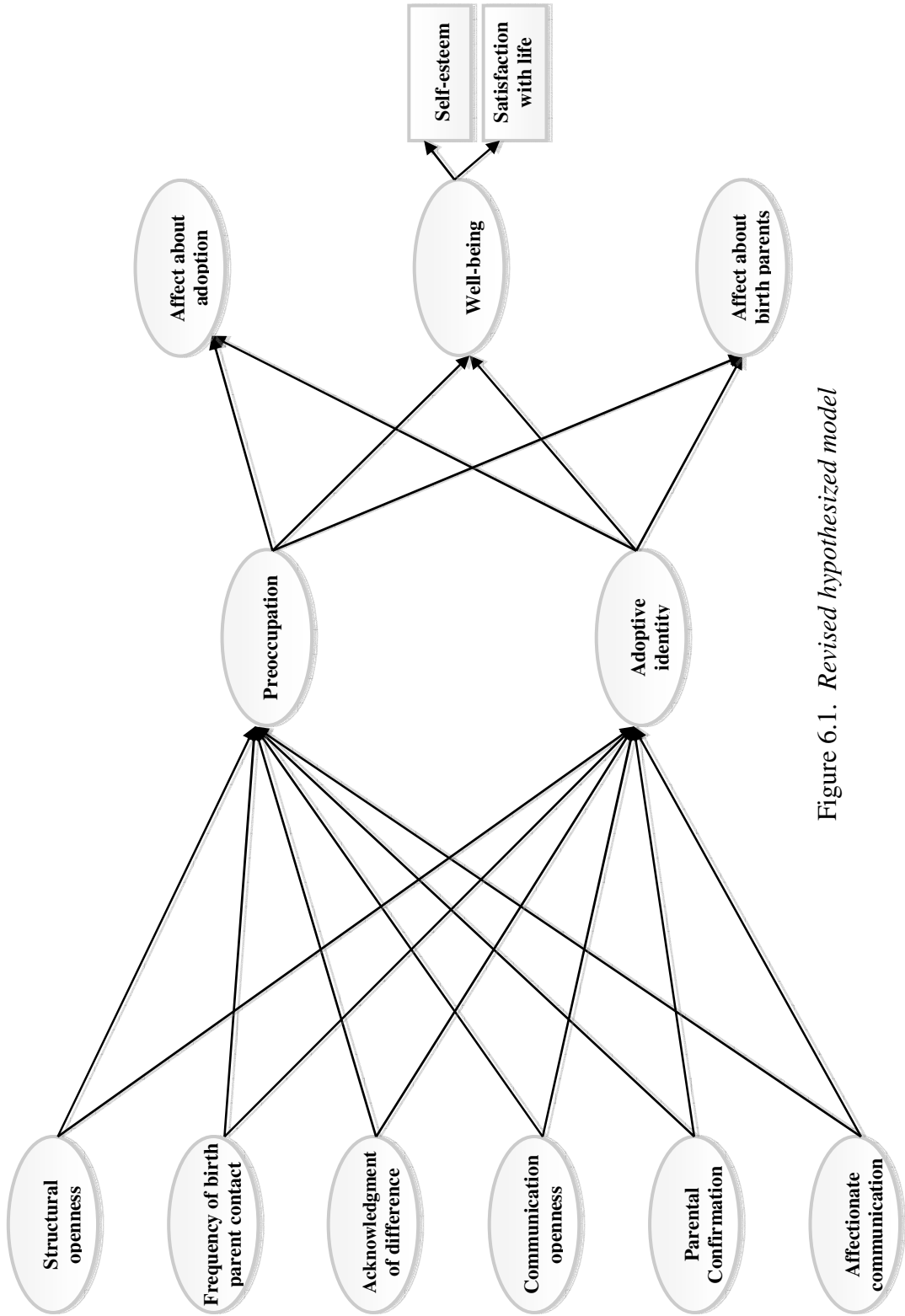
Figure 6.1. *Revised hypothesized model*

the revised model. The model demonstrated good fit to the data, χ^2 ($N = 220$, 31) =49.50,

$p > .05$, $\chi^2/df = 1.60$, CFI = .99; RMSEA = .05; ($CI = 0.02 - 0.08$), SRMR = .03. The

amount of variance accounted for in the structural model was 9% for adoptive identity,

11% for preoccupation, 46% for well-being, 56% for affect about adoption, and 45% for

affect about birth parents. Completely standardized loadings for the latent-indicator and

residual parameters are presented in Table 6.2, and structural parameters are presented in

Table 6.3.

Paths for adoptive identity remained the same as the original model such that

communication openness was a significant negative predictor of adoptive identity, $\beta = -$

.23. Parental confirmation also continued to approach significance as a negative

predictor, $\beta = -.22$. However, given what the AIS represents, these findings have

somewhat different implications than the original analysis. Specifically, they suggest that

as communication openness and parental confirmation increase, individuals are less

likely to have an unsettled adoptive identity. No other parental communication variables

were significant predictors of adoptive identity.

Two parental communication variables emerged as predicting preoccupation

about adoption: structural openness, $\beta = .19$, and acknowledgement of difference, $\beta = $

.19. These findings suggest that as individuals experience increased openness in their

birth parent relationships, they are more likely to be preoccupied with their adoption.

Additionally, the more adoptive parents acknowledge the difference inherent in adoptive

relationships, the more likely the adoptee is to be preoccupied with his or her adoption.

No other parental communication variables predicted preoccupation.

Table 6.2

Estimates for Single Indicator Latent Variables and Latent-Indicator Parameters

Single Indicator Latent Variables or Latent-Indicator Parameter	Standardized Estimate	Residual Parameter
Structural openness	.94	.12
Frequency of birth parent contact	1.00	.00
Communication openness	.97	.07
Acknowledgement of difference	.93	.14
Parental confirmation	.99	.02
Affectionate communication	.98	.04
Developed adoptive identity – Parcel 1	.94	.12
Developed adoptive identity – Parcel 2	.90	.19
Developed adoptive identity – Parcel 3	.90	.18
Preoccupation	.99	.07
Affect about adoption	.97	.07
Well-being-Self esteem	.77	.41
Well-being-Satisfaction with life	.86	.25
Affect about birth parents	.83	.32

Table 6.3

Estimates for Structural Parameters

Structural Parameters	Standardized Estimate	Est/S.E.
Structural openness→Adoptive identity	.14	1.43
Frequency of birth parent contact→Adoptive Identity	-.11	-1.19
Communication openness→Adoptive identity	-.23**	-2.06
Acknowledgement of difference →Adoptive Identity	-.14	-1.45
Parental confirmation→Adoptive identity	-.22*	-1.75
Affectionate communication→Adoptive identity	.11	.88
Adoptive identity→Affect about adoption	.01	.13
Adoptive identity→Well-being	.18**	2.43
Adoptive identity→Affect about birth parents	.33***	4.17
Structural openness→Preoccupation	.19**	1.98
Frequency of birth parent contact→Preoccupation	-.08	-.89
Communication openness→Preoccupation	-.17	-1.53
Acknowledgement of difference →Preoccupation	.19**	2.07
Parental confirmation→Preoccupation	-.08	-.62
Affectionate communication→Preoccupation	.07	.58
Preoccupation→Affect about adoption	-.28***	-4.71
Preoccupation→Well-being	-.50***	-7.10
Preoccupation→Affect about birth parents	-.45***	-5.61
Structural openness→Affect about adoption	.01	.10

*$p < .10$, **$p < .05$, ***$p < .01$ (table continues on next page)

Table 6.3

Estimates for Structural Parameters (cont.)

Structural Parameters	Standardized Estimate	Est/S.E.
Frequency of birth parent contact→Affect about adoption	-.04	-.49
Communication openness→Affect about adoption	.33**	3.66
Acknowledgement of difference →Affect about adoption	-.20**	-2.75
Parental confirmation→Affect about adoption	.14	1.41
Affectionate communication→Affect about adoption	.07	.75
Structural openness→Well-being	.00	-.05
Frequency of birth parent contact→Well-being Identity	.02	.26
Communication openness→Well-being	-.02	-.19
Acknowledgement of difference →Well-being Identity	.08	.86
Parental confirmation→Well-being	.29**	2.37
Affectionate communication→Well-being	.23*	1.89
Structural openness→Affect about birth parents	-.36**	-3.46
Frequency of birth parent contact→Affect about birth Parents	.15	1.52
Communication openness→Affect about birth parents	-.16	-1.27
Acknowledgement of difference →Affect about birth Parents	-.01	-.05
Parental confirmation→Affect about birth parents	-.15	-1.04
Affectionate communication→Affect about birth parents	.51***	3.79

*p < .10, **p < .05, ***p < .01

Table 6.3

Estimates for Structural Parameters (cont.)

Structural Parameters	Standardized Estimate	Est/S.E.
Indirect paths		
Structural openness→Preoccupation→Affect about adoption	-.05*	-1.81
Acknowledgement of difference→Preoccupation→Affect about adoption	-.05**	-1.93
Structural openness→Preoccupation→Well-being	-.10**	-1.89
Acknowledgement of difference→Preoccupation→Well-being	-.10**	-1.96
Structural openness→Preoccupation→Affect about birth parents	-.09*	-1.91
Acknowledgement of difference→Preoccupation→Affect about birth parents	-.09**	-1.93
Communication Openness→Adoptive identity→Affect about birth parents	-.08*	-1.85

*$p < .10$, **$p < .05$, ***$p < .01$
Note: Only significant indirect paths are displayed in the table.

The structural model also indicated that adoptive identity and preoccupation demonstrated relationships to the outcome variables. Adoptive identity was positively related to affect about birth parents, $\beta = .33$, and well-being, $\beta = .18$, meaning that individuals with unsettled adoptive identities are more likely to have positive feelings about their birth family as well as experience increased well-being. Preoccupation was negatively related to all three outcome variables, indicating that individuals who are preoccupied about their adoption tend to have decreased well-being, $\beta = -.50$, negative affect about their adoption, $\beta = -.28$, and negative affect about their birth parents, $\beta = -.45$.

In addition to the findings associated with adoptive identity and preoccupation, a number of direct relationships between the exogenous variables and the outcomes variables emerged. Just as in the original model, communication openness, $\beta = .33$, and acknowledgement of difference, $\beta = -.20$, were significant predictors of affect about adoption, suggesting that individuals with parents who are high in communication openness and low in acknowledgement of difference tend to have positive feelings about their adoption. Non-adoption related communication also operated in the second model as it did in the first such that parental confirmation, $\beta = .29$, and affectionate communication, $\beta = .23$, were positively related to well-being, although affectionate communication only approached significance.

Finally, structural openness, $\beta = -.36$, and affectionate communication, $\beta = .51$, again emerged as significant predictors of affect about birth parents such that increased parental affectionate communication and decreased openness in birth family relationships were associated with increased affect about birth parents.

In addition to the direct relationships in the structural model, seven indirect

relationships emerged suggesting that preoccupation and adoptive identity serve as a

mediator between parental communication and outcome variables. First, results suggest

that there is a marginally significant indirect effect with preoccupation mediating the

relationship between structural openness and affect about adoption (see Figure 6.2). The

direct path from structural openness to affect about adoption was not significant, but the

indirect path between the two approached significance. This marginally significant

indirect effect suggests that as structural openness increases, preoccupation increases,

resulting in decreased affect about one's adoption.
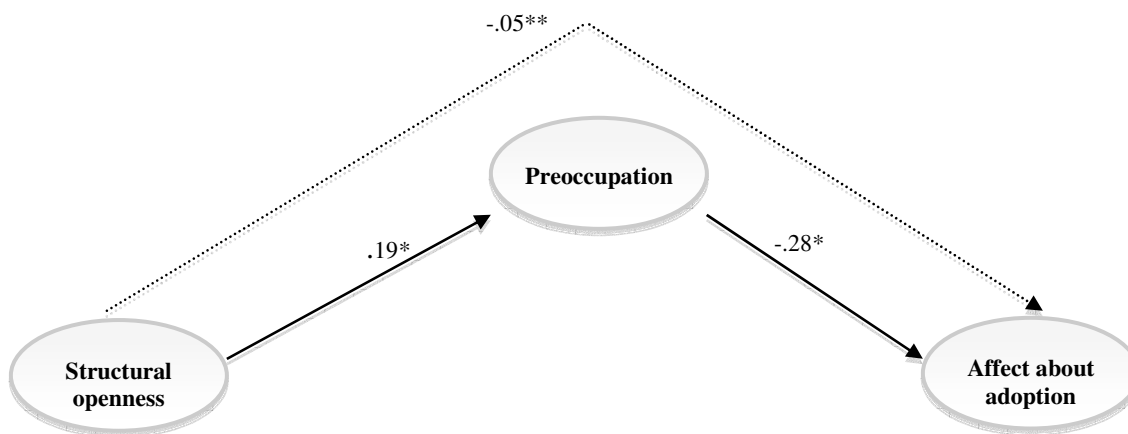
Figure 6.2. *Indirect effect of structural openness on affect about adoption*

Note: Dashed lines indicate indirect effect. * indicates significant parameter at *p* < .05.

** indicates significant parameter at *p* < .10.

Second, acknowledgement of difference is related to affect about adoption both

direct and indirectly through preoccupation. Figure 6.3 depicts the mediating effect of

preoccupation on the relationship between acknowledgement of difference and affect

about adoption. The significant direct path suggests that as acknowledgement of difference increases, affect about adoption decreases. Additionally, acknowledgement of difference also increases preoccupation, which in turn decreases affect about adoption as well.
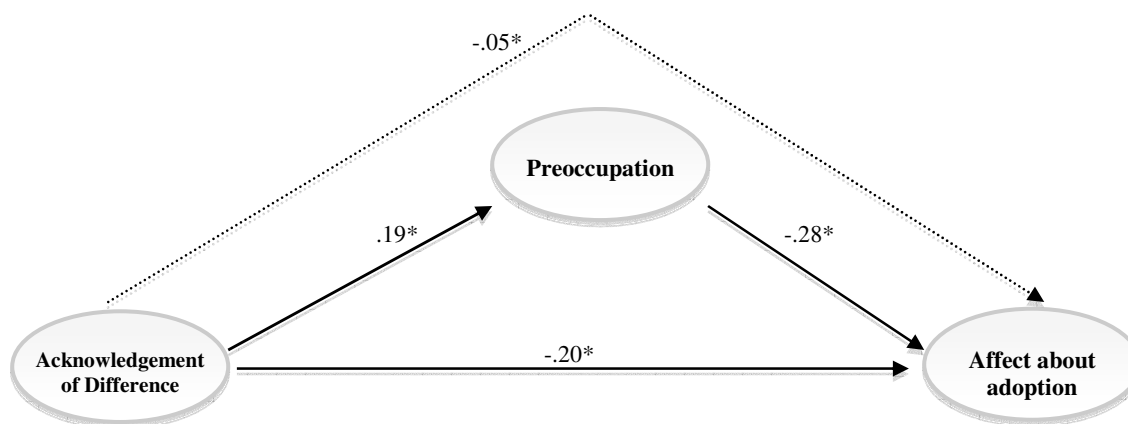

Figure 6.3. *Indirect effect of acknowledgement of difference on affect about adoption*

Note: Dashed lines indicate indirect effect. * indicates significant parameter at *p* < .05.

The third and fourth indirect relationship centered on preoccupation's tie to well-being are depicted in figure 6.4. Both structural openness and acknowledgement of difference are indirectly related to well-being through preoccupation. Given that the direct paths between structural openness and well-being and acknowledgement of difference and well-being are not significant, preoccupation fully mediates the relationship between structural openness and well-being such that as structural openness increases, so does preoccupation which in turn is associated with decreases in well-being. Additionally, as acknowledgement of difference increases, so does preoccupation, which in turn is associated with decreases in well-being.
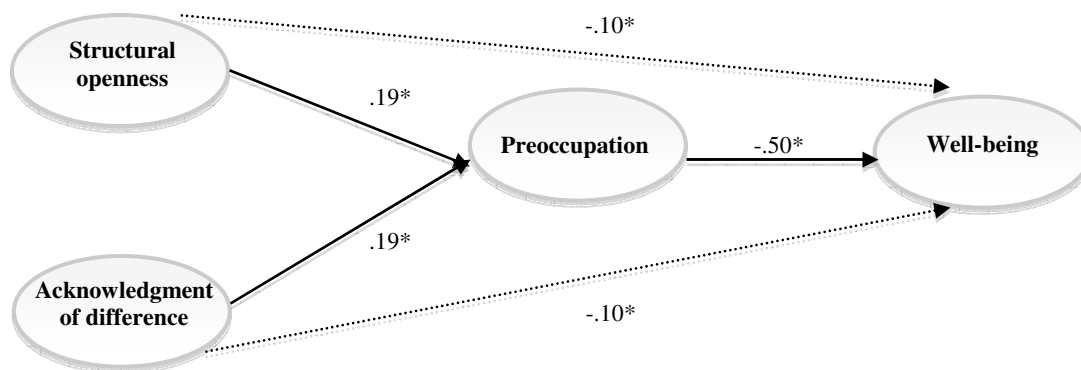
Figure 6.4. *Indirect effect of structural openness and acknowledgement of difference on well-being*

Note: Dashed lines indicate indirect effects. * indicates significant parameter at $p < .05$.

Fifth, there is a marginally significant indirect effect with preoccupation partially mediating the relationship between structural openness and affect about birth parents (see Figure 6.5). A significant direct path indicates that as structural openness increases, affect about birth parents decreases. In addition, as structural openness increases, so does preoccupation, which in turn is related in decreases in affect about birth parents, although this indirect effect only approaches significance.

Figure 6.5. *Indirect effect of structural openness on affect about birth parents*

Note: Dashed lines indicate indirect effect. * indicates significant parameter at $p < .10$.

