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Running Head: BLOGGING AS SOCIAL SUPPORT

Blogging as a Medium of Social Support During the Adoption Process:

A Phenomenological Study of Adopting Parent-Bloggers.

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF
EDUCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

By

Erin Elizabeth Laughery Carson

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

2013

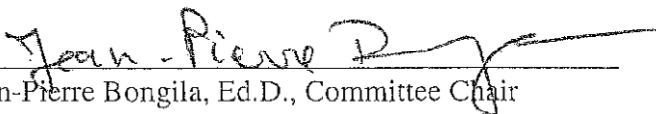
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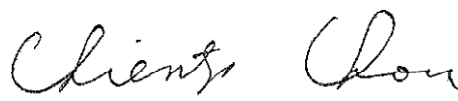
Blogging as a Medium of Social Support During the Adoption Process:
A Phenomenological Study of Adopting Parent-Bloggers.


We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

Dissertation Committee


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Final Approval Date

Acknowledgements

The journey to complete this dissertation would never have finished if not for the help and support of the family and friends who were by my side along the way. First, I want to thank my husband, Kyle for his support and patience during these many years of working towards this goal. He has been my shoulder to lean on during the difficult times as well as the one to give me high-fives when it was time to celebrate. I would not be able to complete this process without him by my side. I also want to thank my two children, River and Autumn for their smiles and hugs that have driven me to finish this study. It was their love that kept me going strong throughout all these years.

I am so thankful to my parents, MaryBeth and Ron Laughery for their years of support and desire for me to reach for the stars. The emotional and editing support I received from them gave me the strength and knowledge to “just keep swimming.” I am forever grateful and happy to be their daughter. Much thanks also goes to my brother Colin, his wife Beth and their son Aiden for the encouragement and love that they have shown me throughout this process.

A special thanks goes out to my colleagues and friends who have listened to various parts of my dissertation in its many stages. Thanks to Kelly, Jen, Chelsea, my Northfield Mommies group and all of those who have heard me talk about this dissertation. A huge thanks also goes to my “fun” cohort 20 members and all my University of St. Thomas classmates who have been there for me during this process. Special thanks goes to Joan, Nicole, Scott, Jeff, Holly, and John among many others who have made this educational experience enlightening and fun.

I will forever be grateful to my chair, Fr. Jean-Pierre Bongila for his never wavering faith in me. I would frequently leave a meeting with him with a confidence that I didn't have before

going in. He was a caring mentor, quick editor, and the world's best cheerleader. With his guidance I was able to complete this dissertation and be proud of what I accomplished. To my committee members, Kate Boyle and Candace Chou, thank you for taking an interest in this study and working with me on this project. I am so thankful to have you be a part of the final stage of my studies.

And finally I am thankful to the participants who agreed to share their adoption and blogging experiences and perspectives with me. Each story that was told was done with heart and passion concerning the subject of adoption. I feel blessed to be able to share aspects of their stories on the following pages.

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the community of support prospective adoptive parents create by way of blogging during the adoption process. This study used phenomenology and grounded theory strategies as they pertain to the qualitative method inquiry to collect data through in depth interviews of nine participants, field notes, blog reading and relating artifacts. In order to get a balanced view of the phenomenon, this study included both blogger and non-blogger adoptive parents, who all participated in subsequent open-ended interviews. To analyze data, I used the following analytical tools: servant leadership, narrative paradigm, social support, and care theories. Completion of this research created greater understanding of how social media invites interactions and connections that may not happen otherwise between people who shared the common purpose to adopt. Findings of this study revealed the following: blogging built a support community for adoptive parents; it offered a place to share information and process emotions; it became a medium for adoptive parents to tell their stories; in particular, writing blogs turned blogging parents into servant leaders whose experience pave the way for future generations. These findings suggest that future prospective adoptive parents could use blogs to research sources and to find support groups both online and otherwise whose help could guide them down the least stressful path of adopting a child.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to all of the prospective adoptive families who are looking for a child to love, to the birth parents who agonize over the decision about what is best for their child, and to the adopted babies who are cherished by many. I hope you all feel completely supported, cared for, and loved.

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Chapter One: Introduction

As a child I had at least ten journals scattered around my room. I would occasionally buy new ones and then, after a few entries in the notebook, my interest would wane and that journal would disappear under my bed along with the other partially written-in books. Even during a college semester long trip traveling around the globe, I struggled to record my journey on paper. One might expect that with all that I was seeing and experiencing in these far-off places, I would have been driven to write down what I saw along with my thoughts. However, recording my memories did not seem to appeal to me, and writing in that format would never catch my interest.

Discovering “Blogging”

All of this “journal neglect” disappeared the moment I began using social media sites on the Internet. In 2006, a lifelong friend of mine was paralyzed in a car accident. To document his recovery he started a blog, which I read regularly. A blog can be many things, but it is often used as a personal diary or place to put your thoughts where others can read them through the World Wide Web. The Merriam Webster dictionary (2011) defines a blog as a “Web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer.” Through his insightful posts and entries, my friend sparked my interest in online writing leading to my beginning a personal blog.

Making it Personal

I began the blog during my first pregnancy because my family lived a thousand miles away. They were constantly calling to ask how I was feeling and what was going on with the baby. I would tell them all the same stories over and over again. At some point, I realized that, by writing online, I would give them all one place to go to find the same information. Although

I still talked with my family and friends after I began my blog, it was helpful to have a communication medium that any of the people about whom I cared could access if they chose.

However, I learned quickly that the blog was not just a way of communicating efficiently – it became a place to write down the thoughts and emotions that were a part of my pregnancy. I found that writing made me better able to analyze and understand what I was going through both physically and emotionally as part of my pregnancy and the upcoming challenges of parenting. Anyone who has been pregnant understands the strange and difficult things that happen during that time, but few people analyze the process through the act of writing it down. Although I had no urge to record all of these sensations in a journal or diary, I found myself wanting to write them online to help me develop a better understanding of myself. I also felt that in addition to communicating with my family and friends, I would benefit by being able to look back and reflect on what I had written. While I initially wanted family and friends to be connected to my new experience and to be more a part of my life, I found this connection to others through writing to be cathartic. My writing became an extension of me that could reach across the miles even though my body could not. Through the blog, I was able to share myself with others through words, which gave writing an entirely new meaning. Writing my thoughts during that time also helped me better understand my experience. It encouraged me to sit down and put into words the things that I was feeling – self-reflection with an audience. So, I not only wanted to be thoughtful about what I was putting down for my benefit and personal reflection, but for others as well. Blogging became a connection with people and a reflection of myself and my experiences. In the end, I felt that it had revealed a part of me that I had never seen before.

Blogging and Adoption

A year after giving birth to my son, my spouse and I began the process of adopting a second child. This new journey provided yet another opportunity for blogging. When we were completing and sending our paperwork, I began looking for others who were in a situation similar to mine. I quickly discovered that many people going through the adoption process also had their own personal family blogs. It was comforting to read that the feelings I had while waiting to adopt were shared by other prospective adoptive parents (PAPs) around the globe. It was also comforting to know that my frustrations with the process were not uncommon.

Blogging as Group Support

The communication aspect of my blog developed once I began the adoption process. As I got more engaged with the adoption, my interest in others' experiences grew. In a short amount of time, I searched for and found other blogs and social media sites that focused on adoption. From there I began on-line relationships with other families from the United States and other countries. We communicated through comments on the blogs, personal emails, and various Internet chat forums about the many things we were experiencing. Communicating with other people who were going through the adoption process at the same time as I provided one of the most therapeutic aspects of my blogging. Prior to blogs, adoption was a lonely process. The only other adoptive parents I knew were from my agency that was fifty miles away. Blogs helped me feel less isolated as well as helping me understand that the problems and issues I was confronting were not unique to me. Knowing that there were others out there who were navigating through the process also gave me comfort. With their guidance, and the relief I got while writing my thoughts down on the blog, I knew I could get through it.

It has been four years since I began the adoption process and more than five years since I started blogging. I appreciate the value of the time and effort I put into blogging about my life because I have not only an online journal of my last four years but also a journal of the beginning of my children's lives. Blogging has been 1) the place where I document important events, 2) an outlet for airing and reflecting upon my emotional challenges and 3) a place where I can meet others with similar issues and explore ways that they were able to cope with them. Having a place to vent and, perhaps more importantly, being forced to express in words what was happening in my life has helped me through both difficult and exciting times.

However, the most significant aspect of blogging is that it has offered a means of "support group" sessions through those difficult times as well as a place to celebrate when we received positive adoption news. While my friends and family are very supportive, their understanding and knowledge of what it takes to adopt is limited. With my blogging, friends and family were better able to understand what was going on and, therefore, provide the support that was needed. This new social media enabled communities both near and far to connect with my experience and, thus, provided emotional support through group interaction. By connecting to others who had an understanding of the adoption process and a way to explain to those closest to me what I was experiencing, this support through blogging gave me the encouragement that I needed to finish my quest to adopt.

Realizing how much blogging has done for me has led me down this path of research. The purpose of this research is to better understand the potential supportive components of blogging, particularly to prospective adoptive parents. I used this basis to develop effective ways to interview others who blog about adoption to determine how blogging has helped or hindered them throughout their adoption process. I looked closely into specific blogs where

people reported emotional benefits, the people behind them, and their adoption stories. I also explored why some individuals did not use blogging if they had the access and abilities, and what their support systems, internally and externally, had been. In the end, I investigated blogging supportive elements for prospective adoptive parents who tried writing a blog, and what the circumstances of their adoptive process and blogging practices were that supported these elements. I examined how people used blogging in this context, and if prospective adoptive parents had a positive or negative effect. With the variety of types of social media being used today, assessing how one aspect can change a community for better or worse sheds an interesting light about how technology is changing parts of our world in unexpected ways.

Problem Statement

Much has been written about various ways humans cope with frustrations and stresses (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), as well as the multiple techniques of coping with stressful environments. For example, Crystal Han-Huei Tsay (2012) provides a taxonomy of support that people receive when coping with stressful conditions. Among those social support tools, literature also mentions networks of mutual communication (Cobb, 1976), informal support (House, 1981), and online support (Tsay, 2012).

However, there is a gap in literature in two regards. First, literature is silent on the nature of support prospective adoptive parents have utilized when dealing with the frustration of the adoption process. Second, while proposing online communication as a tool for support, literature does not refer to “blogging” as a means through which adoptive parents might communicate and find a network of support. Experience shows, however, that some adoptive parents have resorted to blogging as a means of social support during the adoption process (Milbrand, 2011) while the rest of their peers do not write blogs and have not found support in online blogging networks.

While blogging, some adoptive parents express their frustrations in various ways: “I did

not sleep last night...” (Hight, 2010). “I feel empty. The frustration is mounting.” (Salman, 2010) “It shouldn’t be this hard” (Kolbacher, 2010). “We will wait, baby. We *will* wait. It kills us, and we want to take this into our own hands, and make it go faster” (Jacob, 2010). “The only way through this thing called adoption is faith that God is in it with you” (Smith, 2011).

Prospective adoptive parents are no exceptions to serious life-altering stress, but no scholarly literature has attempted to analyze this phenomenon. Farber (2003) points out that these families, along with many others in the adoption process, face ordinary and extraordinary difficulties. Yet literature has not explained the reasons why many adoptive parents deal with stress through blogging. Nor has it determined the sources of support and information those adopting parents that do not use blogging utilize in the process of adoption.

Adoption has not only been known to be stressful as Farber explains, but in a study of 19 Australian adoptive mothers, O’Brein (2003) found that one third of the adoptive parents sampled were at risk for or struggling with depression. Much of this was tied to post-adoption depression, but often the situations that adoptive parents have to manage before adoption are much more stressful. For example, Levy-Schiff (1991) explains that, with very few exceptions, adoptive parents are infertile couples who begin the adoption process after long years of stress, painful disappointments, and narcissistic injuries related to intrusive medical treatment and to their inability to have children. In many couples, these years have been associated with personal, marital, and social difficulties. These worries are only a few of the things that parents have to deal with when they choose to adopt a child. Once in the process, or even after it is completed, “prospective parents face stressful individual and collective role transition challenges as they anticipate forming a new adoptive family” (Derdeyn, 1996, p.1112).

Adoption is not just a difficult process before the child comes home, but after as well. For example, an adoptive parent blogger, after traveling abroad to adopt her daughter, discussed her need to keep writing since it has become a support system for her. “I also have a feeling that as I continue to decompress from our travels and adjust to life with Avivah, I’m going to need to do more writing to stay sane” (McLennan, 2011). Blogging, it seems, is giving the author a place to sort out all that she is going through.

Guiding Research Questions

My dissertation addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How has the experience of blogging helped prospective adoptive parents during the process of adoption?
- 2) How did blogging help them fulfill the need to create and join a support community?
- 3) How have “non-blogger” prospective adoptive parents dealt with the frustration of the adoption process?

This study examines various adoptive parents’ (APs) experiences in blogging, or their choice not to blog. I examined how it helped those who chose to blog through the adoption process, and I also looked at what those who chose not to blog did to help themselves during the process. Although all experiences in adoption are important to this research, it is noteworthy that with the initial start of blogging roughly only twenty years ago, the adoptive parent-bloggers who participated in this study constitute the leading pioneers in the adoptive blogging world. With the aid of the main research questions, I uncovered what led this first generation of bloggers and leaders towards the social media known as blogging, and what aspects of it helped them complete their adoption. Also for the purpose of this study on the phenomenology of

adopting parent-bloggers, I used the various technical expressions as described in the next section.