** indicates significant parameter at *p* < .10.

Sixth, preoccupation fully mediates the relationship between acknowledgement of difference and affect about birth parents (see Figure 6.6). Acknowledgement of difference is not directly associated with affect about birth parents, but as acknowledgement of differences increases, preoccupation also increases which in turn is associated with a decrease in affect about birth parents.
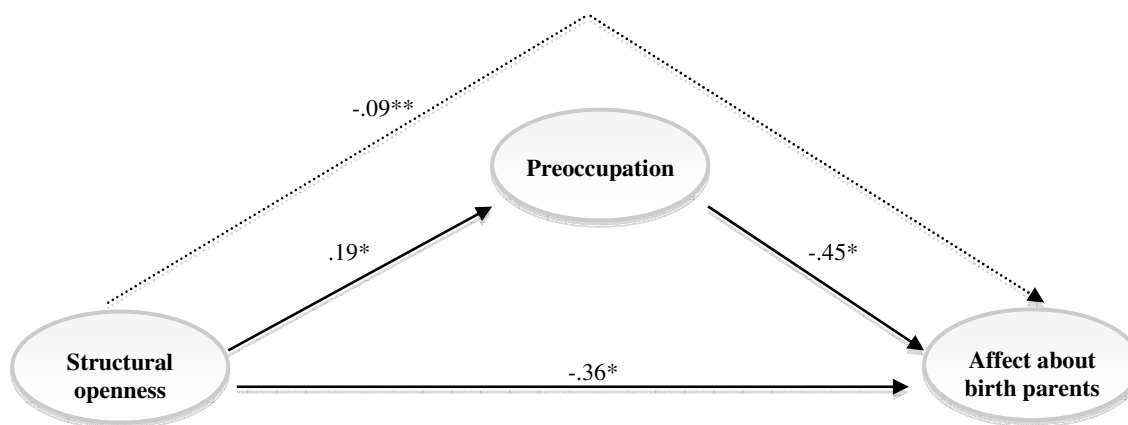

Figure 6.6. *Indirect effect of acknowledgement of difference on affect about birth parents*
Note: Dashed lines indicate indirect effect. * indicates significant parameter at *p* < .05.

Seventh, adoptive identity fully mediates the relationship between communication openness and affect about birth parents (see Figure 6.7), although this indirect relationship approaches significance. Specifically, as adoptive parents' communication openness increase, adoptees are less likely to be unsettled about their adoptive identity. This decrease in unsettled identity, then, is associated with increased affect about birth parents.
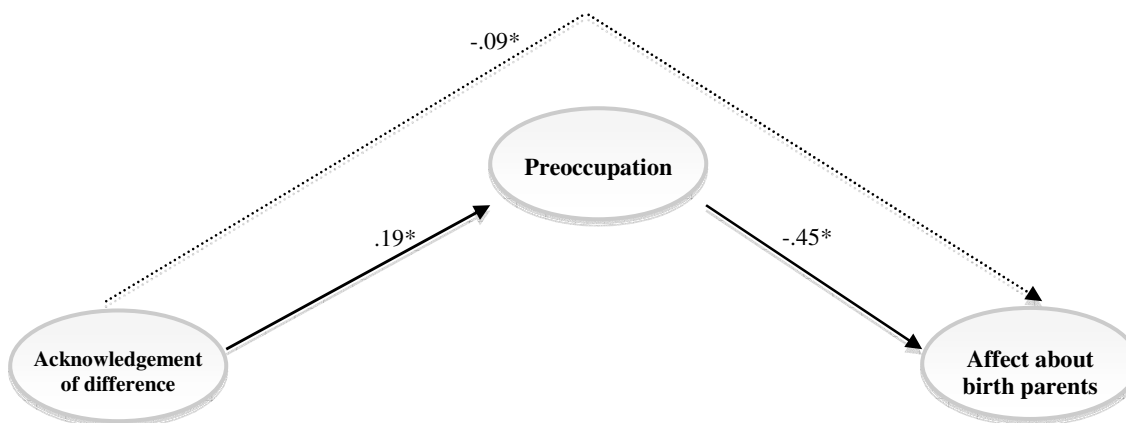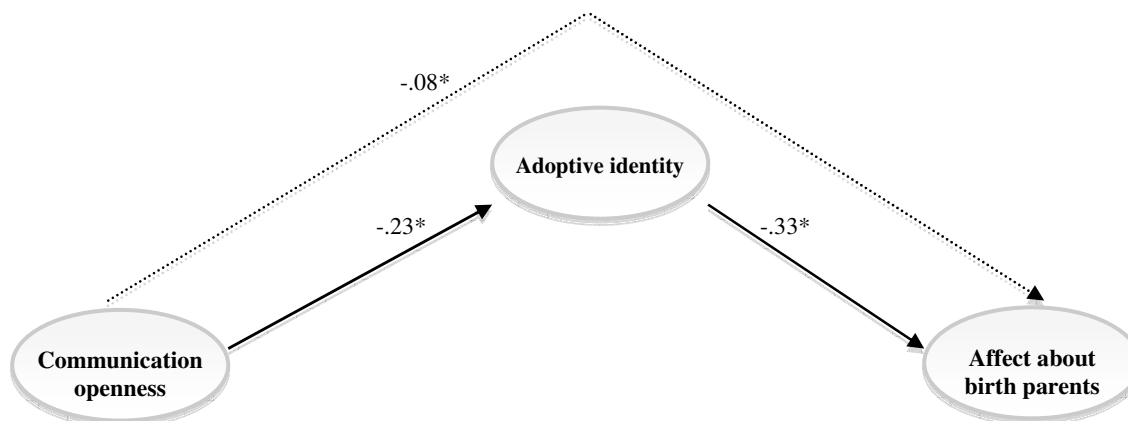
Figure 6.7. *Indirect effect of communication openness on affect about birth parents*

Note: Dashed lines indicate indirect effect. * indicates significant parameter at *p* < .05.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I detailed analysis of pilot study two data in which I replicated

validity and reliability analysis of the three-factor Adoptive Identity Scale (AIS) and

conducted a new round of analysis on the validity of the Preoccupation with Adoption

Scale (PAS) as an independent, unidimensional measure. Results from this analysis

revealed that the AIS is most accurately understood as a measure of adoptive identity

with high scores representing an unsettled adoptive identity. Results also revealed that

the PAS is a reliable measure of the degree to which one's adopted status is a primary

aspect of his or her sense of self.

With the new conceptualizations of the AIS and PAS established, I conducted

additional analysis to explore the relationships between adoptive identity, preoccupation

with adoption, parental communication, and adoptee adjustment. Results from this round

of analysis suggested that parental communication is a significant predictor of adoptive

identity and preoccupation. Specifically, communication openness and parental

confirmation were related to decreased levels of exploration and salience, whereas

structural openness and acknowledgement of difference were related to high levels of preoccupation. Adoptive identity and preoccupation in turn were related to adoptee adjustment. Adoptive identity was a positive predictor of individuals' affect for their birth parents and well-being as measured by self-esteem and satisfaction with life, and preoccupation was a negative predictor of these same variables. Preoccupation was also negatively related to affect about adoption. Finally, adoptive identity is associated with decreased affect for adoptive parents. Further interpretation of these results in provided in Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION

My purpose in the current study was to enhance scholarly understanding of the communicative pathways through which adoptive identities are formed. Toward this end, I assessed the degree to which parental communication contributes to the formation of adoptive identity, and how adoptive identity in turn relates to adoptee adjustment as represented by individual well-being as well as relational well-being with the adoptive and birth parents. Findings from the present study provide insight into the relationship between parental communication, adoptive identity, and personal and relational well-being. The preceding chapters provided a detailed overview of the results in the current study; in this chapter, I highlight some of the significant findings from Chapter 6 in which I assess the degree to which parental communication and adoptee adjustment are related to adoptive identity as indicated by behavioral exploration, reflective exploration, and salience as well as preoccupation with adoption. I focus on the results presented in Chapter 6 rather than the results presented in Chapter 5 in order to address findings related to the Adoptive Identity Scale (AIS) and the Preoccupation with Adoption Scale (PAS) given the importance of both of these constructs in representing developed adoptive identity.

The final structural model in the present study, presented in Chapter 6, examined parental communication and adoptee adjustment in relation to two aspects of adoptees' understanding of self: adoptive identity and preoccupation with adoption. Adoptive identity was measured with the AIS, a scale generated for the current study measuring levels of *behavioral exploration,* or the degree to which an individual actively seeks out

adoption-related information to better understand his or her adoption experience; *reflective exploration*, or the degree to which an individual has thought through the details of his or her adoption; and *salience,* or the degree to which an individual perceives his or her adoption to have prominence, importance, and meaning. The AIS represents an individual's adoptive identity such that low scores reflect an unexamined or limited adoptive identity and high scores reflect an unsettled adoptive identity. Preoccupation was measured with a scale also generated for the current study assessing the degree to which one's adopted status is a primary aspect of his or her sense of self.

Communication openness and parental confirmation were related to decreased levels of exploration and salience, meaning that individuals who had parents who were communicatively open and confirming were less likely to exhibit an unsettled adoptive identity. Structural openness and acknowledgement of difference were related to high levels of preoccupation. Adoptive identity and preoccupation were both related to individuals' affect for their birth parents and well-being as measured by self-esteem and satisfaction with life, with preoccupation exhibiting negative relationships while adoptive identity exhibited positive relationships with these indicators of adoptee adjustment. Additionally, preoccupation was negatively related to affect about adoption. Correlation analysis revealed that adoptive identity is associated with decreased positive affect for adoptive parents. Surprisingly, there were no significant relationships between adoptive identity and structural openness, frequency of birth parent contact, acknowledgement of difference, and affectionate communication; there were also no significant relationships between preoccupation and frequency of birth parent contact, communication openness, parental confirmation, and affectionate communication.

In this chapter, I discuss the implications and conclusions that stem from this set of findings. First, I first revisit the conceptualization of developed adoptive identity. My definition of developed adoptive identity is a conceptual clarification of previous theorizing, however operational issues with developed adoptive identity still remain. Second, I discuss implications about adoptive parent communication. Specifically I describe how adoptive parent communication can facilitate adoptees adjustment, and then I discuss how adoptive parents may best serve their children's needs by normalizing their child's role in the adoptive family. Third, I draw conclusions about adoptive identity. I discuss the degree to which adoptive identity frames an individual's outlook on his or her adoption, I describe the degree to which adoptive parent communication facilitates the formation of adoptive identity, and then I discuss potential sources of influence of adoptive identity beyond parental communication. I conclude the chapter by acknowledging the limitations inherent in the current study and describing future avenues of research.

Reconceptualizing and Reoperationalizing Adoptive Identity

All adoptees are faced with the task of constructing an adoptive identity by negotiating what their adoption means in relation to their overall sense of self (Grotevant, et al., 2000). Grotevant and colleagues (2000) have theorized extensively on adoptive identity by using an Eriksonian approach to identity development, highlighting the role of exploration and commitment. Adoptees vary in the degree to which they have gathered information about their adoption history, reflected on their place in their adoptive family, and ascribed meaning to their adoption (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004). In the current study, I have focused particularly on developed adoptive identities, defined as those

identities in which adoptees incorporate both positive and negative aspects of their

adoption into a sense of self that includes but is not overly preoccupied with their adopted

status.

I originally introduced the construct of developed adoptive identity—and

operationalized it as such—as ranging from a stage of unawareness to an achieved,

developed state. Results from the present study, however, indicate that developed

adoptive identity may be more accurately conceptualized as a mid-point on a continuum.

On one end of this continuum is a state of unawareness in which an individual has little to

no interest in his or her adoption; on the opposite end is a state of preoccupation in which

an individual's adoption consumes a great deal of emotional and mental energy. Between

these poles lies developed adoptive identity, held by individuals who perceive their

adoption to be meaningful but balanced with other aspects of the self such as gender,

ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Grotevant, et al., 2000). Understanding developed

adoptive identity as a defined by balance rather than high levels of development has

important conceptual and operational (i.e., statistical) implications.

Conceptually, developed adoptive identity as marked by balance is consistent

with Grotevant and colleagues' (2000) early theorizing on adoptive identity in which they

suggested the continuum described above in one of the first published articles on

adoptive identity. As adoption researchers began to apply this adoptive identity

theorizing to empirical research, they replaced an emphasis on a continuum with a focus

on adoptive identity typologies (e.g. Donahue, 2008; Dunbar, 2003). The adoptive

identity typology consisted of four adoptive identities: *unexamined*, characterized by little

to no depth in exploration, low salience, and lack of emotion about one's adoptive

identity; *limited*, characterized by modest exploration and little salience attached to one's adoptive status; *unsettled*, marked by high levels of negative affect and salience of adoptive status with substantial exploration; and *integrated*, characterized by balanced levels of both positive and negative affect about their adoption and moderate salience to their adoptive status. In the current study, I drew from this typology research as one of the only sources of empirical research on adoptive identity. I specifically focused on the integrated adoptive identity type as representing the most advanced stage of adoptive identity development given the considerable exploration and salience exhibited in this adoptive identity type. Because the unsettled, limited, and unexplored adoptive identities represent a lack of integration and hence a lack of progress in adoptive identity development, I considered these identity types to be peripheral to developed adoptive identities. As adoption researchers shifted their focus from the developmental process of adoptive identity development to adoptive identity typologies, the importance of developed adoptive identity as positioned at the mid-point of a continuum between disregard and preoccupation was diminished. The findings from this study underscore the importance of viewing developed adoptive identities as balanced between a state in which adoption has little meaning or no meaning to an individual and state in which adoption is the organizing theme of a person's understanding of his- or herself (Grotevant, et al., 2000). It is important to clarify the conceptual and operational meaning of developed adoptive identity in order to accurately investigate adoptive family communication, particularly due to the exploratory nature of this research.

Dimensions of developed adoptive identity. Understanding developed adoptive identity as a defined by balance rather than high levels of development has important

statistical implications as well. Understanding developed adoptive identities as a mid-point on a continuum changes the meaning of the developed adoptive identity measure used in the present study. In my original operationalization of developed adoptive identity in the Developed Adoptive Identity Scale (DAIS), developed adoptive identity was a linear construct, with high scores behavioral exploration, reflective exploration, and salience, and low scores preoccupation pointing toward a developed adoptive identity. Statistical analysis, however, demonstrated that high preoccupation was most consistent with high scores on the behavioral exploration, reflective exploration, and salience subscales. In other words, the preoccupation dimension was not consistent with my operationalization of the developed adoptive identity construct. As outlined in the method and results chapters, I removed the preoccupation subscale, creating the Adoption Identity Scale (AIS; see Chapter 6) consisting of behavioral exploration, reflective exploration, and salience. In reconsidering developed adoptive identity as a balanced state, however, high scores no longer are reflective of having a *developed* adoptive identity. Rather, the AIS is most accurately viewed as a measure of Grotevant and colleagues' (2000) continuum of adoptive identity with low scores reflecting unexamined or limited adoptive identities, high scores reflecting an unsettled adoptive identity, and moderate scores reflecting developed adoptive identities. Having midrange scores on the behavioral, reflective, and salience subscales means that individuals have given some effort towards gathering adoption-related information, reflecting on their adoption, and placing some meaning on the role of adoption in their life, but this identity work has not consumed a great deal of emotional and mental energy nor has their adoption become the

organizing aspect of their sense of self. Validity analysis supports the assertion that high scores on the AIS represent an unsettled adoptive identity.

The preoccupation dimension plays an important role in further differentiating a developed adoptive identity. Individuals with developed adoptive identities do not perceive their adoption to be the only or the most important aspect of who they are. Therefore, individuals with developed adoptive identities also exhibit low scores on the preoccupation measure. In contrast, individuals with unsettled adoptive identities are characterized in part by high levels of preoccupation. Having low preoccupation further reinforces developed adoptive identity's place at the middle of the continuum by demonstrating the degree to which individuals with developed adoptive identities differ from individuals with unsettled adoptive identities.

Given the complexity of the developed adoptive identity construct, the question remains: Can developed adoptive identity be measured? The potentiality of operationalizing developed adoptive identity is still unclear, due in large part to the exploratory nature of this research. Some conclusions about the operationalization of developed adoptive identity, however, can be made at this point. It is clear that developed adoptive identity should not be used as a unidimensional construct. Preoccupation operates differently than behavioral exploration, reflective exploration, and salience. Although the four-factor DAIS, consisting of behavioral exploration, reflective exploration, salience, and preoccupation, conceptually represents developed adoptive identity, this factor structure is not statistically sound as indicated by the negative loading of the preoccupation dimension in the CFA. Due to the negative relationship between preoccupation and the other aspects of developed adoptive identity,

preoccupation should not be included in a measure with behavioral exploration, reflective exploration, and salience as a measure of developed adoptive identity based on the conceptualization of developed adoptive identity at the mid-point of a continuum.

At the same time, the three factor AIS (consisting solely of reflective exploration, behavioral exploration, and salience) is problematic as a measure of *developed* adoptive identity as it leaves out preoccupation, a dimension that plays a pivotal role in the characterization of developed adoptive identity. Having low preoccupation is a crucial aspect of developed adoptive identity, reinforcing developed adoptive identity's place at the middle of the continuum between unexamined and unsettled adoptive identities. Low preoccupation differentiates developed adoptive identity from unsettled adoptive identity, and high behavioral exploration, reflective exploration, and salience differentiates developed adoptive identity from unexamined and limited adoptive identities. Therefore, there is not one measure of developed adoptive identity. Rather, the most accurate way of measuring developed adoptive identity at this point is to assess statistical relationships between the correlates of AIS and the PAS separately but consider the findings holistically as each informs unique aspects of developed adoptive identity (see Chapter 6 for further discussion of the relationship of the AIS and PAS in representing developed adoptive identity).

In the current study, I treated adoptive identity as a latent construct comprised of reflective exploration, behavioral exploration, and salience operating as indicators of adoptive identity. The possibility exists, however, to assess the relationships between correlates of developed adoptive identity by examining reflective exploration, behavioral exploration, and salience separately. Although this approach is not as parsimonious as

having a latent developed adoptive identity variable, assessing the relationship between the subscales of AIS could give more nuanced information into the correlates of developed adoptive identity.

Taking all this together, the findings in the present study clarify the conceptual meaning of adoptive identity in general and developed adoptive identity more specifically. Questions still remain, however, about how to measure developed adoptive identity.

Developed adoptive identity as a nonlinear process. Just as most conceptualizations of identity position identity development to be a life-long, iterative process (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966), adoptive identity is likely to be nonlinear and unstable, representing an individual's orientation to his or her adoption at a particular point in time. Grotevant and colleagues (2000) describe identity development an "iterative and integrative process," thus positioning adoptive identities as useful for explaining particular aspects of the self for certain periods of time (p. 382).