Definition of Terms

<i>Adoptee</i>	“The person who was adopted” (Adamec, 2004, p.379). The child who comes home with the adoptive family.
<i>Adoption</i>	“The complete transfer of parental rights and obligations from one family to another family” (Adamec, 2004, p.379). This is a legal term for the act of taking a child that a family did not birth and making him/her their own.
<i>Adoptive Parent</i>	“People who have been legally approved by a court to be parents to a child” (Adamec, 2004, p.380). Within this study many times I use this term for the families I interviewed.
<i>Birthparents</i>	“A man and woman who conceive and give birth to a child who is placed for adoption” (Adamec, 2004, p.379). These families for whatever reason feel that they cannot take care of the child, so they make the difficult decision to give them to a family that can.
<i>Blog</i>	“Places that provide a form of online interaction where users come together to share opinions and analysis about current events and other issues” (Kaye, 2005, p.73). Within this research the blog is where families discuss online about adoption related experiences.
<i>Blogger or Blogging</i>	“The person who writes for a blog is referred to as a blogger, and the act of writing for the blog is known as blogging” (Churt, 2010, p.1). The blogger within this study is the parents who write about their experiences in adoption.
<i>International Adoption</i>	“The process of adopting a child from another country. Also called ‘intercountry adoption’” (Adamec, 2004, p.382). Many families interviewed during this research adopted children internationally.
<i>MommyBlogger</i>	“A mother who blogs about her children, motherhood, parenting or related topics” (Mommy blogger, n.d. p.1). All participants within this study are women, and could therefore be considered mommybloggers, since they are focused on the topic of adopting a child.
<i>Prospective Adoptive Parent</i>	“A term used to refer to individuals or couples who are ready and willing to adopt a child” (US Legal, 2013, p.1). These are parents who are going through the process of adoption and are actively in

the process. All of the families within this study were currently a prospective adoptive parent or had been recently.

Transracial Adoption

“A situation in which a family adopts a child who is of another race” (Adamec, 2004, p.384). In this study many families were open to adopting a child of another race or nationality.

Problem Significance

This research is unique because there has been very little research evaluating the beneficial nature of blogging for prospective adoptive parents. Similar quantitative research has been done on blogging and adoption; although, how future parents manage adoption through blogging had not been examined before the research reported herein.

One particular study that talks about parental blogging is titled, “Works-in-progress: An analysis of Canadian Mommyblogs” (Fleming, 2008). In this study Fleming discussed why mommyblogs are controversial, who mommybloggers are and what they are doing, what effect commercialization has on mommyblogs and whether mommyblogs are dialogic spaces. This examination brings new light to blogging, especially blogging that uses parenting as the focus. Although Fleming discusses parents as bloggers, he does not focus on adoptive parents.

A second study by Calkins (2005) is on adoption and technology, but focused on how different aspects of the two topics are linked. For example, Calkins (2005) titled her study “Connected again: The Internet’s impact on the adoption reform movement and adoption reunion support”; it looks at the connection between the Internet and adoption reform. She discusses the role that the Internet has had due to the web-based, grassroots adoption community, and how adoption advocates use the Internet to get adoption-reform legislation information out to people. This project ties technology and adoption together nicely, yet focuses on legislative adoption reform instead of the supportive nature of blogs specifically.

Both of these studies focus directly on adoption and technology, but no prior research addressed the beneficial aspects of blogging for adoptive parents (APs). My study links those two topics together, and provides new insight by listening to adoptive parents' stories of whether or not they chose to write about their experiences online. This study sheds a different light on both adoption and social media while examining how each has affected adoptive parents' lives as a whole.

Conclusion and Overview

Humans cope with stress in many ways, but there is minimal literature on the nature of how prospective adoptive parents utilize online sources, such as blogging, during the adoption process to help guide them as well as to manage their stress. This research studied two different groups of adoptive parents: those who blog and those who don't blog. Chapter one includes research questions, which focus on what the benefits are of blogging during the process of adoption as well as what adoptive parents use as other sources of support.

Chapter two, literature review, focuses on information on adoption and blogging, as well as the coping mechanisms adoptive parents used prior to the introduction of blogs. I also discuss the theories used to guide this research: narrative paradigm, care theory, social support theory and servant leadership. Chapter three explains the qualitative methods such as phenomenology and grounded theories used within this research. In addition, in chapter three I described the selection of participants as well as the analysis strategy I utilized to sort data. Chapter four organizes the findings around the guided research questions, and finally, the last chapter summarizes the findings and describes the recommendations for prospective adoptive parents as well as offering suggestions for future research pertinent to the links between adoption and blogging.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

My research focused on adoption, blogging, and the people behind it. I used various participant lenses to explain what it means to have support and community during the waiting period. This literature review covers the following tenets of the study: the origin of blogs; current adoption numbers; how adoption and blogging go together; rationale for blogging; and the positive and negative effects of blogging. After I explain the facts surrounding blogging and adoption, I also cover the analytical literature as an integral part of my literature review. The theories that I present are, servant leadership, the narrative paradigm, social support theory and care theory.

Literature Review

Origin of blogs

In 2006, *The Economist* stated that blogs started in 1997 with a writer Jorn Barger, who titled his website a “weblog.” Later, another writer, Peter Merholz broke up “weblog” into “we blog” which then coined the term “blog.” Kaye (2005) described blogs as places that provide a form of online interaction where users come together to share opinions and analysis about current events and other issues. Weblogs are unique havens that combine news and information with self-expression. A blogger (someone who hosts a Weblog) posts commentary and links for blog readers who may, but are not required, to respond to the blogger with their own comments and links to information.

Stone (2004) explained that blogging as we know and define it today truly began in 1999, when Blogger (a blogging tool) and other simple tools were released to the public. These tools allowed individuals to easily write and discuss various topics online without needing to become an expert in the underlying technology. Today, blogs are written about any and all topics that

you can imagine. For example, Perlmutter (2008) explained how some blogs are concerned with the home, family, and everyday life; while others express fanaticism about certain television shows or rock-‘n’-roll bands; still others are techie, citing, assessing, or carping about new types of iPods or even blogging itself.

Perlmutter (2008) described how blogs today attract a wide spectrum of people to the large variety of topics discussed, and how they are also easy to create because of user-friendly tools such as Blogger. Blogging, essentially, allows anyone to read, write, or discuss information or opinions about their passions with a community. Basically, blogging gives anyone a chance to speak as well as have a way to be heard.

Adoption numbers.

Adoption statistics have changed dramatically over the past fifteen years. For example, Selman (2008) explained that in the year 2004 the global numbers of children moving from one place to another for adoption had steadily increased to an estimated total worldwide of over 45,000 a year. At that time, there seemed to be an assumption that growth would continue and that the number of people applying to adopt would continue to rise. However, the number of international adoptions worldwide fell by 17 percent between 2004 and 2007. Then, in 2008, the total number of USA ‘orphan visas’ or visas issued for children being adopted from other countries than the USA was 17,438, which was 2000 less than in 2007, and 24 percent below the highest recorded number of 22,884 in 2004 (Office of Children’s Issues, 2009). In the year 2010, the Annual Report on Intercountry adoptions reported that the total international adoptions to the United States dropped down to 11,059, one of the lowest numbers in years.

Domestic adoption has seen much steadier numbers in the last few years. Instead of falling for example, a report from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services titled,

“Adoptions of Children with Public Child Welfare Agency Involvement by State FY 2002 - FY 2009,” stated that there were 51,629 child welfare adoptions in 2005; 50,633 in 2006; 52,657 in 2007; 55,303 in 2008; and 57,466 in 2009 (Children’s Bureau Website, 2010). These numbers demonstrate how domestic adoptions have slowly but steadily risen in the recent years, where international adoption has had a quick and significant drop.