The cyclical nature of identity development demonstrated in the general identity research upon which adoptive identity research was based gives further support for the nonlinear development of adoptive identity with adoptive identities representing a meaningful, albeit temporal, stage of exploration and commitment concerning the role of adoption in an individual's sense of self. Marcia (1966) described four stages individuals experience in the identity development process based on the degree of exploration and commitment enacted by the individuals. Those in an *identity-achieved* status have resolved the forces creating a crisis by exploring various options and committing to a set of values. Individuals are in a *moratorium* status when the exploration process has

presented too many options and individuals instead are at a stand still as they attempt to decide on a set of values to which they can commit. Individuals are in a *foreclosure* state when they have committed to a set of values without fully exploring the various options that are available to them. Usually these values come from parental influences, and individuals accept these influences wholesale without experiencing a crisis, which in turn prompts an exploration process. Finally, individuals who are *identity-diffused* have not engaged in exploration and/or made a commitment to a set of goals or values. In later work, Marcia (1993) noted that individuals often recycle through the identity stages by moving from a state of indecision to commitment only to move back to a state of indecision. In revisiting stages, individuals are likely to experience the challenge of that stage more profoundly and use previously learned skills to work though the particular stage again.

Applying this work to adoptive identity, there is theoretical support that the degree to which an individual represents a specific identity may oscillate in relation to specific situations. For example, as new information arises or changes in adoptive and birth relationships occur, individuals will likely pursue new efforts of exploration and commitment to embrace or reject the role of their adoption in their understanding of self (Grotevant, 1997). Further, adoptees do not likely follow a single developmental trajectory from one identity type to another (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004). The adoptive identity development process may be best conceptualized as a dynamic and ongoing process more representative of a cycle than a straight line (Grotevant, 1997). Longitudinal research following the exploration and commitment of adoptees over time can give additional insight into the process through which identity work is experienced.

The current project, in offering a cross-sectional examination of the correlates of developed adoptive identity, offers a glimpse into the communicative pathways influencing one's current adoptive identity state. Coming from a communication-based perspective, this cross-sectional view does more than just provide a snapshot of one's current adoptive identity formation. Communication theorizing about identity privileges the formation of a sense of self that is rooted in social behavior, based on the notion that "the sense of self is defined and redefined in social behavior" (Hecht, Warren, et al., 2005, p. 260). This research provides key insight into the interplay between communication and adoptive identity formation by explicating some communicative pathways related to adoptees' current level of exploration and commitment concerning their adoptive identity. In the following section, I highlight two important implications the current study suggests about the relationship between parental communication and adoptive identity development.

Implications about adoptive parent communication

Findings from the present study suggest two implications about adoptive parent communication. First, parental communication facilitates an adoptee's adjustment. Second, adoptive parents' normalization of the child's adoptive status is an important aspect of parental communication.

Parental communication as facilitating adoptee adjustment. First, findings from the present study suggest that parental communication is an important aspect of adoptees' adjustment. Both adoption and non-adoption related communication behaviors emerged as significant predictors of adoptees adjustment in the areas of affect about adoption, affect about birth parents, and adoptee well-being. These direct effects of

parental communication exclusive of adoptive identity provide a holistic picture of the way in which adoptive parents shape their children's experience. I will first discuss parent communication as it relates to adoptee outlook on his or her adoption then discuss parental communication's tie to adoptee well-being.

In terms of affect about adoption, parental communication helps adoptees frame their adoption in a positive light. Findings from the present study suggest that individuals who perceived their parents to be communicatively open about their adoption tend to have positive feelings about their adoption. Research on communication openness, referring to the content, quality, and overall ease of adoption-related communication, gives context to this finding. Brodzinsky (2005) explains that adoptive parents who are high in communication openness exhibit direct, empathic, and sensitive communication which supports the child's emotions about the adoption. As adoptive parents create a secure context in which to discuss the child's place in his or her family, adoptees may be less likely to feel as though his or her adoption is stigmatized.

Access to information may be driving the relationship between adoptees' feelings about their adoption and their parents' communication about the adoption. Individuals who feel as though their parents have shared all available information about their adoption report feeling more satisfied with their level of uncertainty surrounding their adoption (Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010). If individuals do not feel as though they have to exert significant effort to learn about their adoption, they may be able to focus on processing the adoption-related information without putting their relationship with their adoptive parents at risk. Consistent with this reasoning, researchers have demonstrated that adoptees who experience secrecy about their adoption in interactions with adoptive

parents tend to experience a host of negative feelings surrounding their adoption (Passmore, et al., 2007). Adoptive parents' communicative openness has consistently emerged as a predictor of adoptee adjustment, even more so than the structural openness arrangement of the birth parents inclusion in the adoptive family (Brodzinsky, 2006). The finding from the present study joins this line of research supporting the positive role that communication openness plays in adoptees' feelings about his or her adoption.

In addition to communication openness, adoptive parents' affectionate communication with their child plays an important role in adoptees' development as evidenced in feelings about his or her birth parents. Findings from the present study suggest that individuals who perceive their adoptive parents to be affectionate with them tend to have higher positive affect about their birth parents. Although researchers have demonstrated that affectionate communication is an important predictor of children's social development (Floyd & Morman, 2005), adoptive scholars have yet to consider the degree to which affectionate communication may relate to an adoptee's feelings about his or her birth parents. Although this was not a hypothesized as a direct relationship but rather a mediated relationship through adoptive identity, discovering an association between adoptive parent affectionate communication and affect about birth parent provides further evidence that adoptive parent communication frames an adoptee's outlook on his or her adoption. Affectionate Communication Theory (Floyd & Morman, 2000) explains that children see their parents' affectionate communication as a resource given to those who parents view as valuable and important. As adoptive parents express to their children that they are valuable members of the family, adoptees likely develop a security in their relationship with their adoptive parents. Affectionate communication

may be a means of establishing a strong bond between adoptive parent and child, and the strength of this bond likely affords the adoptee freedom to view his or her birth parents in a positive light. Adoptive parents may also model positive feelings about their child's adoption by expressing feelings of closeness and fondness to their child, which in turn helps an adoptee have a more positive outlook on his or her adoption.

Final evidence of the role of parental communication in adoptees' development is tied to adoptee self-esteem and satisfaction with life. Findings from the present study demonstrate that individuals with adoptive parents who are affectionate and confirming tend to have high levels of self-esteem and satisfaction with life. These findings are consistent with parent-child research. Parental confirmation helps build sense of self in children through communication that enhances an individual's value as a human being (Ellis, 2002). As parents foster a sense of worth and importance in their children, children tend to exhibit high levels of mental health and well-being (Schrodt, et al., 2007). Similarly, affectionate communication is linked with positive aspects of well-being including both life satisfaction (Young, et al., 1995) and self-esteem (Schrodt, et al., 2007). The findings in this sample of adoptees echo current research stemming from general parental communication research, reinforcing the similarities between adoptive and consanguineous families. Just as parents are formative agents of their child's development, adoptive parents can be important sources of well-being for their children.

Findings linking parental confirmation and affectionate communication with adoptee well-being also underscore the importance of examining non-adoption related talk in adoptive families. Despite the fact that research on communication in adoptive families has tended to focus exclusively on adoption-related communication (e.g.

Brodzinsky, 2006; Sobol, et al., 1994; Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003), communication geared at empowering a child's development as a person and not just as an adoptee plays an important role in adoptee adjustment. Given that adoption-related communication is usually a small component of parent-child communication (Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010), research examining the general communicative environment of adoptive families is warranted.

Parental communication as normalizing adoption. A second implication about the relationship between parental communication and adoptive identity development is the importance of adoptive parents normalizing the adoption for their children. In the present study, two sets of findings point toward communication emphasizing the difference inherent in adoptive relationships as being detrimental for adoptees. These findings underscore the importance of adoptive parents creating a family environment that emphasizes belongingness and inclusion rather than an environment emphasizing the challenging or unique aspects of adoptive family relationships.

First, findings in the current study suggest that individuals who perceive their parents to be in high in acknowledgement of difference tend to have negative affect about their adoption. Research suggests that acknowledgement of difference facilitates the adopted child's adjustment by providing the child with a safe structure within the family to develop an understanding of his or her adoption from an early age (Sobol, et al., 1994). The influence of acknowledgement of difference can perhaps be best demonstrated when considering parents who deny that adoption provides a unique set of differences; parents who neglect the unique needs of adoptive relationships may stunt an adoptees' exploration of and commitment to the role of adoption in his or her life, thus potentially

causing confusion and negative feelings about this or her adoption (Kirk, 1964). As such, a rejection of the unique aspects of the adoptive parent-child relationships likely contributes to confusion and denial of adoption-related issues. However, too much attention to differences may serve to isolate the child from the adoptive family (Sobol, et al., 1994). Therefore, balanced levels of acknowledgement of difference have been purported to facilitate adoptee adjustment in previous research (Donahue, 2008) as well as in the present study.

Findings from the current study do not support the notion that balanced levels of acknowledgement of difference were related to either adoptive identity or adoptee adjustment. Rather, a linear relationship was discovered between acknowledgement of difference and affect about adoption such that individuals who experience communication reinforcing the differentness inherent in their adoptive status tend to view their adoption in a negative light. This finding contradicts previous research that suggests that adoptive parents can serve the needs of their children by discussing their child's adoption with them early and often (Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003), suggesting instead that frequent communication aimed at targeting the differentness inherent in adoptive relationships may undermine a child's security in his or her place in the adoptive family.

Second, findings from the current study suggest that individuals who experience increased structural openness tend to be more preoccupied with their adoption and have more negative feelings about their birth parents. The indirect effect of preoccupation mediating structural openness and affect about adoption and birth parents further elucidates the potential role of structural openness in adoptee development. The findings from the current study suggest that having an open adoption may continually remind an

adoptee that he or she is adopted, making their adoption a large component of their identity. As preoccupation is in turn related to low positive affect for adoption and birth parents, open adoptions may be source of struggle for adoptees both directly and indirectly through preoccupation with adoption. Understanding these potential downfalls in open adoptions provides key insight into extant research by underscoring the need to conceptualize open adoption relationships as discourse dependent (Galvin, 2006a).

The discourse-dependent nature of open adoption relationships is supported by extant research on structural openness. Research demonstrates that increased access to birth parents allows adoptees to better understand their biological origins and reasons for their placement in an adoptive family (Atwood, 2007; Berry, 1993; Gritter, 1998). Researchers characterize openness as a continuum ranging from confidential adoptions in which there is no contact with or knowledge of the birth family, to mediated adoptions in which agencies facilitate contact between birth and adoptive parents, to open adoptions in which the birth family engages in ongoing communication with the adoptive family (Wrobel, et al., 1996). Given the merits of birth parent contact, adoptive placements are increasingly open in structure, with adoption researchers and practitioners overwhelmingly embracing the virtues of open adoption (Atwood, 2007; Brodzinsky, 2006).

Further examination of structural openness research, however, testifies to the complexity inherent in birth and adoptive family relationships as a discourse-dependent family form. Despite current adoption practice endorsing open adoptions, there is not a "one size fits all" solution to openness decisions. Rather, birth and adoptive parents must make agreements on the desired level of openness they will enact in their kinship network

based on individual preferences and needs (Atwood, 2007). Results from the present study suggest that more openness is likely not beneficial for adoptees.

Adoption researchers have concluded that structural openness in and of itself does not affect the adjustment of the adoptive child; rather, characteristics of individuals, families, and the kinship network relate to individual and family well-being as these family members jointly construct their relationship through their communication (Grotevant, et al., 2005). In other words, the openness arrangement may not be as important as the way in which the adoption triad communicatively constructs their relationship within various levels of openness. Issues of relationship boundaries, privacy, control, predictability, and parental authority as well as shared expectations concerning frequency and type of future contact between the birth parent and child are communicative tasks that the adoptive family undertakes in tandem with the birth family in constructing mutually satisfying relationships with one another (Melina & Roszia, 1993). Entrance into an open adoption is an inherently communicative process, thoroughly dependent upon discourse as a means to develop and maintain personal and family identities (Galvin, 2003).

The current study adds to this line of research by suggesting that more openness may not be better for adoptees given the associations between structural openness and preoccupation about adoption and negative affect about birth parents. Taking the findings regarding the association between acknowledgement of difference and structural openness with adoptee adjustment together, the current study suggests that adoptees who are increasingly reminded of their adopted status may fare worse than those who feel at home in their adoptive family. Individuals with adoptive parents who excessively point

toward the uniqueness of their adoptive relationship and birth parents who are in regular contact with the adoptive family may view these forms of communication as constant reminders of their adoption. Rather than facilitating the adoptee's development, excessive acknowledgement of difference and regular involvement with birth parents may cause the adoptee to overemphasize the role of adoption in his or her life. Instead of endorsing wholesale the impact of open adoptions on adoptive identity, this study adds to a long line of research suggesting that moderate levels of structural openness may be the most beneficial for adoptees (Grotevant, et al., 2007; Von Korff, 2008) with the effect of structural openness being dependent of the nature of communication between the birth and adoptive families.

In other research, the importance of parents normalizing the adoption emerged as key aspect of adoptee experience (Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010). We discovered that many adoptees reported feeling as though their adoption was a normal aspect of their family life. Adoptive parents facilitated the normalization of their child's adoption by making adoption commonplace. Adoptees reported always knowing that they were adopted and felt as though their adoption was for the most part an unnoticeable aspect of their family. Although a denial of adoptive family relationships has long been recognized as detrimental to adoptive families (Wrobel, Grotevant, et al., 2003), the findings from the present study remind us that a complete shift toward embracing the uniqueness of adoptive relationships in everyday communication may also be detrimental. Adoptive parents can facilitate their child's adjustment by creating normalcy based on the legitimacy of the adoptive relationship.

Conclusions about adoptive identity

Findings from the current study provide evidence to make two initial conclusions about adoptive identity. First, adoptive identity frames an individual's perspective of his or her adoption. Second, parental communication plays a part in adoptive identity development, but the lack of significant findings suggest that there is much more work to be done in adoptive identity research.

Adoptive identity frames perspectives on adoption. First, the current study provides evidence for the conclusion that an individual's feelings about his or her adoption are explained in part by adoptive identity. Specifically, individuals in the current study with unsettled adoptive identities were more likely to have positive feelings about their birth parents and negative feelings about their adoptive parents. Individuals with an unsettled adoptive identity are those who are high in exploration and salience, meaning they have extensively gathered information about their adoption, thought at length about the meaning of their adoption in their life, and have placed great importance on their adoption status as a way to understand themselves. One explanation for this relationship rests on the role of idealization – as individuals undergo identity work through this exploration and commitment process, they may begin to idealize their birth parents, perceiving the birth parents to be more desirable alternatives to their adoptive parents.

Previous adoption research supports the notion that some idealization usually takes place as individuals try to understand their biological roots. In extreme cases, adoptees have reported fantasizing about who their birth parents are, looking toward celebrities as possible candidates (Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010); an adoptee in our study

shared that she would imagine that her birth mother was Gloria Estefan, Judy Garland, or Karen Carpenter. We also found that individuals would think extensively about their birth mother's appearance, often attempting to identify their birth mother in public settings based on hair color, height, or general age. Dunbar (2003) found similar behaviors with individuals searching through high school yearbooks to find someone that looks them as a means of discovering more about their birth parents. As individuals spend time gathering information and reflecting on the role of adoption in their life, they may be idealizing their birth parents as a way to make sense of their genetic roots.

At the same time, findings in the current study indicate that structural openness is associated with negative affect about birth parents further reinforcing the possibility that adoptees idealize birth parents. Whereas gathering information, reflecting on the adoption, and ascribing meaning to the adoption is related to positive affect about birth parents, actual contact with birth parents is associated with negative feelings about birth parents. The birth parent relationship is an extremely complicated relationship with very few social scripts to guide interactions (Grotevant, et al., 2007). Birth relatives obviously share biological ties, fitting with most traditional definitions of family (Floyd, Mikkelson, & Judd, 2006). Despite biological connectedness, however, birth family relationships stretch biologically-based definitions of family as the relationship between birth parent and child is largely unclear. Birth relatives construct their relationship to one another through their communication, making this biological relationship discourse-dependent (Galvin, 2006a).

Birth relatives have few guides in constructing their relationship with one another, and many adoptees report that their interactions with their birth parents are uncomfortable

(Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004). Because of the ambiguity of the birth family relationship, adoptees may struggle with how they relate to their birth parents. Therefore, although having an unsettled identity as characterized by high levels exploration and commitment relate to positive feelings about birth parents, actual contact as characterized by structural openness is related to negative feelings about birth parents.

Parental communication plays a part in adoptive identity. A second conclusion from the present study pertains to role of parental communication in the formation of adoptive identity. Results suggest that parental communication plays some role in the formation of adoptive identity, but the influence of parental communication may be limited. In this section, I first discuss the relationships between parental communication and adoptive identity. Next, I recognize the limited role of parental communication and suggest further avenues of research in this realm.

Associations between adoptive parent communication and adoptive identity. First, findings from the current study suggest that both communication openness and parental confirmation may lessen the likelihood of an adoptee having an unsettled identity. In regards to communication openness, information needs are likely driving the relationship between parental communication and adoptive identity. As adoptive parents freely provide adoption-related information by creating a context in which the child's adoption-related thoughts and feelings are accepted and understood (Brodzinsky, 2005), adoptees are able to focus their identity work efforts on understanding the meaning of the role that adoption plays in their larger sense of self. In other research, communication openness was associated with a resolution of adoption-related issues (Donahue, 2008), suggesting that communication openness provides a pathway to identity development. In

creating an open communicative environment in which to discuss adoption-related information, adoptive parents can nurture their child's understanding and acceptance of his or her adoption.

The indirect finding in the current study linking communication openness to affect about birth parents through adoptive identity further develops this line of reasoning, supporting the notion that communication openness allows for the resolution of adoption-related issues as evidenced by positive affect for birth parents. Specifically, as adoptive parents' communication openness increases, adoptees are less likely to be unsettled about their adoptive identity, and this decrease in unsettled identity is associated with increased positive affect about birth parents. These findings demonstrate the important role of communication openness in adoptive identity development.

In addition to communication openness, parental confirmation emerged as a predictor of adoptive identity. Specifically, individuals who perceived their adoptive parents to exhibit confirming communication are less likely to have an unsettled adoptive identity. Parental confirmation likely prevents adoptees from placing too much meaning on their adoption by fostering the development of other aspects of an adoptee's self. Given that confirming communication allows children to feel "endorsed, recognized, and acknowledged as valuable, significant individuals" (Ellis, 2002, p. 321), adoptees with parents who exhibit confirming communication have the support needed to focus on aspects of the self that do not depend on their status as an adopted individual.