Coping with adoption stress before blogging.

Adoption stress today is not much different than the adoption stresses before blogging became a form of support. For example, Bejenaru and Roth (2012) explained what, in the process of adoption, creates stress for prospective adoptive parents:

The adoption procedure, through its tasks, represents a major stress factor for most of the adoptive parents (seven cases). In general terms, the procedure is characterized by the adoptive parents as “inflexible,” “slow,” “tedious,” “laborious” or “complicated.” It is a procedure that, according to an adoptive mother, “stretches one's nerves over the limit”. The main causes that lead to these appreciations are: the long period of time between certification and the completion of the adoption, the financial costs implied by the necessary medical examinations and tests and the requests that are not fully understood or easy to accept by all adoptive parents. (p. 1319)

In 1978, Eichelberger Thompson discussed the stress that parents are dealing with: “during this time (of the adoption process), the prospective adoptive parent feels that he or she is being tested, judged, and at times manipulated” (p. 248). Because of the long process required for prospective adoptive parents to gain a child, stress becomes more apparent and difficult to manage. For example, Eichelberger Thompson explained that the longer a person is suspended in a stressful situation, the more difficult it becomes to keep things in the proper perspective.

Before blogging, prospective adoptive parents used various outlets for their adoption-related stress. For example, Lustig (1990) described adoptive parents who decide that to alleviate stress they wanted to join a support group. He says, “The Greens and the Blonders are among hundreds of Southern California couples who have joined AAG and similar groups for help, security and support in what many adoptive parents find is a very uncertain process” (p.16). Another couple who participated in a support group discusses the importance of having such a group, where being with other adoptive parents who have led similar parental experiences was very important: “‘We got a lot of help here,’ Larry Green said of AAG. ‘Unless a couple has experienced it, nobody else can really understand what you've gone through’” (p.16).

Johnson (1986) explained another form of support that some adoptive parents created to help them cope with the stress of adoption: “Today the couple are the parents of Stacie Anne, a cherubic, blond, 2 1/2-year old, but it wasn't easy. In fact, the difficulties they experienced prompted them to start a seminar so would-be adoptive parents will know what to expect. The seminar, offered through the South Bay Adult School at Mira Costa High School in Manhattan Beach, is the only such program in the South Bay, the couple said” (p.3).

In the pre-blog era, support groups and seminars counted among outlets for prospective adoptive parents in search of mechanisms to alleviate the pain and angst this process generated. Although Bejenaru and Roth (2012) stated that support groups are still important today, blogging has created an additional space to find a community and support system for prospective adoptive parents.

Adoption and blogging.

With the decline in international adoptions and/or the amount of time it takes to complete the adoption of a child, adoptive parents may feel more stress. The stressful experiences that

adoptive parents face may sometimes feel endless for families, and, as Ward (2011) pointed out, one of the most important needs for adoptive family success is their familial and societal support networks. With this research, I analyze the importance of blogging and its ability to create a network and resource for families. As Friedman (2010) explained, one of blogosphere's defining characteristics is its focus on connection and dialogue. With the world getting smaller due to our technological networks, the blogosphere is a perfect place for families who are adopting to find other families who have gone, or are going through a similar adoption process.

Roberts-Miller (2004) explained that blogs, as much or more than newsgroups and mailing lists, tend to attract people with similar philosophies. I expect that this is true for the adoption community as well. For example, if a family is considering adoption, they may look online to see if there is information available about a certain adoption program. While in the process, they may come across other families' blogs who detail their experience. Not only will these families possibly describe the intricacies of the process itself through their blog, but, as Blood (2002) pointed out, they will be likely to use the blog as a vehicle for self-expression and self-empowerment. Blood also explains that blogging makes people more thoughtful and articulate observers of the world around them. Families seeking out information about adoption will then be more likely to find the value in these internal ramblings from other families in the process since they may represent an experience that they can expect to encounter.

This initial connection between adoptive families may only be just the first of many benefits of blogging about an adoption experience. Ratliff (2009) noted that blogs can be generally essayistic and introspective in style. People can put their thoughts down in their own sort of therapeutic expression, which may help them cope with the difficulties of their adoption

process. For example, Stone (2011) who has been in the adoption process for a few years, discussed her thoughts on blogging and therapy:

Throughout the adoption process this blog has been a bit like therapy - I'm not sure why the public posting of intimate feelings, fears and joy should be therapeutic, but somehow it has been. I think about the psychology behind this often. I wonder at the differences between bloggers who reveal their innermost experiences, and those who can't perceive of sharing their lives and thoughts in a forum such as this or at all (p.1).

The blogging world is not the only place to find information about the supporting nature of blogging. A CNN article titled "Your blog can be group therapy" (2008) discussed how a licensed social worker encourages patients to blog about bottled up feelings. The article later goes on to state that, while blogging should not replace face to face counseling, it can positively compliment sessions. Based on Stone's research, it appears that blogging is now becoming a secondary form of therapy used by medical professionals.

Blogs can also become places where people start to bond together and create "enclaves." Ratliff (2009) explained enclaves as being spaces where communities can form and articulate positions. Within the adoption community, these enclaves may arise when something drastic happens during the process over which adoptive parents feel they have no control. Therefore, although blogging has been used to bring people with similar interests together, it also has an emotionally supportive nature as well as providing a place to form opinions and a forum to do something about them.

Rationale of blogging.

Although blogging is a relatively new phenomenon, actions similar to blogging are as old as the human spirit. Perlmutter (2008) explained that throughout thousands of years of human

history, the elites (or their paid scribes, artists and heralds) were the only ones disseminating messages via mass communication. The top stratum has always had the ability to broadcast and upload, ever since civilization raised its first castle or obelisk. Blogging, on the other hand, gives every person the opportunity to explain their thoughts and feelings to whoever chooses to listen. Schalchin (2009) stated that blogging can be used by anyone because it is the cheapest form of self-publishing invented. Anyone who has access to a computer and the Internet can explain to the world their passions, beliefs, and thoughts on anything they choose to discuss.

Gumbrecht, et al. (2004) interviewed various bloggers to find out why they chose to blog and what their motivation was. Findings from their study revealed five major motivations for blogging:

- 1) documenting one's life;
- 2) providing commentary and opinions;
- 3) expressing deeply felt emotions;
- 4) articulating ideas through writing;
- 5) forming and maintaining community forums.

The researchers concluded that blogging is so popular because it is an unusually versatile medium, employed for everything from spontaneous release of emotion to achievable support of group collaboration and community. This wide range of uses makes blogs appealing to many different types of people, including prospective adoptive parents, so long as they want to be heard.

Positive and negative effects of blogging.

Examining the rationale behind blogging gave me a basic understanding of what positive effects blogs may have on both the people who write them as well as those who read them.

Although there are many positive aspects of blogging, one important aspect is its new way of forming a community of people with shared interests. Furthermore, Perlmutter (2008) stated, “above all, others can join in; blogs are, to use the term from political theory, voluntary associations of individuals who could previously have associated so intimately only in the union hall, at the town meeting, or among the mob on the street” (p. 14). Kline & Burstein (2005) go on to explain that another reason blogs will further embed themselves into our cultural DNA is that we can now begin to satisfy the ancient human urges to converse, communicate, argue publically, learn collaboratively, share experiences, and archive collective knowledge. These urges are part of the definition of what we are as a species, and they have suddenly been married with incredibly powerful, fast, ubiquitous technologies.

Since blogging is no longer limited to just technologically advanced people and all humans have the urge to converse, communicate, etc. as Kline & Burstein (2005) stated, it is not surprising that mothers and adoptive parents seek the opportunity to write and read about the subject on which they focus much of their lives. For example, Rosenberg (2009) talked about how “mommyblogging” (blogs written typically by mothers about the subject of motherhood) is one of a whole host of subcultures into which blogging has fragmented. There are not just crafts bloggers but also a whole cadre of knitting bloggers and weaving bloggers. Each of these subcultures has its own norms of behavior. Unsurprisingly, there is much more positive reinforcement among mommybloggers than among political bloggers. The support-group feeling can cause some observers to roll their eyes; on the other hand, support is surely what a lot of mothers desperately need.

Adoptive parents have not been left behind in the blogging world. Millbrand (2011) the editor of *Adoptive Families Magazine* wrote an article about blogging and adoption titled,

“Spread the Word.” Millbrand discussed the reasons adoptive parents choose to blog. She stated that, for thousands of adoptive parents, blogs present a perfect way to share the details of their journeys to becoming a family as well as their lives afterward. Millbrand also stated that blogging is an ideal way to keep everyone up to date on the latest adoption news for families who travel to complete their adoption or adoptive parents-to-be who have loved ones geographically scattered. The blog has turned into a great communication piece that has benefited many adoptive parents who can find distance to be an issue.

Millbrand (2011) talked about the other support outlets that blogging offers. For example, she states that the uncertainties of adoption can be difficult to handle, so many bloggers find solace in their diaries. Millbrand quoted one blogger as saying, “One day, I started my own blog to see if sharing my feelings with no one (and everyone) would help. The support I've found through the blogging world has been amazing” (p.2). She found that this new kind of support helps adoptive parents survive the wait while also easing the demanding transition into parenthood.

Blogging not only supports those who write the blogs, but also those who read it. Millbrand (2011) explained that adoption blogs can help those considering adoption to get a feel for the process, as well as a sense of the challenges and joys of life after the adoption is completed. Blogs can give pieces of information that adoptive parents are looking for, but it can also be “a real source of inspiration and information” (p.1).

It follows that blogging seems to have many positive aspects. Some may argue that blogging may benefit the writers more than the readers, but that is certainly not a truism and is most likely decided on each individual writer's and reader's level of interest. The writers of blogs not only get to share their stories, something that humans have thrived on since the dawn

of time, but they also get to hear peoples' reactions to their telling of these stories. Blogging has become a new source of communication and information where readers can learn about a topic, as well as say something to the writer in return. All of this is done on a public forum that is typically both a personal yet an incredibly open space. Although blogging can be a useful and beneficial process to many, blogging can also be open to very public criticism.

Alterman (2003) wrote that one problem with blogs remains definitional. "It's hard to know exactly what qualifies" (p.1). He stated that weblogs are inherently biased and unedited and require no credentials whatsoever, not even the judgment of an editor or personal resources person. He indicates that absolutely anybody with access to a computer can blog, which means a vast increase in the net amount of biased / uneducated data swirling around the blogosphere, most of it unedited, much of it unchecked and some if it largely untrue. He stated that that since blogging appears to be here to stay, it will be even harder and harder for amateurs to sift through the morass of information available to them each day and decide what to believe.

Conclusion.

The falling numbers in international adoptions and the slow growth in domestic adoptions complicate the adoption process and limit the options for adoptive parents. Potential adoptive parents must now look to whatever available resources they find, including blogs, for help and support. Blogs have positive affects on readers and writers as they provide ways to create a community that would be otherwise impossible. However, there are also potential negative aspects that should not be forgotten, such as having to search through thousands of blogs to find useful information. As Alterman (2003) suggested, you need to be cautious in deciding what is true and what is conjecture.

The topic of adoption blogging is vast, so integrating various theories such as servant leadership, the narrative paradigm, social support theory and care theory will provide an even clearer path to the importance in this research.

Relevant Analytic Literature

This dissertation examines whether and how blogging about adoption during the period leading up to when a family is united with a child helps create a community of support. The theories below have a direct link with this research. They are all relational in nature, and important to gaining a stronger understanding of the research as a whole. The theories that I present here are: servant leadership, the narrative paradigm, social support theory and care theory.

Servant Leadership.

Adopting parents are actively engaged in a virtual form of servant-leadership, as they voluntarily convey information to their peers (therefore becoming servants) and strive to bring the process (as leaders) to a positive ending. For example, Robert Greenleaf (1977), the founder of servant leadership explained it as follows:

The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant - first to make sure that other people's needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wise, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or at least not be further deprived? (p. 2)

Spears and Lawrence (2004) described servant leadership in a very similar way, as “a long term, transformational approach to life and work – in essence, a way of being – that has the potential for creating positive change throughout society” (p.12). Servant leaders are people who by nature are servants. Servant nature is the real man or woman, not bestowed, not assumed, and not to be taken away. They are servants first. Servant leadership theory holds that an authentic leader should embody certain qualities.

Spears and Lawrence (2004) explained that servant-leaders are people who are always searching, listening, and expecting that there is something, or someone, better for these times. Spears and Lawrence identify the following major leadership qualities or characteristics in Servant Leadership:

1. Listening. “Only a true natural servant automatically responds to any problem by listening first” (p. 10).
2. Empathy. “Men grow taller when those who lead them empathize, and when they are accepted for who they are...” (p. 14) meaning that people feel comforted when their peers empathize with their experience and become better people for it.
3. Healing. Greenleaf (1977) defined healing as “to make whole”(p. 27). The servant-leader recognizes the shared human desire to find wholeness in one’s self, and supports wholeness and healing in others.
4. An awareness of the world. Without awareness, “we miss leadership opportunities” (p. 19).
5. Persuasion rather than coercion. Greenleaf (1977) notes that “A fresh look is being taken at the issues of power and authority, and people are beginning to learn, however

- haltingly, to relate to one another in less coercive and more creatively supporting ways” (pp. 3-4).
6. Conceptualization, or to dream big dreams. The servant-leader can conceive solutions to problems that do not currently exist (pp. 23-25).
 7. Foresight- or the outcome by using lessons from the past, to see the current situation and the consequences for the future. “Prescience, or foresight, is a better than average guess about *what* is going to happen *when* in the future” (p. 16).
 8. Stewardship. Organizational stewards, or “trustees” are concerned not only for the individual followers within the organization, but also the organization as a whole, and its impact on and relationship with all of society (Greenleaf, 1991). A servant leader also has a commitment to serve the needs of others as well as use openness and persuasion rather than control. Servant leaders also have a commitment to the personal, professional and spiritual growth of people and organizations, where they help build communities, not just individuals. According to Greenleaf, “All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form...is for enough servant-leaders to show the way” (p. 30).