Taking these findings together, results from the current study underscore the important role of parental communication in adoptive identity development. Having access to adoption-related information and feeling confirmed by parents may allow an

adoptee to process his or her adoption in ways that discourages adoptees from being

unsettled, thus permitting the adoptee to come to terms with his or her adoption.

Adoptive parent communication in the present study was measured at the global

level, measuring mother and father communication separately but combining these scores

for analysis. In post-hoc analysis comparing mother and father communication, there

were not significant differences in the degree to which mother and father communication

was related to adoptive identity. Previous research has determined different patterns of

communication between mothers and fathers in relation to their adopted child, with

mothers offering more information to the child throughout the child's developmental

stages (Schwartz & Finley, 2006; Wrobel, et al., 1998). Results from the current study

indicating that mother and father communication were not correlated differently to

adoptive identity brings new insight into the degree to which parental communication

may actually differ between mothers and fathers. Although adoptees may report unique

patterns of communication for mothers and fathers, the degree to which parents differ in

relation to adoptive identity is not at the level of statistical significance. These findings

support the possibility that adoptees' perceptions of global parental communication may

be more meaningful when considering adoptive identity development than individual

mother and father communication patterns.

Limited role of parental communication in adoptive identity development.

Although many of the communication variables emerged as significant predictors of

adoptee adjustment, many of the hypotheses for adoptive identity development were not

supported. Specifically, neither frequency of birth parent contact nor affectionate

communication was predictive of adoptive identity or preoccupation. Structural openness

and acknowledgement of difference were also not associated with adoptive identity, and communication openness and parental confirmation were not associated with preoccupation. Only communication openness and parental confirmation explained variance in adoptive identity, and structural openness and acknowledgement of difference were the only significant predictors of preoccupation. Even these variables explained only a portion of variance for adoptive identity (9%) and preoccupation (11%). Given the scope of these findings, there is much left unexplained in adoptive identity development. Therefore, although parental communication may play an important role in adoptive identity development, this role is limited in its influence and scope. Three possible reasons exist explaining the lack of significant findings in the present study.

First, Grotevant and colleagues (2000) position adoptive identity as involving three components: the *intrapsychic* component involving intellectual and affective processes; the *relational* component involving how identity is negotiated and enacted within the family; and the *social* component involving interaction in contexts beyond the family unit. In the present study, I focused on the relational component, viewing parental communication as an important pathway through which adoptive identity is formed. Although parental communication clearly plays a pivotal role in an adoptee's understanding of and adjustment to his or her adoption, parental communication is just one part of a larger context of factors culminating to influence one's adoptive identity. Future research should address the intrapsychic and social components to adoptive identity to add additional information about the processes central to adoptive identity formation.

Communication scholars are not precluded from investigating individual and social components of adoptive identity. Although viewing adoptive identity as housed in family relationships may be more central to communication theorizing, the Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht, Jackson, & Pitts, 2005) gives insight into how the three components of identity could be viewed as enactments of identity by highlighting multiple interdependent layers of identity that come together to create a holistic sense of self. CTI situates identity as an inherently communicative entity in that a "person's sense of self is part of his or her social behavior, and the sense of self emerges and is defined and redefined in social behavior" (Hecht, Warren, et al., 2005, p. 260). In this line of reasoning, communication is not separate from or a precursor to identity, but rather communication is the enactment of identity. Communication constitutes our identity, and social interaction simultaneously affects and comprises our identity (Hecht, Jackson, et al., 2005). Identity, as it is intricately linked with communication, is both relational and discursive (Hecht, Warren, et al., 2005).

CTI offers a holistic assessment of identity by indentifying multiple loci of identity pertaining to both individual and relational realms (Hecht, 2002). There are four layers of identity resulting from the multiple loci of identity: personal, enacted, relational, and communal (Hecht, Warren, et al., 2005). The *personal layer* of identity is similar to traditional conceptualizations of identity as the individual is a source of identity. Personal identity stems from how individuals define themselves through their self-concept or self-image. CTI, however, builds off this basic notion of identity to account for how this identity is constructed and maintained in social interaction. The *enactment layer* is the expression of identity as identity is enacted and defined in messages with

others. Communication is the primary focus in the enacted layer. The *relational layer* calls upon both the individual and enacted layer by asserting that identity is jointly negotiated in relationships through communication in which identity is a mutual product of self and the other. Relational identities take three forms: identity as a product of social interaction through ongoing modification of one's identity as influenced by other's view of the individual, identity as defined by relational roles such as parent or child, and identity as the relational unit in which the relationship itself is an identity such as being a member of a particular family. Finally, the *communal layer* of identity situates identity within group membership in which shared characteristics with other ingroup members influence how an individual comes to a sense of self.

An important component of CTI is that the four layers of identity are interpenetrated (Hecht, Jackson, et al., 2005). Personal, enacted, relational, and communal layers of identity build upon and inform one another to the degree that it is necessary to consider each layer in conjunction with the other layers. The degree to which specific layers interact and separate differs in specific contexts, but the four layers combine to inform an individual's holistic understanding of his or her identity and place in the social world.

Future research examining the intrapsychic, relational, and social components of adoptive identity using CTI as a theoretical framework can perhaps inform researchers on the numerous pathways through which adoptive identity is formed. A CTI approach privileging the communicative nature of identity among various layers has the potential to bring valuable insight into the adoptive identity formation process in its numerous forms. Research drawing from CTI could also illuminate the degree to which adoptive

identity intersects with other aspects of an individual's identity such as gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation by emphasizing the communal layer of identity as consisting identification with numerous social groups. CTI would provide a theoretical framework for looking at adoptive identity – an area of inquiry that is currently lacking in theory.

A second potential reason for the lack of significant findings in the present study is based on the changing needs of adoptees over time. The Family Adoptive Communication Model (FAC; Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003) explains that ongoing adoption disclosures are important considering the changing needs of the child. As adoptees develop intellectually and emotionally throughout childhood, their informational needs change. Adoption-related communication in early years may be only effective insofar as they correspond to the child's developmental capabilities, thus ongoing conversations about adoption best serve the adoptee's formation (Brodzinsky, et al., 1984). According to the FAC, communication about adoption is dynamic as the adopted child's needs change over time (Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003). Given the fluidity of adoptive parents' communication, certain communication behaviors may be related to adoptive identity development at various stages of the developmental process. For example, the FAC suggests that adoptive parent's task in the early childhood years is to provide unsolicited information to the child about adoption. In these years, frequency of talk about adoption may be central to a young adoptee's understanding of his or her adoption. The FAC explains that as adoptees develop mentally and emotionally, they begin to approach the adoptive parents with questions about their adoption. In this stage, communication openness may emerge as more important than frequency of talk to encourage the child's curiosity. In the final stage of the FAC, adoptees seek out

information about the adoption independently of the parents either through legal means or direct contact with birth parents. Here adoptive parents do not play as active a role in communicating with their child about his or her adoption, but adoptive parents support as manifested in parental confirmation and affectionate communication may facilitate an adoptees' identity development.

Strong empirical and theoretical evidence supports the notion that adoptive parent communication changes over time (Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003), but the degree to which parental communication relates to adoptive identity development differently at various stages of the developmental process is not yet solidified in adoption research. In the current study, I conducted cross-sectional research in which I prompted adoptees to provide perceptions of their adoptive parents communication throughout their upbringing as well as their current state of adoptive identity development. My research design does not account for the degree to which adoptive parent communication may have varied throughout the adoptees' upbringing. Additionally, the current study does not examine the degree to which adoptive parent communication may have related to various stages of adoptive identity development. The fact that many parental communication variables were not associated with adoptive identity development in the current study does not preclude the possibility that these parental communication behaviors may have been contributed to adoptive identity development at earlier stages of the adoptive identity formation process.

A final reason for the lack of significant findings is based on individual variation in identity needs of adoptees. Studies examining adoptees' level of uncertainty about their adoption find that individuals range in their responses to their adoption. Powell and

Afifi (2005) found that many adoptees do not experience a sense of loss or uncertainty about their adoption. In our extension of this research (Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010), we found that many adoptees were unmotivated to reduce their uncertainty about their adoption. These studies suggest that some adoptees may not be motivated to undergo identity work to better understand their adoption. These individuals who view their adoption to be a negligible aspect of their identity resemble the unexamined adoptive identity from Dunbar's (2003) adoptive identity typology. In these cases, adoptees may not begin the adoptive identity formation process due to personal preference or identity needs. Adoptive parents of individuals with low uncertainty or limited adoptive identities may still exhibit the communication behaviors measured in the current study. However, due to individual identity needs, parental communication may not be predictive of adoptive identity for those individuals who are not interested in the exploration or commitment inherent in adoptive identity development.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the contributions of this research, the results should be interpreted within the limitations of the research design. This study utilized a nonrandom sample of adult adoptees. As such, the generalizability of these results to the adoptee population is not warranted. Rather, these findings provide insight into the relationship between parental communication, adoptive identity, and adoptee adjustment. Additional research utilizing a more representative sample of adoptees should precede the revision of theories supporting the models examined in this study. Acknowledging the degree to which characteristics of the sample may attenuate the relationships between variables in the present gives important insight into the findings presented in the current study. In this

section, I review five potential sources of variance in the present study: family structure, age, foster care, international adoption, and self-selection bias.

Family structure. Both single parent and two-parent families were included in the present study, and family structure may be an important source of variation in adoptive identity development. In the current study, individuals in two-parent families were higher on adoptive identity exploration and salience than individuals from single parent families. Further research exploring the degree to which family structure may influence adoptive identity development is warranted.

Age. In the current study, age was significantly associated with adoptive identity. Specifically, older individuals had higher scores on measures of exploration and salience. This finding is consistent with other adoptive identity research (Donahue, 2008; Dunbar, 2003). Therefore, individuals may come to terms with their adoptive status and resolve adoption-related issues as they mature and develop throughout their adulthood. Parental communication may not play as prominent a role in the identity work done during adulthood. Given the variations between age and adoptive identity, the current study's findings should be interpreted with caution.

Additionally, older individuals were less likely to have open adoptions and contact with their birth parents throughout their upbringing. Access to birth parent information and interactions plays a prominent role in adoptive identity development (Wrobel, Grotevant, et al., 2003), and the identity work required of individuals who do not have contact with their birth parents is likely different than individuals who have an open relationship with their birth family. Given the significant associations between age and aspects of the birth parent relationship, the findings in the current study should be

interpreted with caution, particularly given the associations between adoptive identity development and birth parent contact. In that adoptive placements are increasingly shifting to open arrangements with increasingly regular birth parent contact (Atwood, 2007), ongoing research should examine the degree to which birth parent contact facilitates adoptive identity formation.

Foster care. Individuals who were in the foster care system were included in the present study. Analysis revealed that the individuals who were in the foster care system did not differ from the sample on the exploration and salience dimensions adoptive identity. Research indicates that children do not begin to comprehend adoptive placements until they are approximately five years old at which point adoptive parents begin to construct an adoption story and answer questions about the child's adoptive placement (Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003). Given the young age at which individuals who were in the foster care system were placed with their adoptive families, these individuals are likely to have similar identity needs when compared with individuals who were adopted at infancy. Additional research examining the identity formation of individuals in the foster care system is warranted, and I envision myself pursuing this line of research in the future. Foster family research is particularly important when considering that adoptions through the foster care system are occurring with approximately twice the frequency of private infant adoptions (Placek, 2007). As foster families are becoming increasingly common in our society, knowledge of the identity needs of foster children and the communicative dynamics of foster parents will be crucial for family scholars and practitioners.

Internationally adopted individuals.   In the current study, individuals from both international and domestic adoptions were included. Findings from the present study did not uncover significant differences between these groups on adoptive identity. However, the communicative environments and the identity needs of families formed through international and visibly different adoption are unique (Harrigan & Braithwaite, 2010). Perhaps one reason that internationally adopted individuals did not differ from the remainder of the sample is due to the small number of international adoptees in the present study. Future research incorporating a more representative sample of internationally adopted individuals is likely to uncover unique adoptive identity needs for this group. It is likely that adoptive parent communication plays a different role for internationally adopted individuals.

Self-selection bias. The sampling methodology utilized in the current study may attenuate the findings in the current study. Specifically, I solicited participants by posting the link to my survey in online forums about adoption. The individuals who are active in adoption forums are more likely to view their adoption as an important aspect of their self. These individuals may also be more likely to view their adoption in extremes, either perceiving adoption to be overwhelmingly positive or negative. Those in the forums who opted to complete my survey are also likely to be those individuals who are interested in generating knowledge about adoption, further suggesting that adoption is an important aspect of the identity of the individuals in the sample used in the current study. Due to the individuals who saw my call for research and elected to complete the survey, there may be a self-selection bias in the sample. The current study should not be considered representative of adoptees in a general sense. Future research that solicits adoptee

participation from mainstream society from can provide additional insight into the findings in the present study.

Conclusion

Adoptees face crucial questions of identity as they attempt to make sense of the role of adoption in their sense of self such as "Where did I come from? Who were my birthparents? Why was I placed for adoption? Do my birthparents think of me now? Do I have birth siblings? What does adoption mean in my life?" (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004, p. 135). Forming responses to these questions is a primal need for many adoptees as they begin to construct an adoptive identity, or an understanding of what it means to be adopted. In the current study, I examined the adoptive identity formation process by focusing on developed adoptive identities, or identities in which adoptees incorporate both positive and negative aspects of their adoption into a sense of self that includes, but is not overly preoccupied with, their adopted status. I conducted two pilot studies to refine the conceptualization and operationalization of developed adoptive identity. These studies, along with empirical and theoretical support from extant adoptive identity research (Donahue, 2008; Dunbar, 2003; Grotevant, et al., 2000; Von Korff, 2008), point toward developed adoptive identity being a mid-point on a continuum of exploration and salience, characterized by moderate levels of behavioral exploration, reflective exploration, and salience and low levels of preoccupation. In refining this definition of developed adoptive identity, developed adoptive identity is measured in the current study by two separate measures (Adoptive Identity Scale and Preoccupation with Adoption Scale) that together give a holistic accounting of the correlates of developed adoptive identity.

Throughout this study, I offered empirical and theoretical evidence for (a) the association of parent-child communication and the formation of developed adoptive identity as well as (b) the association between developed adoptive identity and individual well-being as well as relational well-being with the adoptive and birth parents. Findings from the present study underscore the importance of emphasizing the content, nature, and process of communication in understanding the role of parental communication in facilitating the formation of developed adoptive identity. Communication openness and parental confirmation are particularly important to adoptive identity formation; individuals with parents who were open about their adoption and confirming of their worth tended to not have an unsettled adoptive identity. Structural openness and acknowledgement seem to play a part in adoptive identity by increasing the likelihood that an individual will be preoccupied about his or her adoption. Findings from the present study also point toward adoptive identity playing an important role in adoptee adjustment. Adoptive identity was positively related to affect for their birth parents, self-esteem, and satisfaction with life and negatively related to positive affect about adoptive parents, whereas preoccupation was negatively associated with affect about adoption, affect for their birth parents, self-esteem, and satisfaction with life.

Aggregating these findings, the current study provides insight into both the contribution of adoptive parent communication as well as the importance of adoptive identity. Adoptive parent communication can facilitate adoptees adjustment, and adoptive parents may best serve their children's needs by normalizing their child's role in the adoptive family. Additionally, adoptive identity frames an individual's outlook on his or her adoption. Although adoptive parents' communication facilitates the formation of

adoptive identity to some degree, additional possibilities beyond parental communication exist for further explaining the developmental process through which individuals come to form an adoptive identity. Overall, this study extends theorizing on developed adoptive identity and provides insight into the parental communication behaviors and aspects of adoptee adjustment associated with adoptive identity.

REFERENCES

Adams, G. R., & Marshall, S. K. (1996). A developmental social psychology of identity: Understanding the person-in-context. *Journal of Adolescence, 19*, 429-442.

Atwood, T. C. (2007). The jury is in regarding adoption openness. In T. C. Atwood, L. A. Allen, V. C. Ravenel & N. F. Callahan (Eds.), *Adoption Factbook IV* (pp. 453-454). Alexandria, VA: National Council for Adoption.

Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51*, 1173-1182.

Baxter, L. A. (2004). Relationships as dialogues. *Personal Relationships, 11*, 1-22.

Benson, P. L., Sharma, A. R., & Roehlkepartain, E. C. (1994). *The Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire*. Minneapolis, MN: The Search Institute.

Bergen, K. M., & Braithwaite, D. O. (2009). Identity as constituted in communication. In W. F. Eadie (Ed.), *21st Century Communication* (Vol. 1, pp. 165-176). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Berry, M. (1993). Risks and benefits of open adoption. *The Future of Children, 3*, 125-138.

Brodzinsky, D. M. (1987). Adjustment to adoption: A psychosocial perspective. *Clinical Psychology Review, 7*, 25-47.

Brodzinsky, D. M. (1993). Long-term outcomes in adoption. *The Future of Children, 3*, 153-166.

Brodzinsky, D. M. (2005). Reconcepualizing openness in adoption: Implications for theory, research, and practice. In D. M. Brodzinsky & J. Palacios (Eds.),

Psychological issues in adoption: Research and practice (pp. 145-166). Westport, CT: Praegar Publishers.

Brodzinsky, D. M. (2006). Family structural openness and communication openness as predictors in the adjustment of adopted children. *Adoption Quarterly, 9*, 1-18.

Brodzinsky, D. M., & Pinderhughes, E. (2002). Parenting and child development in adoptive families. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting* (Vol. 1, pp. 279-311). Mahwah, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaun Associates.

Brodzinsky, D. M., Singer, L. M., & Braff, A. M. (1984). Children's understanding of adoption. *Child Development, 55*, 869-878.

Buber, M. (1958). *I and thou*. New York: Scribner.

Colaner, C. W., & Kranstuber, H. (2010). "Forever kind of wondering": Communicatively managing uncertainty in adoptive families. *Journal of Family Communication, 10*, 236-255.

Diener, E. D., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The Satisfaction with Life Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 49*, 71-75.

Docan-Morgan, S. J. (2008). *They don't know what it's like to be in my shoes: Topic avoidance about race in transracially adoptive families*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association.

Donahue, E. A. (2008). *Open communication in adoption and adoptive identity development.* Long Island University, New York City, New York.