The adoption blogging community embodies many of these characteristics including the following:

1. Many bloggers consider themselves to be good, empathetic listeners when they are taking the time to read others’ insights and stories about adoption. For example, Van Brunt, (2012) explained the affect other blogs had on her leading up to the adoption of her child:

I used to cry over other adoptive families’ “gotcha day” videos. These slideshows, posted by families who had finally reached the pinnacle of the

adoption process — finally meeting their child face-to-face — are a series of photos and video capturing the emotions of the momentous day, set to stirring music. I knew, intimately, the anticipation on the parents' faces. I could taste their joy when they caught the first glimpse of their longed-for child, which is what usually started my own tears flowing. I could almost see our own moment, our own child, in our arms at last. I nodded, choked up, knowing. Our moment was coming soon.

2. Prospective adoptive parents also want to help and be healers when discussing difficult topics on their own blog. Van Brunt (2012) later goes on to discuss her experience and explains a more difficult topic concerning what she originally wrote about, “gotcha day videos”:

Like most hard lessons that are terrifying and agonizing at the time, now I can thank God for our gotcha day. Because now, when I see a seeming fairy tale, I find myself wondering what's on the other side. Like when a friend's new marriage seems perfect. Or when a woman with no children listens politely in a room full of women talking about their labor and delivery stories. Or when a family with the American Dream smiles like everything is fine. I know now that it can't be that simple. (p. 1)

3. Prospective adoptive parents may believe they have an awareness of the world that few others see, and therefore try and persuade readers that adoption is good for their community and world. For example, a family looking to adopt explains that their pursuit of adoption stems from God's call to help the orphans: “And, now, here we are. It's as if He turned a switch in our hearts. Overnight, our hearts were thrown into a passionate pursuit of His call for orphans” (Jacobs, 2010).

4. Bloggers may also believe that they have big dreams, since adopting a child who is not biologically theirs is much “bigger” than themselves,

5. Additionally, bloggers are using lessons about orphans to help guide them towards making the world a better place. For example, Sturm (2011) discusses the number of orphans in the world, which is one of the various reasons he is choosing to adopt: “Multiple sources indicate that there are over 140 million orphans in the world today. Let's say that number is inflated. Let's say there are only 140,000 orphans in the world. Can you imagine the life of an orphan? The lack of options and a future? ”

6. Finally, parents who communicate and discuss their experience also believe that they made a commitment to others. They believe that communicating through blogging about adoption they are making the world a better place one child, and one family at a time. For example, in an article titled, “What's Her Secret? Bluffton mom helps others through the adoption process” (Bredeson, 2012), an adoptive parent talks about how another family helped her through their adoption process: “I think talking to somebody who has been through it, it makes you realize you're not the only one who has the feelings that you're feeling. It was more just the emotional support that was how they were there for us” (p.1). The adoptive parents provided them a feeling of being a part of an adoption community, which in turn gifted them the emotional support they needed.

The word “community” in this context means families who are currently waiting or have already adopted a child. Community, as stated in the last characteristic, is important to the development of servant leaders. Blogging also helps the community through serving each other with information, community building, sympathy, and encouragement. For example, a comment on a blog post about the difficulties of adoption states:

I have started a blog and my focus is on failed adoptions and sharing my emotions hoping that people will find it that need encouragement. Your blog has been that for me. I am a very open person and it is so good to hear the words said that I am feeling too. People who have gone through failed adoptions need to hear your thoughts (Stone, 2011).

Spears and Lawrence (2004) also stated that a strength of servant-leadership is that it encourages everyone to actively seek opportunities to both serve and lead others, thereby setting up the potential for raising the quality of life throughout society. By blogging – the sharing of ideas and giving of support through an online community – adopting parents are serving each other as well as the child they are bringing into their lives by relieving stress caused from the process. Through posts on blogs such as “Random Rwanda Info” (Our Life Journey, 2011), adopting parents can relay information about the adoption situation while supporting parents who are waiting to bring their child home. Thus, blogging adoptive parents engage in a virtual form of leadership by attending to the needs of their virtual peers and building a community. Much of the leadership they portray is achieved through the act of telling their story to others, which leads us to the next theory, the narrative paradigm.

Narrative Paradigm.

Blogging about adoption involves explaining each family’s personal story. The narrative paradigm considers how humans use blogging to talk about their experiences, character, and important aspects of their life through story. Fisher (1984) explained the structure of narrative paradigm in his article titled, “Narration as a Communication Paradigm.” In that, Fisher states five presuppositions:

1. Humans are essentially storytellers. They live life through their own personal story.

2. The paradigmatic mode of human decision-making and communication is characterized by “good reasons” which vary in form among communication situations, genres and media.
3. The production and practice of good reasons are ruled by matters of history, biography, culture and character.
4. Rationality is determined by the nature of people as narrative beings – their inherent awareness of narrative probability, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing narrative fidelity, whether the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives.
5. The world is a set of stories, and we choose the stories we recreate to live what we consider a good life. In short, good reasons are the stuff of stories, the means by which humans realize their nature as reasoning-valuing beings.

Fisher (1989) goes on to describe the narrative paradigm as a philosophical statement meant as an approach to interpretation and assessment of human communication – assuming that all forms of human communication can be fundamentally seen as stories and as interpretations of aspects of the world occurring in time and shaped by history, culture and character. This definition of humans’ communication explains why, if you look on the Internet for a blog, you will find content for almost any topic you seek with the author’s story and personal opinions attached.

Mark Kretschmar (2010) of Bethel University in Minnesota stated that, “the assumption of the narrative paradigm is that people are essentially storytellers” (2008). Blogs, in turn, are described by Merriam Webster (2011) as “a Web site that contains an online personal journal

with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer” (p.1). Just as Fisher (1989) described, blogs are essentially a venue for people to tell their story.

Likewise, blogging is storytelling. Blogs are peoples’ personal perspectives and stories, and through blogs people explain their thoughts and actions on a particular topic, or piece of their life. People typically choose to tell their story through the lens of their culture, biography, history and character; and many bloggers have very specific personalities that are perpetuated by the way they tell their story. For example, an adoption blogger writes about her passions and why adoption is so important to her. Through this post she explains a lot about her history, culture and character:

I, Laurie, have been led without a doubt through Jesus. He has given me the passion for orphans and adoption. I know so many adoptive parents say that, and it is very true.

Before my family moved to Sweden to minister here, I had my dream job. First of all I was finally mommy to my son and I was the coordinator for the international section of an adoption agency. I also worked in domestic adoption with birthmothers. I am one the many that sees adoption through the eyes of Christ. Not only the adoption of children around the world, but our adoption as children of God. There is no way to separate the two. (Kjernald, 2011)

Bloggers, especially prospective adoptive parent bloggers, are looking for other stories that ring true to their own lives and experiences. Many parents are searching for people who are “like them” through the similar experiences they have shared or stories they have to tell. This is how the narrative paradigm fits with blogging. When prospective adoptive parents are able to tell their tale, as well as find others who blog about adoption, they are using the narrative paradigm by sharing their story of reasoning and values. For example, Millbrand (2011) explained that

whether it's giving potential parents the courage to pursue adoption or a waiting family practical advice on what to pack for their international adoption trip, an adoption blog can be a real source of inspiration and information. Fisher (1984) also believed that we understand and interpret the lives we live as a long narrative consisting of many smaller narratives. This is what blogs do for prospective adoptive parents; they give them a place to tell important aspects of their story, read other stories to help them cope along the way, and, as the next theory explains, create a sense of community support amongst the prospective adoptive parents who blog about their experience.