Dornbusch, S. M., Mont-Reynaud, R., Ritter, P. L., Chen, Z., & Steinberg, L. (1991). Stressful events and their correlates among adolescents of diverse backgrounds. In

M. E. Colten & S. Gore (Eds.), *Adolescent stress: Causes and consequences* (pp. 111-130). New York: Aldine De Gruyter.

Dunbar, N. (2003). *Typologies of adolescent adoptive Identity: The influence of family context and relationships.* Univerisity of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

Dunbar, N., & Grotevant, H. D. (2004). Adoption narratives: The construction of adoptive identity during adolescence. In M. W. Pratt & B. H. Fiese (Eds.), *Family stories and the life course: Across time and generations* (pp. 135-161). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Ellis, K. (2002). Perceived parental confirmation: Development and validation of an instrument. *Southern Communication Journal, 67*, 319-334.

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: WW Norton & Company.

Floyd, K., Mikkelson, A. C., & Judd, J. (2006). Defining the family through relationships. In L. H. Turner & R. West (Eds.), *The family communication sourcebook* (pp. 21-39). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Floyd, K., & Morman, M. T. (1998). The measurement of affectionate communication. *Communication Quarterly, 46*, 144-162.

Floyd, K., & Morman, M. T. (2000). Affection received from fathers as a predictor of men's affection with their own sons: Tests of the modeling and compensation hypotheses. *Communication Monographs, 67*, 347-361.

Floyd, K., & Morman, M. T. (2005). Fathers' and sons' reports of fathers' affectionate communication: Implications of a naive theory of affection. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 22*, 99.

Frey, L., Botan, C. H., & Kreps, G. L. (2000). *Investigating communication: An introduction to research methods, 2nd edition*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Friedlander, M. L. (1999). Ethnic identity development of internationally adopted children and adolescents: Implications for family therapists. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 25*, 43-60.

Galvin, K. (2003). International and transracial adoption: A communication research agenda. *Journal of Family Communication, 3*, 237-259.

Galvin, K. (2006a). Diversity's impact on defining the family. In L. H. Turner & R. West (Eds.), *The family communication sourcebook* (pp. 3-19). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Galvin, K. (2006b). Joined by hearts and words: Adoptive family relationships. In K. Floyd & M. T. Morman (Eds.), *Widening the family circle: New research in family communication* (pp. 137-152). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gergen, K. J. (1991). *The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*. New York: Basic Books.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Graham, J. W. (2009). Missing data analysis: Making it work in the real world. *Annual Review of Psychology, 60*, 549-576.

Graham, J. W., Taylor, B. J., Olchowski, A. E., & Cumsille, P. E. (2006). Planned missing data designs in psychological research. *Psychological Methods, 11*, 323-343.

Gritter, J. L. (1998). *The spirit of open adoption*. Mt. Morris, IL: CWLA Press.

Grotevant, H. D. (1997). Coming to terms with adoption: The construction of identity from adolescence into adulthood. *Adoption Quarterly, 1*, 3-28.

Grotevant, H. D., & Cooper, C. R. (1985). Patterns of interaction in family relationships and the development of identity exploration in adolescence. *Child Development, 56*, 415-428.

Grotevant, H. D., Dunbar, N., & Kohler, J. K. (1999). Manual for coding identity in adopted adolescents. University of Minnesota.

Grotevant, H. D., Dunbar, N., Kohler, J. K., & Esau, A. M. L. (2000). Adoptive identity: How contexts within and beyond the family shape developmental pathways. *Family Relations, 49*, 379-387.

Grotevant, H. D., Fravel, D., Gorall, D., & Piper, J. (1999). Narratives of adoptive parents: Perspectives from individual and couple interviews. In B. Fiese, A. Sameroff, H. Grotevant, F. Wambolt, S. Dickstein & D. Fravel (Eds.), *The stories that families tell: Narrative coherence, narrative interaction, and relationship beliefs* (pp. 69-81). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Grotevant, H. D., & McRoy, R. (1998). *Openness in adoption: Exploring family connections*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Grotevant, H. D., Perry, Y. V., & McRoy, R. G. (2005). Openness in adoption: Outcomes for adolescents within their adoption kinship networks. In D. M. Brodzinsky & J. Palacios (Eds.), *Psychological Issues in Adoption: Research and Practice* (pp. 166-186). Westport, CT: Praegar Publishers.

Grotevant, H. D., Wrobel, G. M., Von Korff, L., Skinner, B., Newell, J., Friese, S., et al. (2007). Many faces of openness in adoption: Perspectives of adopted adolescents and their parents. *Adoption Quarterly, 10*, 79-101.

Harrigan, M. M. (2009). The contradictions of identity-work for parents of visibly adopted children. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 26*, 634-658.

Harrigan, M. M., & Braithwaite, D. O. (2010). Discursive struggles in families formed through visible adoption: An exploration of dialectical unity. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 38*, 127 - 144.

Hecht, M. L. (2002). A research odyssey: Toward the development of a communication theory of identity. *Communication Monographs, 60*, 76-82.

Hecht, M. L., Jackson, R. L., II, & Pitts, M. J. (2005). Culture: Intersections of Intergroup and Identity Theories. In J. Harwood & H. Giles (Eds.), *Intergroup Communication: Multiple Perspectives* (pp. 21-42). New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Hecht, M. L., Warren, J. R., Jung, E., & Krieger, J. L. (2005). A communication theory of identity: Development, theoretical perspective, and future directions. In W. B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Theorizing about intercultural communication* (pp. 257-278). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Henney, S. M., McRoy, R. G., Ayers-Lopez, S., & Grotevant, H. D. (2003). The impact of openness on adoption agency practices. *Adoption Quarterly, 6*, 31-51.

Higgins, E. T. (1987). Self-discrepancy: A theory relating self and affect. *Psychological Review, 94*, 319-340.

Jones, C., & Hackett, S. (2008). Communicative openness within adoptive families: Adoptive parents' narrative accounts of the challenges of adoption talk and the approaches used to manage these challenges. *Adoption Quarterly, 10*, 157-178.

Kammann, R., & Flett, R. (1983). Affectometer 2: A scale to measure current level of general happiness. *Australian Journal of Psychology, 35*, 259-265.

King, P. E., Furrow, J. L., & Roth, N. (2002). The influence of families and peers on adolescent religiousness. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity, 21*, 109–120.

Kirk, H. D. (1964). *Shared fate*. New York: Free Press.

Kline, R. B. (2005). *Principle and practice of Structural Equation Modeling*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Koenig Kellas, J. (2008). Narrative theories: Making sense of interpersonal communication. In L. A. Baxter & D. O. Braithwaite (Eds.), *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 241-254). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kohler, J. K., Grotevant, H. D., & McRoy, R. G. (2002). Adopted adolescents' preoccupation with adoption: The impact on adoptive family relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 64*, 93-104.

Lanz, M., Iafrate, R., Rosnati, R., & Scabini, E. (1999). Parent–child communication and adolescent self-esteem in separated, intercountry adoptive and intact non-adoptive families. *Journal of Adolescence, 22*, 785-794.

Levine, T. (2005). Confirmatory factor analysis and scale validation in communication research. *Communication Research Reports, 22*, 335-338.

Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3*, 551-558.

Marcia, J. E. (1993). The identity status approach to ego identity In J. E. Marcia & D. R. Waterman (Eds.), *Ego identity: A handbook for psychosocial research* (pp. 1-21). New York: Springer-Verlag.

Martin, T. F., White, J. M., & Perlman, D. (2003). Religious socialization: A test of the channeling hypothesis of parental influence on adolescent faith maturity. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 18*, 169-187.

McRoy, R. G., Grotevant, H. D., Lopez, S. A., & Furuta, A. (1990). Adoption revelation and communication issues: Implications for practice. *Families in Society, 71*, 550-557.

McRoy, R. G., Grotevant, H. D., & Zurcher, L. A. (1988). *Emotional disturbance in adopted adolescents: Origins and development*. New York: Praeger.

Melina, L. R., & Roszia, S. K. (1993). *The open adoption experience*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Mendenhall, T. J., Berge, J. M., Wrobel, G. M., Grotevant, H. D., & McRoy, R. G. (2004). Adolescents' satisfaction with contact in adoption. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 21*, 175-190.

Miller, B. C., Fan, X., Grotevant, H. D., Christensen, M., Coyl, D., & Van Dulmen, M. (2000). Adopted adolescents' overrepresentation in mental health counseling: Adoptees' problems or parents' lower threshold for referral. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 39*, 1504-1511.

Muthén, L. K., & Muthén, B. (2008). *Mplus User's Guide. Version 5*. Los Angeles, CA:
Muthén & Muthén.

Muthén, L. K., & Muthén, B. (2010). *Mplus User's Guide. Version 6*. Los Angeles, CA:
Muthén & Muthén.

Passmore, N., Feeney, J. A., & Foulstone, A. R. (2007). Secrecy within adoptive families
and its impact on adult adoptees. *Family Relationships Quarterly, 5*, 3–5.

Perosa, L. M., Perosa, S. L., & Tam, H. P. (1996). The contribution of family structure
and differentiation to identity development in females. *Journal of Youth and
Adolescence, 25*, 817-837.

Phinney, J. S. (1989). Stages of ethnic identity development in minority group
adolescents. *The Journal of Early Adolescence, 9*, 34-49.

Phinney, J. S. (1990). Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: Review of research.
Psychological Bulletin, 108, 499-514.

Phinney, J. S. (1996). Understanding ethnic diversity: The role of ethnic identity.
American Behavioral Scientist, 40, 143-152.

Placek, P. (2007). National adoption data. In T. C. Atwood, L. A. Allen, V. C. Ravenel &
N. F. Callahan (Eds.), *Adoption Factbook IV* (pp. 3-70). Alexandria, VA: National
Council for Adoption.

Powell, K. A., & Afifi, T. D. (2005). Uncertainty management and adoptees' ambiguous
loss of their birth parents. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 22*, 129-
151.

Robins, R. W., Hendin, H. M., & Trzesniewski, K. H. (2001). Measuring Global Self-Esteem: Construct Validation of a Single-Item Measure and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27*, 151-161.

Rosenberg, M. (1985). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Rosnati, R., & Marta, E. (1997). Parent-child relationships as a protective factor in preventing adolescents' psychosocial risk in inter-racial adoptive and non-adoptive families. *Journal of Adolescence, 20*, 617-631.

Schafer, J., & Graham, J. W. (2002). Missing data: Our view of the state of the art. *Psychological Methods, 7*, 147-177.

Schoenberg, C. (1974). On adoption and identity. *Child Welfare, 53*(9), 549.

Schrodt, P., Ledbetter, A. M., & Ohrt, J. K. (2007). Parental confirmation and affection as mediators of family communication patterns and children's mental well-being. *Journal of Family Communication, 7*, 23-46.

Schwartz, S. J., & Finley, G. E. (2006). Father involvement, nurturant fathering, and young adult psychosocial functioning: Differences among adoptive, adoptive stepfather, and nonadoptive stepfamilies *Journal of Family Issues, 27*, 712-731.

Silber, K., & Dorner, P. M. (1990). *Children of Open Adoption*: Corona Publishing Company.

Sobol, M. P., Delaney, S., & Earn, B. M. (1994). Adoptees' portrayal of the development of family structure. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 23*, 385-401.

Soliz, J. (2007). Communicative predictors of a shared family identity: Comparison of grandchildren's perceptions of family-of-origin grandparents and stepgrandparents. *Journal of Family Communication, 7*, 177-190.

Steiger, J. H. (1980). Tests for comparing elements of a correlation matrix. *Psychological bulletin, 87*, 245-251.

Stein, L. M., & Hoopes, J. L. (1985). *Identity formation in the adopted adolescent*. New York: Child Welfare League of America.

Stephenson, M. T., & Holbert, R. L. (2003). A Monte Carlo simulation of observable versus latent variable structural equation modeling techniques. *Communication Research, 30*, 332-354.

Stolley, K. S. (1993). Statistics on adoption in the United States. *The Future of Children, 3*, 26-42.

Suter, E. A. (2008). Discursive negotiation of family identity: A study of U.S. families with adopted children from China. *Journal of Family Communication, 8*, 126-147.

Von Korff, L. A. (2008). *Pathways to narrative adoptive identity formation in adolescence and emerging adulthood.* University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

Wahl, S. T., McBride, M. C., & Schrodt, P. (2005). Becoming "point and click" parents: A case study of communication and online adoption. *Journal of Family Communication, 5*(4), 279-294.

Wegar, K. (2000). Adoption, family ideology, and social stigma: Bias in community attitudes, adoption research, and practice. *Family Relations, 49*, 363-369.

Wrobel, G. M., Ayers-Lopez, S., Grotevant, H. D., McRoy, R. G., & Friedrick, M. (1996). Open adoption and the level of child participation. *Child Development, 67*, 2358-2374.

Wrobel, G. M., Grotevant, H. D., Berge, J., Mendenhall, T., & McRoy, R. (2003). Contact in adoption: The experience of adoptive families in the USA. *Adoption & Fostering Journal, 27*, 57-67.

Wrobel, G. M., Grotevant, H. D., & McRoy, R. G. (2004). Adolescent search for birthparents: Who moves forward? *Journal of Adolescent Research, 19*, 132-151.

Wrobel, G. M., Kohler, J. K., Grotevant, H. D., & McRoy, R. G. (1998). Factors related to patterns of information exchange between adoptive parents and children in mediated adoptions. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 19*, 641-657.

Wrobel, G. M., Kohler, J. K., Grotevant, H. D., & McRoy, R. G. (2003). The Family Adoption Communication (FAC) Model: Identifying pathways of adoption-related communication. *Adoption Quarterly, 7*, 53-84.

Young, M. H., Miller, B. C., Norton, M. C., & Hill, E. J. (1995). The effect of parental supportive behaviors on life satisfaction of adolescent offspring. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 57*, 813-822.

Appendix A

Recruitment Script for Pilot Study 1

Hi,

My name is Colleen Colaner and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am doing research on how adopted individuals think about their adoption, and I'm looking for people who would be interested in filling out a survey for me. In this study, I am hoping to learn about how individuals identify themselves as an adopted person and how they think their adoption does and does not explain who they are as a person.

In both research and in popular culture, adoption is often talked about as a negative or traumatic thing for a person. A big part of this view comes from studies that focus on people who have had difficult experiences as an adopted person or from society in general not completely understanding what adoption means for individuals and families. A number of other studies have rejected this idea, instead showing that most adopted individuals have neutral or positive experiences with their adoption and feel that their adoption has really shaped who they are. I think that it is important to hear from adopted individuals in the general population in order to get a better picture of how individuals view their adoption. Your experience, represented in your answers in this survey, will help researchers and people in everyday life to have a more realistic understanding of adoption. Your unique insight will also help direct the kind of research that is done on adoptees in the future. In other words, I really want to hear from you because I think that the world needs better information about the experiences of adopted individuals!

If you are interested in participating in this study, than I am excited to hear from you. The only thing criteria I have for participating is that you:
  1) Must be at least 19 years old,
  2) Must be adopted by an individual/s other than a step-parent

If you are interested in this project and qualify for the study, I would like to ask you to fill out an online survey that takes about 25 minutes to complete. Before you do the survey, I'll have you read over an informed consent form that gives me permission to use your answers for my research. All of your information will be kept confidential, and I never use any names or identifying information when I talk about my research. If you have any questions, please email me at cwcolaner@huskers.unl.edu. If you want to complete the survey, please go to the following link:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=o41GB62mmN9WBwgH0sexpg%3d%3d

Usually the survey works just like I want it to, but if there is a problem with some of the technology, please let me know. You can send me an email at cwcolaner@huskers.unl.edu.

Thanks for helping me in my research!

Colleen Colaner
Department of Communication Studies
422 Oldfather Hall
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68588-0329
402-472-3348

Dr. Jordan Soliz
Department of Communication Studies
425 Oldfather Hall
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68588-0329
402-472-8326

APPENDIX B

Permission Request for Pilot Study 1

Hi,

I'm a graduate student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am doing research on how adopted individuals think about their adoption. I am interested to learn how individuals identify themselves as an adopted person and how they think their adoption does and does not explain who they are as a person.

In order to get participants for my study, I'd like to post my call for participants to your group. Before I post, however, I'd like to get your permission. Below you will find exactly what I would be posting online. Do you mind if I post it to your group? I appreciate your help.

Thanks so much!
Colleen Colaner

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent for Pilot Study 1

Department of Communication Studies

IRB approval number IRB#2009049875 EX

Informed Consent: Adoption Identity Study

This study looks at how adopted individuals think about their adoption. I am interested in how individuals identify themselves as an adopted person and how they think their adoption does and does not explain who they are as a person.

Thank you for your interest in being involved in this research. Before I have you take the survey, I need to be sure that you are:
> 1) At least 19 years old,
> 2) Were adopted by an individual/s other than a step-parent

If these two things describe you, than please follow the link to the online survey. The survey will ask you about your thoughts about your adoption as well as some individual and family characteristics. You will also be asked to fill out a questionnaire in order to collect demographic information. The entire process will take about 25 minutes.

I want you to know that all of your responses will be kept strictly confidential. I never use any names or identifying information when I talk about my research. The only people who will view you actual responses will be the two researchers.   The only way that we will use your results will be for data in a research presentation at an academic conference and possibility a publication in an academic journal.

If you are doing this study as an option for research credit in a course, you must have made prior agreement your instructor on what kinds of studies qualify for course credit. In order to give you credit for your contribution, I ask you to give your name as well as your instructor's name at the end of the survey. Your instructor will be informed that you participated in a study in the Communication Studies department, but not which study you participated in. You will not be penalized in any way in your class for not participating in this study, and your course instructor will provide an alternative option if you do not wish to participate in this study but would still like to receive research credit.

Also at the end of the study, you have the option to provide an email address if you would like to be contacted for future studies. This email will not be part of the data set

that will be analyzed and will not be connected with your completed questionnaire in any way. If you do provide your email address, I will keep your information on a password-protected computer. I will never share these emails with others for any reason.

I want you to know that you are free to take a break or refuse to answer any questions at any time throughout the survey.   You are also free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without negatively affecting your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may call the investigator at any time, office phone, (402) 472-3348, or the secondary investigator at (402) 472-8326. Please contact the investigator: if you want to voice concerns or complaints about the research; in the event of a research related injury.

Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 for the following reasons: you wish to talk to someone other than the research staff to obtain answers to questions about your rights as a research participant; to voice concerns or complaints about the research; to provide input concerning the research process; in the event the study staff could not be reached.

There are no known risks to participating in this study. However, talking about your adopted status may make you feel uncomfortable. Aside from research credit that your instructor may be offering, there are no direct benefits to participating in this study except potentially gaining a greater understanding of your experience as an adopted individual and helping to extend knowledge about adoption to society.