Social Support Theory.

Social support, in the opinion of various authors such as Albrecht et al., (1987); Cohen & Syme, (1985); and Sarason, Sarason, Shearin, & Pierce, (1987) generally refers to resources provided by others that satisfy a person's basic social needs. According to this theory, social support is a resource that enables individuals to cope with stress as well as to adapt during highly stressful transitioning periods (Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001).

Cohen & McKay (1984) use the term "social support" to refer to the mechanisms by which interpersonal relationships buffer someone against a stressful environment. Adoptive families encounter stressful environments often. For example, Rex (2012) spoke about adoption and how "uncertainty was like a leech. It attached itself to us, and, with every failed situation, it drained a bit more of our blood, a little more of our hope" (p.14).

According to Wills (1991), there are four common functions of social support: emotional support, tangible support also known as instrumental support (Langford, Bowsher and Maloney 1997), informational support and companionship support.

Langford, Bowsher and Maloney (1997) describe Emotional support as the offering of emotions such as empathy, concern, affection, love, trust, acceptance, intimacy, encouragement,

or caring. Emotional support is the communication that leads to the information that one is being given these emotions by another. It is believed to be the most important category through which the perception of support is conveyed to others, and emotional acts far outnumber all other types of support that is offered.

Mildrand (2011) explained emotional support and blogging when she talked about the experience of an adoptive parent who started her own blog to determine whether sharing her feelings with no one (and everyone) would help. What the adoptive parent found when she started her blog was that the emotional support she discovered through her blogging practice has been amazing and supportive.

House (1981) defined tangible support as the provision of financial assistance, material goods, or services. Langford, Bowsher and Maloney (1997) further describe tangible support as instrumental support, and they suggest that although the provision of tangible support may include caring and love for an individual, it is distinguishable from emotional support because it is concrete assistance, such as supplying material goods or performing assigned work for others.

An example of tangible support can be found in Kokes's (2012) blog that has three links asking for financial assistance, "Backyard Benefit Show, Donate and Fundraiser." Under the section titled: Backyard Benefit Show, Kokes explained why they are hosting such an event by saying that it is to "celebrate adoption and help us raise adoption funds" (p.1).

Wills (1991) discussed the third function of Informational support as the advice, guidance, suggestions, or useful information to someone. Langford, Bowsher and Maloney (1997) add to that description by stating that this support can include the information given to another during a time of stress. They suggest that informational support helps people solve problems and cope during those times.

Milbrand (2011) also talked about Informational support when she states: “blogs are the perfect way to keep everyone up on the latest adoption news. Many participants found their sites particularly valuable when they travel to finalize their adoption, as friends and family members have one central location to find information about what's happening and to leave encouraging comments.” (p.1).

Finally, Wills (1991) stated the fourth function, Companionship support as the type of support that gives someone a sense of social belonging. Cohen and McKay (1984) explained this form of support, also known as “belonging,” as the feelings of belonging or solidarity that have an elevating effect on a person’s mood. Wills also suggests that the feelings elicited by some social support systems are necessary for a normal and healthy life and, as such, may help to prevent psychological disorders (p. 8).

Adoption blogging has helped adoptive parents find others like themselves- which in turn creates a sense of belonging. For example, Milbrand (2011) quoted an adoptive parent and her thoughts on how blogging has created companionship: “When we decided to adopt, I turned to the blog world and found women like me who were adopting. They didn't sugarcoat their experiences, and I learned so much from them. Some were further along in the process, and I shared their joy as they brought their children home. It gave me such hope for our future” (p.1).

In conclusion, social support is embedded into the adoption blogging community. As shown in the examples above, many adoptive parents find that blogging creates Social Support during a very stressful time in their life. Emotional support, Tangible support, Informational support and Companionship support are key to guiding prospective adoptive parents to the end of a strenuous adoption process. Through blogging and social support, adoptive parents feel cared for, which leads to the next theory.

Care Theory.

To care, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2012), is to “feel interest or concern” (p.1). Blogging about adoption expresses these exact characteristics for the process, the people, and the children who are involved. Care theory, according to Noddings (2003) is broken into these three main tenets:

1. Individuals need people if they want to achieve their goals, and they are fully dependent on others for support. For example, Noddings (1984) stated that “the carer (*one-caring*) must exhibit engrossment, or a strong form of empathy, and motivational displacement, which is where the one caring has behavior that is largely determined by the needs of the cared-for, and the person who is cared for (*cared-for*) must respond in some way to the caring” (p.69).
2. More care should be given to people who are particularly vulnerable, such as children, the poor, and other populations who are not given an upper hand.
3. To preserve the interest of those involved in a thing such as adoption, it is important to understand all the details of the situation.

Held (2006) explained that the central focus of the ethics of care is on the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility. For Held, the ethics of care usually works with a conception of persons as relational rather than as the self-sufficient independent individuals of the dominant moral theories. Rather, the ethics of care sees persons as relational and interdependent, morally and epistemologically. Held states that every person starts out as a child dependent on those providing us care, and we remain with others in fundamental ways throughout our lives.

Held (2006) also explained that the ethics of care addresses moral issues arising in relationships among the unequal and dependent. These relationships are often loaded with emotion, and Held observes how often these attributes apply not only in the household but in wider society as well. For instance, persons do not choose which gender, racial, class, ethnic, religious, national, or cultural groups to be brought up in, yet these sorts of ties may be important aspects of who they are and how their experience can contribute to moral understanding. This is an important aspect to the ethics of care in terms of adoption.

Since the prospective adoptive parents end goal is to create a family, the parents' focus is most likely on the topic of care: caring for their family, caring for other adoptive parents, caring for the baby that will hopefully arrive soon.

Stone (2011) explained it in a post titled, "We miss you so much." In this post, she expressed in raw emotion how much she wishes she could bring her son home:

I think of you every day. Every hour. Most every minute. We're doing everything we can short of moving heaven and earth to get you home. And if we could find a way, we'd move heaven and earth, too. We hope you're safe, and warm, and happy. And I hope blue bear reminds you of us. We'll be there soon...as soon as we possibly can, and maybe even sooner (p.1).

As Held (2006) explained, the ethics of care values emotion. For some blog writers, being able to share that emotion may be the main reason they blog.

Many adoptive parents are also beginning a multi-racial family, and not always with the support of community and family members. If this is the case, adoptive parents can, in turn, use blogs for questions they have about understanding the possible difficulties that may come along

with a multi-racial family. For example, Woolard (2011) raised questions for prospective adoptive parents to consider if adopting a child of another race:

If you are considering adopting a child or children that are not part of your own race there are a few other things that you need to take into consideration ... Have you considered that when you do welcome that child into your hearts that you will no longer be like the majority of other families? Think back has any of your friends or family ever told a racial joke or used a racial slur? Have you asked your friends and family how they feel about welcoming a child of a different race into the mix? If you do ask and the answers are not quite what you were thinking they would be are you willing to reduce contact with that person? (p.1).