Knowing this, you are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this study. Your agreement certifies that you have decided to participate, having read and understood the information presented. Your signature also indicates that you are in fact at least 19 years old and that you were adopted by an individual other than a step-parent. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

Please click the below button to agree to this information.

> I agree

Should you have any questions regarding your participation in this study, please feel free to contact any or all of the following people:

Colleen Colaner   Dr. Jordan Soliz
Phone: (402) 472-3348   Phone: 402-472-8326
Email: cwcolaner@huskers.unl.edu   Email: jsoliz2@unl.edu

APPENDIX D

Questionnaire for Pilot Study 1

2. Please rate the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of your life in general.

	Not at all true of me	Not really true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
I think a lot about my birth parent(s)' characteristics.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I think that some of my personality can be explained by my adoptive parent(s).	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I have a clear sense of what my adopted status means for me.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I change my mind often about what I think about my adoption.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
The fact that I was adopted only explains part of who I am.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I have spent a lot of time thinking about my adoption.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has helped me understand my status as an adopted child.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I have spent time trying to find out more about my birth parent(s).	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I think that some of my personality can be explained by the fact that I was adopted.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I am not very clear about the role of my adoption in my life.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I have thought about how my life would have been different if my birth parent(s) would have raised me.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
My adoptive status is an important part of who I am, but is not the most important thing about me.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I have spent a lot of time thinking about why my birth parent(s) placed me into an adoptive family.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I am frustrated by the unanswered questions I have about my adoption.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
Sometimes I cannot stop thinking about my adoption even if I try.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
Knowing my birth parent(s) was/is important to me in order to understand who I am.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

3. Please rate the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of your life in general.

	Not at all true of me	Not really true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
I view my adoptive parent(s) to be my real parent(s).	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I feel rejected by my birth parent(s).	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I blame my adoption for problems I had in my relationship with my adoptive parent(s).	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I respect my birth mother for making the choice to place me in an adoptive family.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I have fond feelings for my birth parent(s).	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I have strong negative feelings about the fact that I was adopted.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I think my birth mother must have loved me to have made the decision to place me in an adoptive family.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I am grateful that my birth parent(s) placed me in an adoptive family.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I think that my adoptive parent(s) love me just as much as they would if I was biologically related to them.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I don't have any strong positive feelings about the fact that I was adopted.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
The love that parent(s) have for adopted children is the same as the love parent(s) have for their biological. children.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I think that my life is	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

better because my birth parent(s) decided to have me adopted.

| Thinking about my adoption too much makes me feel bad. | ⌐ | ⌐ | ⌐ | ⌐ | ⌐ |
| I would be open to adopting children myself in the future. | ⌐ | ⌐ | ⌐ | ⌐ | ⌐ |

4. Please rate the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of your life in general.

	Not at all true of me	Not really true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
My life is on the right track.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I wish I could change some part of my life.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
My future looks good.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I feel as though the best years of my life are over.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I like myself.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I feel there must be something wrong with me.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I can handle any problems that come up.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I feel like a failure.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I feel loved and trusted.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I seem to be left alone when I don't want to be.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I feel close to people around me.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I have lost interest in other people and I don't care about them.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I feel I can do whatever I want to.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
My life seems stuck in a rut.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I have energy to spare.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I can't be bothered doing anything.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I smile and laugh a lot.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
Nothing seems very much	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

fun any more.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
I think clearly and creatively.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
My thoughts go around in useless circles.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

5. Please rate the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of your life in general.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
At times, I think I am no good at all.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I am able to do things as well as most other people.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I certainly feel useless at times.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I wish I could have more respect for myself.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I take a positive attitude toward myself.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

6. Please indicate how often you have experienced the following conditions in the past month.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
Felt over-tired	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
Felt nervous or worried	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
Felt "low" or depressed	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
Felt tense or irritable	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
Had trouble sleeping	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
Lost your appetite	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
Felt apart or alone	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
Felt as if you were eating too much	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

7. Thinking about the way that you have felt over the past few months, please indicate if you have felt:

	Yes	No
Particularly excited or interested in something	⌐	⌐
So restless that you couldn't sit long in a chair	⌐	⌐
Proud because someone complimented you on something you had done	⌐	⌐
Very lonely or remote from people	⌐	⌐
Pleased about having accomplished something	⌐	⌐
Bored	⌐	⌐
On top of the world	⌐	⌐
Depressed or very unhappy	⌐	⌐
That things were going your way	⌐	⌐
Upset because someone criticized you	⌐	⌐

Read each of the following four paragraphs. Using the scale below, rate each paragraph according to how well it describes you.

8. Being adopted doesn't really matter much to me. I try to avoid the topic of adoption because it raises a lot of questions. I would like to know more about my birth parent(s) or I have met my birth parent(s) but don't think about them very often. The importance of adoption to me varies at different times.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Somewhat			Very Much

9. I have thought a great deal about adoption. I understand myself better because I have thought about whom I am in relation to my adoptive and birth parents. I don't feel bad about being adopted. I have thought about whether or not to search for information about and or contact with my birth parent(s). I feel satisfied with the background information I have *and/or* the level of contact I had/have with my birth parent(s).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Somewhat			Very Much

10. It isn't good or bad to be adopted. Adoption doesn't enter into my life or my decisions at all. I don't think my birth parent(s) would want to hear from me now. If the subject of adoption comes up I just give people the basic facts. I feel like it is something that happened in the past and I am fine where I am.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Somewhat			Very Much

11. I am still trying to figure out how adoption relates to who I am. I think a lot about the traits I might share with my birth parents. After a conversation about adoption I tend to feel upset. I have thought about whether or not to search for information about and or contact with my birth parent(s). I feel dissatisfied with the background information I have *or* the level of contact I had/have with my birth parent(s).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Somewhat			Very Much

12. Which of these paragraphs as whole best describes you?

- o Number 8
- o Number 9
- o Number 10
- o Number 11

13. Questions about your mother and father refer to your parents who adopted you. Reflecting back on your upbringing, please answer each question as honestly as you can.

	Not true	Seldom true	Sometimes true	Often true	Always true
I think my parent(s) are happy that they adopted me	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I think of my adoptive mother as my real mother.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I think of my adoptive father as my real father.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I get teased about being	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

adopted.					
I'm glad my parent(s) adopted me.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I think my parent(s) would love me more if I were their birth child.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I like the fact that I'm adopted.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I feel good that I'm adopted.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
Being adopted makes me feel loved.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I feel proud that my parent(s) adopted me.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
It bothers me that I may have brothers and sisters I don't know.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
Being adopted makes me feel special.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
Being adopted makes me feel angry.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I wish I knew more about my medical history.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
My parent(s) tell me I should be thankful that they adopted me.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
My parent(s) tell me they can give me back if they want to.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
It hurts to know I was adopted.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I wish people did not know I was adopted.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I wish my parents would tell me more about my adoption.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I wish I lived with my birthparents.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I wish I knew more about my birthmother.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I wish I knew more about my birthfather.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I wish I knew what my birthmother looks like.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I wish I knew what my birthfather looks like.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

14. Using the scale provided, please indicate how often you:

	Never	Less than once a month	About once a month	2-3 times a month	About once a week	A few times a week	Every day
Think about your birthmother	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
Think about your birthfather	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
Think about your adoption	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

15. If possible, would you like to meet your birthmother and birthfather?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Definitely not	Probably not	Not sure	Yes, probably	Yes, definitely	Have already met one or both

16. Please indicate your response to the following questions using the scale provided:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree
I get tired of having to explain adoption to people.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I find it easy to talk about adoption.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
I like to tell people I am adopted.	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

17. When you were in grades 6, 7, or 8, did the fact that you were adopted:

	Yes	Not sure	No
Make any difference to you?	⌐	⌐	⌐
Make you feel good?	⌐	⌐	⌐
Make you feel sad?	⌐	⌐	⌐
Make you feel special?	⌐	⌐	⌐
Make you feel angry?	⌐	⌐	⌐
Make you feel confused about yourself?	⌐	⌐	⌐
Make you feel loved or wanted?	⌐	⌐	⌐
Did you think often about adoption?	⌐	⌐	⌐
Did you feel good about your	⌐	⌐	⌐

family?

18. Using the scale provided, please indicate how often you:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree
How often do you have dreams at night about meeting or living with your birthmother?	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
How often do you have dreams at night about meeting or living with your birthfather?	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
How often do you find yourself daydreaming about your birthparents?	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
How often do you have the feeling that you miss or long for your birthparents?	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

19. How would you describe the role that adoption, if at all, plays in how you think about and understand yourself as a person?

20. Some adoptions are "open" meaning that the birth mother and/or father are an active part of the adoptive family. Other adoptions are "closed" meaning that the birth mother and/or father were not involved in the life of the adoptive family and/or the adopted individual. Using these descriptions, was your adoption open or closed?

Open   Closed   Other (please specify)

21. Were you adopted domestically or internationally?

Domestically   Internationally

If Internationally, which country were you adopted from?

22. How old were you when you were adopted?

23. How much contact do you have with your birth family?

No contact   Very little contact   Some contact   Quite a bit of contact   A lot of contact

24. Are your parents still married?

Yes   No

25. If no, are they (please choose one):

Widowed   Separated   Divorced

26. If widowed or divorced, have either of your parents remarried?

                                    Yes   No
Father   ⌐   ⌐
Mother   ⌐   ⌐

27. Do you have any children?

Yes   No

28. If so, how many?

29. What are their sexes and ages?

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

30. Do you have any siblings?

Yes   No

31. If yes,

How many siblings do you have
How many of these siblings were also
adopted?

32. What is your age?

33. What is your biological sex?

Male   Female   Other

34. What is your current relationship status (check all that apply):
   o   Not currently in a romantic relationship

- o Dating
- o Never married
- o Single, divorced or separated
- o Single, widowed
- o Married, first marriage
- o Married, not first marriage
- o Partnered
- o Living together

35. What is your ethnic background (check all that apply):
    - o Asian American
    - o Black/African American
    - o Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
    - o Hispanic/Latino
    - o Native American
    - o White/Caucasian
    - o Other (Please specify):

36. What is your highest level of education?
    - o Some high school
    - o Completed high school
    - o Some college
    - o Completed college
    - o Some graduate school
    - o Completed graduate school

37. Which of the following describes your total family income in the last 12 months?
    - o Under $5,000
    - o $ 5,000 - $ 9,999
    - o $10,000 - $14,999
    - o $15,000 - $19,999
    - o $20,000 - $24,999
    - o $25,000 - $29,999
    - o $30,000 - $39,999
    - o $40,000 - $49,999
    - o $50,000 - $59,999
    - o $60,000 - $74,999
    - o $75,000 - $100,000
    - o $100,000 OR MORE

38. Are you interested in being contacted for future research projects?

*Your email address will only be used for future research opportunities and will not be shared or distributed in any way.

Yes   No

If yes, please provide your email address:

39. If you are interested in receiving extra credit for participation in this research project, please provide the following information:

Your name
Your instructor's name

Thank you for completing this survey. Your answers are completely confidential and will be used only for research purposes.

APPENDIX E

Recruitment Script for Pilot Study 2

My name is Colleen Colaner and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am doing research on how adopted individuals think about their adoption, and I'm looking for people who would be interested in filling out a survey for me. In this study, I am hoping to learn about how individuals identify themselves as an adopted person and how they think their adoption does and does not explain who they are as a person.

In both research and in popular culture, adoption is often talked about as a negative or traumatic thing for a person. A big part of this view comes from studies that focus on people who have had difficult experiences as an adopted person or from society in general not completely understanding what adoption means for individuals and families. A number of other studies have rejected this idea, instead showing that most adopted individuals have neutral or positive experiences with their adoption and feel that their adoption has really shaped who they are. I think that it is important to hear from adopted individuals in the general population in order to get a better picture of how individuals view their adoption. Your experience, represented in your answers in this survey, will help researchers and people in everyday life to have a more realistic understanding of adoption. Your unique insight will also help direct the kind of research that is done on adoptees in the future. In other words, I really want to hear from you because I think that the world needs better information about the experiences of adopted individuals!

If you are interested in participating in this study, than I am excited to hear from you. The only thing criteria I have for participating is that you:
 1) Must be at least 19 years old,
 2) Must be adopted by an individual/s other than a step-parent

If you are interested in this project and qualify for the study, I would like to ask you to fill out an online survey that takes about 25 minutes to complete. Before you do the survey, I'll have you read over an informed consent form that gives me permission to use your answers for my research. All of your information will be kept confidential, and I never use any names or identifying information when I talk about my research. If you have any questions, please email me at cwcolaner@huskers.unl.edu. If you want to complete the survey, please go to the following link:

http://ssp.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_3ZRYqkeKo54Jehm&SVID=Prod

Usually the survey works just like I want it to, but if there is a problem with some of the technology, please let me know. You can send me an email at cwcolaner@huskers.unl.edu.

Thanks for helping me in my research!

Colleen Colaner
Department of Communication Studies
422 Oldfather Hall
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68588-0329
402-472-3348

Dr. Jordan Soliz
Department of Communication Studies
425 Oldfather Hall
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68588-0329
402-472-8326

APPENDIX F

Permission Request for Pilot Study 2

Hi,

I'm a graduate student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am doing research on how adopted individuals think about their adoption. I am interested to learn how individuals identify themselves as an adopted person and how they think their adoption does and does not explain who they are as a person.

In order to get participants for my study, I'd like to post my call for participants to your group. Before I post, however, I'd like to get your permission. Below you will find exactly what I would be posting online. Do you mind if I post it to your group? I appreciate your help.

Thanks so much!
Colleen Colaner

APPENDIX G

Initiation to Questionnaire for Participants from Previous Studies for Pilot Study 2

Hi, there-

I am writing you because you recently completed a survey for me about your adoption, and you indicated that you would like to be contacted for future studies. I have a new study underway, and I am looking for some individuals who would be willing to fill out another online survey for me. If you are interested in filling out another survey for me, I would be very appreciative. This study is on adoptive identity, or how individuals understand the role of adoption in their life. Many of the questions may seem familiar, and some of the questions are exactly the same as in previous studies you may have completed. This is intentional – I'm sorry for the redundancy, but feel free to use the same answers as before. This survey is an extension of my previous studies, and I need to get new responses. Below is the link to the new survey:

Follow this link to the Survey: $[l://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey]

Or copy and paste the url below into your internet browser: $l://SurveyURL

Thank you so much for your support of my research. If you would like any information on my studies, please feel free to contact me.

Colleen Warner Colaner, M.A. Ph.D.
Student/Graduate Teaching Instructor
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
418 Oldfather Hall Lincoln, NE 6858
cwcolaner@huskers.unl.edu

Follow the link to opt out of future emails: $l://OptOutLink

APPENDIX H

Informed Consent for Pilot Study 2

This study looks at how adopted individuals think about their adoption. I am interested in how individuals identify themselves as an adopted person and how they think their adoption does and does not explain who they are as a person.

Thank you for your interest in being involved in this research. Before I have you take the survey, I need to be sure that you are:
1) At least 19 years old,
2) Were adopted by an individual/s other than a step-parent

If these two things describe you, than please follow the link to the online survey. The survey will ask you about your thoughts about your adoption as well as some individual and family characteristics. You will also be asked to fill out a questionnaire in order to collect demographic information. The entire process will take about 25 minutes.

I want you to know that all of your responses will be kept strictly confidential. I never use any names or identifying information when I talk about my research. The only people who will view you actual responses will be the two researchers. The only way that we will use your results will be for data in a research presentation at an academic conference and possibility a publication in an academic journal.

If you are doing this study as an option for research credit in a course, you must have made prior agreement your instructor on what kinds of studies qualify for course credit. In order to give you credit for your contribution, I ask you to give your name as well as your instructor's name at the end of the survey. Your instructor will be informed that you participated in a study in the Communication Studies department, but not which study you participated in. You will not be penalized in any way in your class for not participating in this study, and your course instructor will provide an alternative option if you do not wish to participate in this study but would still like to receive research credit.

Also at the end of the study, you have the option to provide an email address if you would like to be contacted for future studies. This email will not be part of the data set that will be analyzed and will not be connected with your completed questionnaire in any way. If you do provide your email address, I will keep your information on a password-protected computer. I will never share these emails with others for any reason.

I want you to know that you are free to take a break or refuse to answer any questions at any time throughout the survey. You are also free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without negatively affecting your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered

before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may call the investigator at any time, office phone, (402) 472-3348, or the secondary investigator at (402) 472-8326. Please contact the investigator: if you want to voice concerns or complaints about the research; in the event of a research related injury.

Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 for the following reasons: you wish to talk to someone other than the research staff to obtain answers to questions about your rights as a research participant; to voice concerns or complaints about the research; to provide input concerning the research process; in the event the study staff could not be reached.

There are no known risks to participating in this study. However, talking about your adopted status may make you feel uncomfortable. Aside from research credit that your instructor may be offering, there are no direct benefits to participating in this study except potentially gaining a greater understanding of your experience as an adopted individual and helping to extend knowledge about adoption to society.

Knowing this, you are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this study. Your agreement certifies that you have decided to participate, having read and understood the information presented. Your signature also indicates that you are in fact at least 19 years old and that you were adopted by an individual other than a step-parent. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

Should you have any questions regarding your participation in this study, please feel free to contact any or all of the following people:

Colleen Colaner
Phone: (402) 472-3348
Email: cwcolaner@huskers.unl.edu

Dr. Jordan Soliz
Phone: 402-472-8326
Email: jsoliz2@unl.edu

APPENDIX I

Questionnaire for Pilot Study 2

The following questions ask about how much you have thought about your adoption. Some people have a lot of information about their birth family and others have very little information. These questions have to do with how much you have thought about both the known and the unknown aspects of your adoption history regardless of the amount of information you have about your adoption.

Please answer the questions below based on how true you feel these statements are about your experience in thinking about your adoption.

I have reflected on the situations surrounding my birth
Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I have reflected on the situations surrounding my placement in my adoptive family
Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has been helpful to me
Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has helped me understand how I relate to my birth parent(s)
Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has helped me understand how I relate to my adoptive parent(s)
Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I have a clear understanding of why my birth parent(s) placed me into an adoptive family
Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I have thought about my birth parent(s) characteristics
Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I have never really had a desire to know information about my birth parents
Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me

⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I feel that I have spent an appropriate amount of time thinking about my adoption

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I think I have spent a healthy amount of time reflecting on my adoption

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I have thought about how my life would have been different if my birth parent(s) would have raised me

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I have thought about how my life would have been different if I hadn't been adopted

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I have thought about which aspects of my personality could be explained by my adoptive parent(s)' characteristics

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I have thought about which aspects of my personality could be explained by my birth parent(s)' characteristics

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

The following questions ask about the actions that you have taken or would like to take to learn more about your birth family and your origins. In some cases, people have very limited access to information about their adoption yet others have met and interacted with their birth family a lot. These questions have to do with what you have done to know more about your adoption regardless of the amount of information you were able to collect.

Please answer the questions below based on how true you feel these statements are about your experience in gathering information about your adoption.

I have gathered information about my birth parents

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I have sought out information about my birth parents

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

Meeting my birth parent(s) is/was important to me

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

Meeting my birth parent(s) helped/would help me understand my situation better

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

Gathering information about my birth parent(s) is/was important to me

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

Gathering information about my birth parent(s) helped/would help me understand my situation better

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

There is more information I could get about my adoption if I wanted to

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I think my questions about my adoption are answered as much as is possible

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I know everything that can be known about my adoption

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I have spent time trying to find out more about my birth parent(s)

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

The following questions ask about how important you feel your adoption is to you. Many of the questions include the words "part" or "some" to indicate that the adoption may explain a portion of who you are but not everything about you.

Please answer the questions below based on how true you feel these statements are about your experience with your adoption.

I think my adoption is an important part of who I am

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me

⌐   ⌐   ⌐   ⌐   ⌐

I think my experiences as an adopted child have shaped who I am as a person

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

If I hadn't been adopted, I think I would be pretty much the same person I am now

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

The fact that I was adopted explains some aspects of who I am as a person

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I think that my adoption has played a part in why I am the way that I am

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

Some of my personality is the way that it is because of my status as an adopted child

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

The following questions continue to ask about how important you feel your adoption is to you. People place different levels of importance on their status as a person who was adopted. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

Please answer the questions below based on how true you feel these statements are about your experience with your adoption.

My adoption is the most important thing about me

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I am first and foremost an adopted individual

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

It is difficult to have any part of my life detached from my adopted status

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

My adoption affects the way I see everything in the world

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I feel like nearly every aspect of who I am is the way that it is because of my adoption

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

People cannot understand anything about me if they do not know I am adopted

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

The following questions ask about your thoughts and feelings about your adoption.

Please answer the questions below based on how true you feel these statements are about your experience with your adoption.

I have strong negative feelings about the fact that I was adopted

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

Thinking about my adoption makes me feel bad

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

I blame my adoption for problems I had in my life

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

I don't have any strong positive feelings about the fact that I was adopted

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

I am grateful that I was adopted

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

I am happy that I was adopted

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

I think that my adoption was a positive thing for me

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

I feel special because I was adopted

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

The love that parent(s) have for adopted children is equal to the love parent(s) have for their biological children

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I would be open to adopting children myself in the future

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

The following questions ask about your thoughts and feelings about your birth parents.

Please answer the questions below based on how true you feel these statements are about your experience with your adoption.

I feel rejected by my birth parent(s)

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I respect my birth parent(s) for making the choice to place me in an adoptive family

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I think my birth parent(s) must have loved me to have made the decision to place me in an adoptive family

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I have fond feelings for my birth parent(s)

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I blame my birth parents for the difficulties I have faced in my life

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I feel a sense of connection to my birth parent(s)

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

The following questions ask about your thoughts and feelings about your adoptive parents.

Please answer the questions below based on how true you feel these statements are about your experience with your adoption.

I view my adoptive parent(s) to be my real parent(s)

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

I think that my adoptive parent(s) love me just as much as they would if I was biologically related to them

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

Adoption is a legitimate way to form a family.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

Adoptive parents can be good parents to a child.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

Sometimes adoptive parents are able to provide better parenting than birth parents

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

I feel close to my adoptive parents

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

I have respect for my adoptive parents

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

I admire my adoptive parents

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

The following list gives statements about general feelings you have about yourself. Please indicate the degree to which each statement reflects your general feelings.

On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

At times, I think I am no good at all.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I am able to do things as well as most other people.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I certainly feel useless at times.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I wish I could have more respect for myself.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I take a positive attitude toward myself.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

Read each of the following four paragraphs. Using the scale below, rate each paragraph according to how well it describes you.

#1. Being adopted doesn't really matter much to me. I try to avoid the topic of adoption because it raises a lot of questions. I would like to know more about my birth parent(s) or I have met my birth parent(s) but don't think about them very often. The importance of adoption to me varies at different times.

Not at all like me	Not really like me	Somewhat not like me	Unsure	Somewhat like me	Really like me	Very much like me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

#2. I have thought a great deal about adoption. I understand myself better because I have thought about whom I am in relation to my adoptive and birth parents. I don't feel bad

about being adopted. I have thought about whether or not to search for information about and or contact with my birth parent(s). I feel satisfied with the background information I have and/or the level of contact I had/have with my birth parent(s).

Not at all like me	Not really like me	Somewhat not like me	Unsure	Somewhat like me	Really like me	Very much like me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

#3. It isn't good or bad to be adopted. Adoption doesn't enter into my life or my decisions at all. I don't think my birth parent(s) would want to hear from me now. If the subject of adoption comes up I just give people the basic facts. I feel like it is something that happened in the past and I am fine where I am.

Not at all like me	Not really like me	Somewhat not like me	Unsure	Somewhat like me	Really like me	Very much like me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

#4. I am still trying to figure out how adoption relates to who I am. I think a lot about the traits I might share with my birth parents. After a conversation about adoption I tend to feel upset. I have thought about whether or not to search for information about and or contact with my birth parent(s). I feel dissatisfied with the background information I have or the level of contact I had/have with my birth parent(s).

Not at all like me	Not really like me	Somewhat not like me	Unsure	Somewhat like me	Really like me	Very much like me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

Which of these paragraphs as whole best describes you?

#1	#2	#3	#4
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

Questions about your mother and father refer to your parents who adopted you.
Reflecting back on your upbringing, please answer each question as honestly as you can.

I think my parent(s) are happy that they adopted me

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I think of my adoptive mother as my real mother.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I think of my adoptive father as my real father.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I get teased about being adopted.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

I'm glad my parent(s) adopted me.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

I think my parent(s) would love me more if I were their birth child.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

I like the fact that I'm adopted.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

I feel good that I'm adopted.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

Being adopted makes me feel loved.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

I feel proud that my parent(s) adopted me.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

It bothers me that I may have brothers and sisters I don't know.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

Being adopted makes me feel special.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

Being adopted makes me feel angry.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

I wish I knew more about my medical history.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ

My parent(s) tell me I should be thankful that they adopted me.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

My parent(s) tell me they can give me back if they want to.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

It hurts to know I was adopted.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I wish people did not know I was adopted.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I wish my parents would tell me more about my adoption.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I wish I lived with my birthparents.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I wish I knew more about my birthmother.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I wish I knew more about my birthfather.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I wish I knew what my birthmother looks like.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

I wish I knew what my birthfather looks like.

Not at all true of me	Not true of me	Unsure	Somewhat true of me	Very true of me
⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐

How often do you think about your birthmother?
- ❏ Never
- ❏ Less than Once a Month
- ❏ Once a Month
- ❏ 2-3 Times a Month
- ❏ Once a Week

- ❑ 2-3 Times a Week
- ❑ Daily

How often do you think about your birthfather?
- ❑ Never
- ❑ Less than Once a Month
- ❑ Once a Month
- ❑ 2-3 Times a Month
- ❑ Once a Week
- ❑ 2-3 Times a Week
- ❑ Daily

How often do you think about your adoption?
- ❑ Never
- ❑ Less than Once a Month
- ❑ Once a Month
- ❑ 2-3 Times a Month
- ❑ Once a Week
- ❑ 2-3 Times a Week
- ❑ Daily

If possible, would you like to meet your birthmother and birthfather?
- ❑ Never
- ❑ Less than Once a Month
- ❑ Once a Month
- ❑ 2-3 Times a Month
- ❑ Once a Week
- ❑ 2-3 Times a Week
- ❑ Daily

Please indicate your response to the following questions using the scale provided.

I get tired of having to explain adoption to people.
- ❑ Strongly Disagree
- ❑ Disagree
- ❑ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ❑ Agree
- ❑ Strongly Agree

I find it easy to talk about adoption.
- ❑ Strongly Disagree
- ❑ Disagree
- ❑ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ❑ Agree
- ❑ Strongly Agree

I like to tell people I am adopted.
- ❑ Strongly Disagree
- ❑ Disagree
- ❑ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ❑ Agree
- ❑ Strongly Agree

When you were in grades 6, 7, or 8, did the fact that you were adopted:

make any difference to you?
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ Not sure
- ❑ No

make you feel good?
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ Not sure
- ❑ No

make you feel sad?
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ Not sure
- ❑ No

make you feel special?
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ Not sure
- ❑ No

make you feel angry?
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ Not sure
- ❑ No

make you feel confused about yourself?
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ Not sure
- ❑ No

make you feel loved or wanted?
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ Not sure
- ❑ No

Did you think often about your adoption?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ Not sure
- ❑ No

Did you feel good about your family?
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ Not sure
- ❑ No

How often do you have dreams at night about meeting or living with your birthmother?
- ❑ Never
- ❑ Rarely
- ❑ Sometimes
- ❑ Quite Often
- ❑ Very Often

How often do you have dreams at night about meeting or living with your birthfather?
- ❑ Never
- ❑ Rarely
- ❑ Sometimes
- ❑ Quite Often
- ❑ Very Often

How often do you find yourself daydreaming about your birthparents?
- ❑ Never
- ❑ Rarely
- ❑ Sometimes
- ❑ Quite Often
- ❑ Very Often

How often do you have the feeling that you miss or long for your birthparents?
- ❑ Never
- ❑ Rarely
- ❑ Sometimes
- ❑ Quite Often
- ❑ Very Often

How would you describe the role that adoption, if at all, plays in how you think about and understand yourself as a person?

_____
_____
_____

Was your adoption open (you and your adoptive parents had regular contact with and access to your birth mother and/or father) or closed (your birth mother and/or father were not a regular part of your or your adoptive parent(s)' life)?

❑ Open
❑ Closed
❑ Other (please explain): _____

Were you adopted domestically or internationally?
❑ Domestic
❑ International.
   If so, from what country? _____

How old were you when you were adopted? _____

How much contact do you have with your birth family?
❑ No contact
❑ Very little contact
❑ Some contact
❑ Quite a bit of contact
❑ A lot of contact

Are your parents still married?
❑ Yes
❑ No

Are your parents:
❑ Widowed
❑ Separated
❑ Divorced

Have either of your parents remarried?
❑ Yes
❑ No

Do you have any children?
❑ Yes
❑ No

How many? _____

What is their biological sex and age?

What is your age? _____

What is your biological sex?
- ❑ Male
- ❑ Female
- ❑ Other

What is your current relationship status?
- ❑ Single
- ❑ Dating
- ❑ Divorced or separated
- ❑ Married
- ❑ Partnered/Living together
- ❑ Other, please explain:

What is your ethnic background?
- ❑ Asian
- ❑ Black
- ❑ Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- ❑ Hispanic
- ❑ Native American
- ❑ White/Caucasian
- ❑ Other, please explain:

What is your highest level of education?
- ❑ Some high school
- ❑ Complete high school
- ❑ Some college
- ❑ Completed college
- ❑ Some graduate school
- ❑ Completed graduate school

Which of the following describes your total family income in the last 12 months?
- ❑ Under $5,000
- ❑ $ 5,000 - $ 9,999
- ❑ $10,000 - $14,999
- ❑ $15,000 - $19,999
- ❑ $20,000 - $24,999
- ❑ $25,000 - $29,999
- ❑ $30,000 - $39,999
- ❑ $40,000 - $49,999
- ❑ $50,000 - $59,999
- ❑ $60,000 - $74,999
- ❑ $75,000 - $100,000
- ❑ $100,000 OR MORE

7. Are you interested in being contacted for future research projects?

*Your email address will only be used for future research opportunities and will not be shared or distributed in any way.
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Please provide your email address, and the researchers will email you regarding future opportunities for participation: _____

If you are interested in receiving extra credit for participation in this research project, please provide the following information:
Your name
Your instructor's name

Thank you for completing this survey. Your answers are completely confidential and will be used only for research purposes.

APPENDIX J

Recruitment Script for Main Study

Hi,

My name is Colleen Colaner and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am doing research on how adoptive parents talked to their children about adoption, and I'm looking for people who would be interested in filling out a survey for me.

Let me give you a little information about the study. According to the National Survey of Children's Health, there are about 1.8 million adoptees in the United States. Even though adoption is a relatively common thing, there is still a lot that is unknown about adoptive families. In my research, I am trying to find out how adoptive parents have talked to their children about their adoption, and how these conversations may relate to the way that individuals think about their adoption. To do this, I am asking individuals who were adopted to think back on their upbringing and answer some questions about their parents' communication. Your experience, represented in your answers in this survey, will help researchers and people in everyday life to have a more realistic understanding of adoption and will shed light on the role that adoptive parents play in their children's upbringing. In other words, I really want to hear from you because I think that we need better information about adoptive families!

If you are interested in participating in this study, I am excited to hear from you. The only thing criteria I have for participating is that you:

      1) Must be at least 19 years old,
      2) Must be adopted by an individual/s other than a step-parent

If you are interested in this project and qualify for the study, I would like to ask you to fill out an online survey that takes about 35 minutes to complete. Before you do the survey, I'll have you read over an informed consent form that gives me permission to use your answers for my research. All of your information will be kept confidential, and I never use any names or identifying information when I talk about my research. If you have any questions, please email me at cwcolaner@huskers.unl.edu. If you want to complete the survey, please go to the following link:

http://ssp.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_6eSN205UWIkrDMg&SVID=Prod

Usually the survey works just like I want it to, but if there is a problem with some of the technology, please let me know. You can send me an email at cwcolaner@huskers.unl.edu.

Thanks for helping me in my research!

Colleen Colaner   Dr. Jordan Soliz
Department of Communication Studies   Department of Communication Studies
422 Oldfather Hall   425 Oldfather Hall
University of Nebraska-Lincoln   University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68588-0329   Lincoln, NE 68588-0329
402-472-3348   402-472-8326

APPENDIX K

Invitation to Questionnaire for Participants from Previous Studies for Main Study

Hello-

My name is Colleen Colaner and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am doing research on how adoptive parents talked to their children about adoption, and I'm looking for people who would be interested in filling out a survey for me. I am writing you because you recently completed a survey for me about your adoption, and you indicated that you would like to be contacted for future studies. I have a new study underway, and I am looking for some individuals who would be willing to fill out another online survey for me. If you are interested in filling out another survey for me, I would be very appreciative.

Let me give you a little information about the study. According to the National Survey of Children's Health, there are about 1.8 million adoptees in the United States. Even though adoption is a relatively common thing, there is still a lot that is unknown about adoptive families. In my research, I am trying to find out how adoptive parents have talked to their children about their adoption, and how these conversations may relate to the way that individuals think about their adoption. To do this, I am asking individuals who were adopted to think back on their upbringing and answer some questions about their parents' communication. Your experience, represented in your answers in this survey, will help researchers and people in everyday life to have a more realistic understanding of adoption and will shed light on the role that adoptive parents play in their children's upbringing. In other words, I really want to hear from you because I think that we need better information about adoptive families!

Many of the questions may seem familiar, and some of the questions are exactly the same as in previous studies you may have completed. This is intentional – I'm sorry for the redundancy, but feel free to use the same answers as before. This survey is an extension of my previous studies, and I need to get new responses.

Follow this link to the Survey: $l://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser: $l://SurveyURL

Thank you so much for considering to be part of this study. Your perspective is very important to me, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,
Colleen Colaner
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Follow the link to opt out of future emails: $l://OptOutLink

APPENDIX L

Permission Request for Main Study

Hi,

I'm a graduate student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am doing research on how adoptive parents talked to their children about adoption. In order to get participants for my study, I'd like to post my call for participants to your group. Before I post, however, I'd like to get your permission. Below you will find exactly what I would be posting online. Do you mind if I post it to your group? I appreciate your help.

Thanks so much!
Colleen Colaner

APPENDIX M

Letter to Agencies for Main Study

Hi,

I'm a graduate student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am doing research on how adoptive parents talked to their children about adoption. I am trying to get the word out about my study. Would you be willing to share this study with adoptees from your agency? Below you will find the call for the study. I appreciate your help!

Thanks so much!

Colleen Colaner

APPENDIX N

Informed Consent for Main Study

Adoption Identity and Parental Communication Study

IRB Approval 20100210683 EX

Thank you for your interest in being involved in this research. This study looks at how adoptive parents talked to their children about adoption. Before I have you take the survey, I need to be sure that you:
1) Are at least 19 years old, and
2) Were adopted by an individual/s other than a step-parent

If these two things describe you, then please continue to the online survey. The survey will ask you about your thoughts about your adoption as well as some individual and family characteristics. You will also be asked to fill out a questionnaire in order to collect demographic information. The entire process will take about 35 minutes.

I want you to know that all of your responses will be kept strictly confidential. I never use any names or identifying information when I talk about my research. The only people who will view your actual responses will be the two researchers. The only way that we will use your results will be for data in a research presentation at an academic conference and possibility a publication in an academic journal.

If you are doing this study as an option for research credit in a course, you must have made prior agreement your instructor on what kinds of studies qualify for course credit. In order to give you credit for your contribution, I ask you to give your name as well as your instructor's name at the end of the survey. Your instructor will be informed that you participated in a study in the Communication Studies department, but not which study you participated in. You will not be penalized in any way in your class for not participating in this study, and your course instructor will provide an alternative option if you do not wish to participate in this study but would still like to receive research credit.

Also at the end of the study, you have the option to provide an email address if you would like to be contacted for future studies. This email will not be part of the data set that will be analyzed and will not be connected with your completed questionnaire in any way. If you do provide your email address, I will keep your information on a password-protected computer. I will never share these emails with others for any reason.

I want you to know that you are free to take a break or refuse to answer any questions at any time throughout the survey. You are also free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without negatively affecting your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. You may call the investigator at (402) 472-3348, or the secondary investigator at (402) 472-8326. Please contact the investigator if you want to voice concerns or complaints about the research or in the event of a research-related injury.

Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 for the following reasons: you wish to talk to someone other than the research staff to obtain answers to questions about your rights as a research participant; to voice concerns or complaints about the research; to provide input concerning the research process; or in the event the study staff could not be reached.

There are no known risks to participating in this study. However, talking about your adopted status may make you feel uncomfortable. Aside from research credit that your instructor may be offering, there are no direct benefits to participating in this study except potentially gaining a greater understanding of your experience as an adopted individual and helping to extend knowledge about adoption to society.

Knowing this, you are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this study. Your agreement certifies that you have decided to participate, having read and understood the information presented. Your agreement also indicates that you are in fact at least 19 years old and that you were adopted by an individual other than a step-parent. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

Should you have any questions regarding your participation in this study, please feel free to contact any or all of the following people:

Colleen Colaner   Dr. Jordan Soliz
Phone: (402) 472-3348   Phone: 402-472-8326
Email: cwcolaner@huskers.unl.edu   Email: jsoliz2@unl.edu

Please click the below button to agree to this information.

☐   I agree

APPENDIX O

Questionnaire for Main Study

General Survey Instructions

Thank you so much for your interest in this study! The time you take to complete this survey will help to create a greater understanding of some of the issues facing individuals who were adopted and the role that adoptive parents play in their children's upbringing. Your experience is important, so I am excited to hear from you.

A lot of the questions in the survey ask about the way that your adoptive parents talked to you about your adoption. There are some questions about your birth parents too. Just for clarification, I use the terms "parent" and "adoptive parent" when referring to the parents who adopted and raised you. I use the term "birth parent" when referring to your biological parents.

This survey is divided into 6 sections. It should take about 35 minutes to complete the survey. Ideally you would take the survey in one sitting, but if this isn't doable, you can leave the survey and come back without losing your spot. As long as you return to the survey using the same computer and within 2 weeks, you can pick right up where you left off.

At the end of the survey, there will be an option to send a similar survey to your adoptive parents. Please consider further advancing this research by sending the survey link to your adoptive parents!

Thank you again for being part of this research!

Section I. This set of questions asks about how you view the role of your adoption in your life.

Please rate the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of your life in general.

	Not at all true of me	2	3	4	5	6	Absolutely true of me
Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has been helpful to me							
Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has helped me understand how I relate to my birth parent(s							
Reflecting on the events leading up to my adoption has helped me understand how I relate to my adoptive parent(s)							
Spending an appropriate amount of time thinking about my adoption has been helpful							
Spending a healthy amount of time reflecting on my							

adoption helped me understand myself better

Thinking about how my life would have been different if my birth parent(s) would have raised me has been helpful to me

Thinking about how my life would have been different if I hadn't been adopted has been helpful to me

I have gathered information about my birth parents

I have sought out information about my birth parents

Meeting my birth parent(s) is/was important to me

Meeting my birth parent(s) helped/would help me understand my situation better

Gathering information about my birth parent(s) is/was important to me

Gathering information about my birth parent(s) helped/would help me understand my situation better

I have spent time trying to find out more about my birth parent(s)

I think my adoption is an important part of who I am

I think my experiences as an adopted child have shaped who I am as a person

The fact that I was adopted explains some aspects of who I am as a person

I think that my adoption has played a part in why I am the way that I am

My adoption is the most important thing about me

I am first and foremost an adopted individual

It is difficult to have any part of my life detached from my adopted status

My adoption affects the way I see everything in the world

I feel like nearly every aspect of who I am is the way that it is because of my adoption

People cannot understand anything about me if they do not know I am adopted

Not at all true of me	2	3	4	5	6	Absolutely true of me

Section II. This set of questions asks about your contact with your birth parents.

Thinking about your upbringing, please rate the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of your experience during your childhood and adolescence.

	Not at all true of me		Absolutely true of me

I knew the name of my birth mother.

I knew where my birth mother lived.

I met my birth mother.

I communicated with my birth mother through an adoption agency or another intermediary.	
I communicated directly with my birth mother by telephone, email, or letter.	
I visited with my birth mother on one or more occasions during my upbringing.	
I knew the name of my birth father.	
I knew where my birth father lived.	
I met my birth father.	
I communicated with my birth father through an adoption agency or another intermediary.	
I communicated directly with my birth father by telephone, email, or letter.	
I visited with my birth father on one or more occasions during my upbringing.	

	Not at all true of me					Absolutely true of me

	No contact	2	3	4	5	6	A great deal of contact
How much contact did you have with your birth mother during your upbringing?							
How much contact did you have with your birth father during your upbringing?							

Section III. This set of questions asks about your adoptive parents' communication with you during your upbringing.

During your upbringing, did you have a relationship with one or two adoptive parents?
- ❑ Relationship with one adoptive parent
- ❑ Relationship with two adoptive parents

During the majority of your upbringing, were these parents:
- ❑ Married
- ❑ Divorced
- ❑ Separated

In the following sections, I want to ask about each adoptive parent separately. You will receive the same set of questions for each parent. For this first set, please choose one parent to consider as you answer the following questions.

Is this parent your:
- ❑ Adoptive Mother
- ❑ Adoptive Father

Thinking about this parent's communication with you during your upbringing, please rate the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of your experience during

your childhood and adolescence

	Not at all true of me	2	3	4	5	6	Absolutely true of me
This parent talked to me about my adoption during my upbringing on a regular basis.							
This parent would bring up my adoption even when I didn't ask about it.							
I talked to this parent when anything concerning my birth parents came up (meeting them, talking with them, new information about them).							
I would talk to this parent about my adoption before talking with my birth parents.							
I would talk to this parent about my adoption after talking with my birth parents.							
This parent frequently gave me information about my adoption.							
This parent has talked to me about my adoption for as long as I can remember.							
My adoption was a frequent topic of conversation with this parent when I was growing up.							

Thinking about this parent's communication with you during your upbringing, please rate the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of your experience during your childhood and adolescence

	Not at all true of me	2	3	4	5	6	Absolutely true of me
This parent was a good listener when it came to my thoughts and feelings about being adopted.							
This parent had difficulty in understanding adoption from my point of view.							
I was very satisfied with how this parent and I talked together concerning my feelings about being adopted.							
If I had problems or concerns related to being adopted, I found it easy to discuss them with this parent.							
This parent was uncomfortable when I asked questions about my birth parents.							
I could discuss my true thoughts and feelings about being adopted or about my birth parents with this parent without feeling uncomfortable or embarrassed.							
When I asked questions about my adoption or about my birth parents, I got honest answers from this parent.							
This parent understood what I was feeling about being adopted without having to ask me.							
I felt very uncomfortable discussing my birth parents with this parent.							
It was easy for me to express my thoughts and feelings about being adopted to this parent.							

If there was something I needed to know about my
adoption, this parent was always there for me trying to
answer my questions.

This parent has told me all he/she knows about the
reasons why I was placed for adoption.

I had many thoughts and feelings about being adopted
or about my birth parents that I could not share with
this parent.

This parent made it very easy for me to ask questions
about my adoption or about my birth parents.

Thinking about this parent's communication with you during your upbringing, please rate
the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of your experience during
your childhood and adolescence.

	Not at all true of me	2	3	4	5	6	Absolutely true of me

Although I was adopted, this parent felt that I was
"exactly like one of her own."

This parent was unaware of any differences between
him- or herself and a non-adopting parent.

This parent never wanted me to think of myself as an
adopted child.

This parent felt that it was important that I looked
something like him/her.

This parent expressed having some satisfactions that
other parents do not have.

In my family, this parent celebrated the anniversary of
my adoption.

This parent believed there are no differences between
families who adopt children and those who have only
biological children.

Thinking about this parent's communication with you during your upbringing, please rate
the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of your experience during
your childhood and adolescence.

This parent:

	Not at all true of me	2	3	4	5	6	Absolutely true of me

Attended the sports events, music events, or other
activities in which I participated.

Made statements that communicated to me that I was a
unique, valuable human being.

Demonstrated that he or she was genuinely listening
when I was speaking about issues important to me.

Made statements that communicated that my feelings
were valid and real (e.g., made statements like, "I'm
sorry that you're so disappointed, angry, etc.).

Gave me undivided attention when engaged in private conversations.

Maintained meaningful eye contact with me when we were engaged in a conversation.

Asked how I felt about school, family issues, punishments, etc.

Gave appropriate facial responses such as smiling or nodding during conversations with me.

Allowed me to express negative feelings.

Gave clear, direct responses to me during conversations.

Asked my opinion or solicited my viewpoint.

Reserved uninterrupted time with me.

Went off on unrelated tangents during conversations with me.

Gave ambiguous (unclear, vague) responses.

Gave impersonal responses (e.g., loaded with clichés or responses that did not truly respond to me).

Sent double messages (verbal and nonverbal messages that differed).

Interrupted me during conversations.

Ascribed motives to my actions (e.g., made statement like, "You're only doing this because . . .") .

Avoided physical contact such as touching, hugging pats on the back, etc.

Discounted or explained away my feelings.

Engaged in monologue (continued on and on with whatever he or she had to say, failing to acknowledge anything I said or tried to interject).

Used killer glances (put-down looks).

Ignored me while in the same room.

Criticized my feelings when I expressed them.

Ignored my attempts to express my feelings.

Belittled me.

Engaged in negative name calling (labeling).

Made statements that communicated that my ideas didn't count (e.g., "Can't you do anything right?" "Just shut up and keep out of this" or "What do you know about this anyway?")

Not at all true of me	2	3	4	5	6	Absolutely true of me

How often during your childhood and adolescence would you and this parent:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Hold hands					
Kiss on lips					
Kiss on cheeks					

Put arm around shoulder
Sit close to each other
Hug each other
Look into each other's eyes
Give massages to each other
Wink at each other
Say how important relationship is
Say "You're my best friend"
Say "I love you"
Say "I like you"
Say "You're a good friend"
Help each other with problems
Give each other compliments
Praise each other's
accomplishments
Share private information
Acknowledge each other's birthday

Thank you for answering those questions about one of your parents. Now I would like to ask you the same set of questions about your other adoptive parent. On the next page, I will have you shift your thinking to the other parent.

Is this parent your:
- ❑ Adoptive Mother
- ❑ Adoptive Father

Thinking about this parent's communication with you during your upbringing, please rate the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of your experience during your childhood and adolescence

	Not at all true of me	2	3	4	5	6	Absolutely true of me
This parent talked to me about my adoption during my upbringing on a regular basis.							
This parent would bring up my adoption even when I didn't ask about it.							
I talked to this parent when anything concerning my birth parents came up (meeting them, talking with them, new information about them).							
I would talk to this parent about my adoption before talking with my birth parents.							
I would talk to this parent about my adoption after talking with my birth parents.							
This parent frequently gave me information about my adoption.							
This parent has talked to me about my adoption for as long as I can remember.							
My adoption was a frequent topic of conversation with							

this parent when I was growing up.

Thinking about this parent's communication with you during your upbringing, please rate the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of your experience during your childhood and adolescence

	Not at all true of me	2	3	4	5	6	Absolutely true of me
This parent was a good listener when it came to my thoughts and feelings about being adopted.							
This parent had difficulty in understanding adoption from my point of view.							
I was very satisfied with how this parent and I talked together concerning my feelings about being adopted.							
If I had problems or concerns related to being adopted, I found it easy to discuss them with this parent.							
This parent was uncomfortable when I asked questions about my birth parents.							
I could discuss my true thoughts and feelings about being adopted or about my birth parents with this parent without feeling uncomfortable or embarrassed.							
When I asked questions about my adoption or about my birth parents, I got honest answers from this parent.							
This parent understood what I was feeling about being adopted without having to ask me.							
I felt very uncomfortable discussing my birth parents with this parent.							
It was easy for me to express my thoughts and feelings about being adopted to this parent.							
If there was something I needed to know about my adoption, this parent was always there for me trying to answer my questions.							
This parent has told me all he/she knows about the reasons why I was placed for adoption.							
I had many thoughts and feelings about being adopted or about my birth parents that I could not share with this parent.							
This parent made it very easy for me to ask questions about my adoption or about my birth parents.							

Thinking about this parent's communication with you during your upbringing, please rate the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of your experience during your childhood and adolescence.

	Not at all true of me	2	3	4	5	6	Absolutely true of me
Although I was adopted, this parent felt that I was "exactly like one of her own."							
This parent was unaware of any differences between							

him- or herself and a non-adopting parent.

This parent never wanted me to think of myself as an adopted child.

This parent felt that it was important that I looked something like him/her.

This parent expressed having some satisfactions that other parents do not have.

In my family, this parent celebrated the anniversary of my adoption.

This parent believed there are no differences between families who adopt children and those who have only biological children.

Thinking about this parent's communication with you during your upbringing, please rate the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of your experience during your childhood and adolescence.

This parent:

	Not at all true of me	2	3	4	5	6	Absolutely true of me
Attended the sports events, music events, or other activities in which I participated.							
Made statements that communicated to me that I was a unique, valuable human being.							
Demonstrated that he or she was genuinely listening when I was speaking about issues important to me.							
Made statements that communicated that my feelings were valid and real (e.g., made statements like, "I'm sorry that you're so disappointed, angry, etc.).							
Gave me undivided attention when engaged in private conversations.							
Maintained meaningful eye contact with me when we were engaged in a conversation.							
Asked how I felt about school, family issues, punishments, etc.							
Gave appropriate facial responses such as smiling or nodding during conversations with me.							
Allowed me to express negative feelings.							
Gave clear, direct responses to me during conversations.							
Asked my opinion or solicited my viewpoint.							
Reserved uninterrupted time with me.							
Went off on unrelated tangents during conversations with me.							
Gave ambiguous (unclear, vague) responses.							
Gave impersonal responses (e.g., loaded with clichés or responses that did not truly respond to me).							

Sent double messages (verbal and nonverbal messages that differed).

Interrupted me during conversations.

Ascribed motives to my actions (e.g., made statement like, "You're only doing this because . . .") .

Avoided physical contact such as touching, hugging pats on the back, etc.

Discounted or explained away my feelings.

Engaged in monologue (continued on and on with whatever he or she had to say, failing to acknowledge anything I said or tried to interject).

Used killer glances (put-down looks).

Ignored me while in the same room.

Criticized my feelings when I expressed them.

Ignored my attempts to express my feelings.

Belittled me.

Engaged in negative name calling (labeling).

Made statements that communicated that my ideas didn't count (e.g., "Can't you do anything right?" "Just shut up and keep out of this" or "What do you know about this anyway?")

Not at all true of me	2	3	4	5	6	Absolutely true of me

How often during your childhood and adolescence would you and this parent:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Hold hands					
Kiss on lips					
Kiss on cheeks					
Put arm around shoulder					
Sit close to each other					
Hug each other					
Look into each other's eyes					
Give massages to each other					
Wink at each other					
Say how important relationship is					
Say "You're my best friend"					
Say "I love you"					
Say "I like you"					
Say "You're a good friend"					
Help each other with problems					
Give each other compliments					
Praise each other's accomplishments					
Share private information					
Acknowledge each other's birthday					

Section IV: This set of questions focuses on how you think about yourself.

Please rate the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of you.

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

Please rate the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of you.

	Not at all true of me	2	3	4	5	6	Absolutely true of me
In most ways my life is close to my ideal							
The conditions of my life are excellent							
I am satisfied with my life							
So far I have gotten the important things I want in life							
If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.							

Section V: This set of questions asks you about your thoughts and feelings about your adoption.

Please rate the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of you.

	Not at all true of me	2	3	4	5	6	Absolutely true of me
I have strong negative feelings about the fact that I was adopted							
Thinking about my adoption makes me feel bad							
I blame my adoption for problems I had in my life							
I don't have any strong positive feelings about the fact that I was adopted							
I am grateful that I was adopted							
I am happy that I was adopted							
I think that my adoption was a positive thing for me							
I feel special because I was adopted							
The love that parent(s) have for adopted children is equal to the love parent(s) have for their biological children							
I would be open to adopting children myself in the future							

Please rate the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of you.

	Not at all true of me	2	3	4	5	6	Absolutely true of me
I view my adoptive parent(s) to be my real parent(s)							
I think that my adoptive parent(s) love me just as much as they would if I was biologically related to them							
Adoption is a legitimate way to form a family.							
Adoptive parents can be good parents to a child.							
Sometimes adoptive parents are able to provide better parenting than birth parents							
I feel close to my adoptive parents							
I have respect for my adoptive parents							
I admire my adoptive parents							

Please rate the extent to which you feel the following statements are true of you.

	Not at all true of me	2	3	4	5	6	Absolutely true of me
I feel rejected by my birth parent(s)							
I respect my birth parent(s) for making the choice to place me in an adoptive family							
I think my birth parent(s) must have loved me to have made the decision to place me in an adoptive family							
I have fond feelings for my birth parent(s)							
I blame my birth parents for the difficulties I have faced in my life							
I feel a sense of connection to my birth parent(s)							

Section VI: This is the final section. This set of questions asks you about your demographic characteristics.

What is your age? _____

What is your biological sex?
- ❑ Male
- ❑ Female

What is your current relationship status (check all that apply):
- ❑ Not currently in a romantic relationship
- ❑ Dating
- ❑ Never married
- ❑ Single, divorced or separated
- ❑ Single, widowed
- ❑ Married, first marriage
- ❑ Married, not first marriage
- ❑ Partnered
- ❑ Living together

What is your ethnic/racial background? Please give as much detail as you feel is important. _____

What is your highest level of education? _____

What was your approximate total family income in the last 12 months? _____

Were you adopted:
- ❑ Domestically
- ❑ Internationally
  Which country were you adopted from? _____

How old were you when you were adopted? _____

Were you ever in the foster care system?
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Do you have any siblings?
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

How many of these siblings were also adopted? _____

You're done! Thank you so much for filling out this survey. Following are a few "housekeeping" questions. Thanks again for being part of this research.

Are you interested in being contacted for future research projects?

Your email address will only be used for future research opportunities and will not be shared or distributed in any way.
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No
  If so, please provide your email address:_____

I am also collecting data from adoptive parents. If you are interested in having your parent(s) complete a version of this survey, you can send this link to them.

http://ssp.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_9XKejARYqwLibru&SVID=Prod

So I can match your response with your parent's response, please provide the following information. I will remove all names as soon as your survey is matched with your parent's. Your parents will never see your responses.
Your name:
Your adoptive parent's name:

Your adoptive parent's
name:

Are you interested in receiving extra credit for participation in this research project?
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Please provide the following information:
Your Name:
Your Instructor's Name:

<div align="center">We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.
Your response has been recorded.</div>