Adoptive parents often must raise a child in a different race and culture than those in which the child was born. With the support and care through blogging and community, prospective adoptive parents can ask questions they need to have answered and, therefore, be better prepared for the day they bring home their child. The ethics of care, Held (2006) explained, recognizes the moral value and importance of family and friendship and the need for moral guidance in these domains to understand how existing relations should be changed and new ones developed.

Conclusion

The theories presented here - servant leadership, narrative paradigm, social support theory and care theory - all tie together the topics of adoption and blogging. Each has a human aspect and sheds light on what various adoptive parents are experiencing during the time leading up to meeting their child. All the data in the literature review helped guide my research questions and informed my understanding of how prospective adoptive parents weave their way

through a very difficult process. In the next section I explain the process I used to conduct my research, and I describe the assessments, procedures, and measures used to evaluate my findings.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Qualitative Research

My qualitative study examines if and how adoption blogging creates a supportive community. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006) “qualitative research is a broad approach to the study of social phenomena” (p.2), and is particularly suited to uncovering meanings people assign to their experiences (Hoshmand, 1989; Polkinghorne, 1991). The specific qualitative method used in my research is a grounded approach guided by phenomenology.

Phenomenology, according to Creswell (2007), is a way to describe meaning for several individuals in their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon. My goal was to “describe what all participants have in common in their experience” (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). I designed this study to describe the common experiences of participants who blog while involved in the legal, personal and emotional details of child adoption. The design of the study allowed me to describe the essence of the process of their adoption and learn about each shared experiences of blogging and/or community building.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory methods emerged from sociologists Glaser and Strauss’s (1970) collaboration during their studies of the dying in hospitals. Glaser and Strauss developed grounded theory because they felt that theories used in research were often inappropriate and ill-suited for participants under study. They developed theories from research grounded in data rather than deducing testable hypotheses from existing theories. They proposed that systematic qualitative analysis had its own logic and could generate theory. In particular, Glaser and

Strauss intended to construct abstract theoretical explanations of social processes (Charmaz, 2009).

Grounded theories develop from the data obtained in the field (Cresswell, 2007). Charmaz (2009) explained that grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories grounded in the data themselves. Charmaz suggested that grounded theory can complement other approaches to qualitative data analysis rather than stand in opposition to them. In my study, I paired grounded theory to phenomenology in order to allow for an enfolding collection of that data that thoroughly circumvent the lived experiences of adoptive parents. During the conduct of this research the data was analyzed and collected to allow for a theoretical underpinning to arise from the emerging themes.

Charmaz (2009) is one of the main theorists of grounded theory within the qualitative research tradition. This grounded theory approach includes advocating for a social constructivist perspective that includes emphasizing diverse local worlds, multiple realities, and the complexities of particular worlds, views, and actions (Cresswell, 2007). While interviewing participants, I followed Charmaz's (2009) methods of intensive interviewing, which permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience. For this grounded theory study, I devised a few broad, open-ended, non-judgmental questions to encourage unanticipated statements and stories. Grounded theory interviewing, Charmaz explained, differs from much in-depth interviewing because interviewers narrow the range of interview topics to gather specific data for developing theoretical frameworks as the interviewers proceed with conducting the interviews. It was in this context that I developed questions and thought processes before and during the interviews.

After I conducted the interviews, I maintained the grounded theory method in the organization of data analysis and sorting of the research findings. Grounded theory expresses the need for initial and focused coding of data (Charmaz, 2009). I also used memo-writing in this process. Charmaz explained that memo-writing can “catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons and connections you make, and crystallize questions and directions for you to pursue. Through conversing with yourself through memo-writing, new ideas and insights arise during the act of writing” (p.72). Likewise, I utilized personal memos during and particularly after interviews to enrich my understanding of the participants’ lived experiences. Through the use of grounded theory methods, this research develops ideas and theory concerning how prospective adoptive parents use blogging as a source of support throughout the adoption process.

Data Collection

To investigate the experience of prospective adoptive parents who have used blogging as means of creating a supportive community, I interviewed adoptive parents who had chosen to both blog and not blog. To find participants (see appendix G), I advertised on my blog and sent the link out to other social media sites. When this didn’t entice enough non-bloggers (people who choose not to blog about adoption) to participate in the study, I then contacted adoptive parents that I personally knew to identify additional candidates for participation in the study. I found four bloggers and five non-bloggers to participate in this research. From each category, I found at least two participants who had finished the adoption process, and their children were home and two others who were currently going through the adoption process. When more people were interested in participating in the study than needed, I selected participants by: 1) preference for those living in Minnesota since I would prefer to conduct face-to-face interviews

if possible; 2) (If blogging participants) preference for those who blogged at least once a week on average. I also ensured that the most recent adoption did not happen more than five years ago, and, if they had just recently begun the adoption process, I required that they were at least six months into the process of adopting and blogging.

Once I found the participants, I conducted a minimum of two interviews with each person who became involved with the study. These interviews were conducted face-to-face, with a video teleconference through Skype, or on the telephone. A place and time conducive to data collection and convenient for the interviewee was arranged through a phone call or email. Once we met for the interview, I described the project to the interviewee verbally and through the consent form (see Appendix A). Every interview was recorded with the default being a visual recording while allowing for sound-only recordings if the interviewee preferred. Observations and field notes were collected during the discussions. Interviewees could withdraw from the project or refuse to answer a question at any time. A printed transcript was made of the interview using the services of an outside transcriptionist service called GMR Transcription (see Appendix B for the transcriptionist agreement). All audio recordings, video recordings, and transcripts are being kept in a locked place at my home or in a password-protected computer folder that is not accessible to the general public.

Once the transcription process was complete, I reviewed it and make sure all of it was accurate. There were sometimes additional questions that I asked depending upon 1) insights I gained from the earlier data I had collected or 2) in connection to a point that was brought up in the interview. The purpose of many of these questions was clarification and triangulation with other data sources I had collected. Any changes or corrections were made and a final transcript was printed.

Triangulation

In addition to the interviews of the nine participants in the study I conducted, I triangulated the data by using other sources to help structure my thought process before, during and after the interviews. For example, I monitored the blogging participant's blogs, viewed pictures and visuals during the actual interview process, and took extensive field notes. Grounded theory describes these added sources as elicited and extant texts. Charmaz (2009) explained that elicited texts involve research participants producing written data in response to a researcher's request; and extant texts consist of varied documents that the researcher had no hand in shaping.

Artifacts: pictures, journals and the like.

In *Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*, Norum (2008) defined artifacts as things that societies and cultures make for their own use. They provide material evidence of the past by documenting and recording the past. Artifacts can provide historical, demographic, and (possibly) personal information about a culture, society, or people. Insights into how people lived, what they valued and believed, their ideas and assumptions, and their knowledge and opinions are revealed in artifacts. The author explains that artifacts may include photos, tools, buildings, toys, pottery, jewelry, clothing, weapons, gifts, paintings, graffiti, furniture, and other similar items.

Likewise, during interviews I often asked participants to show me pictures of their child and journals, diaries, paintings, or other things such as baby cribs and rooms that reminded them of their adoption process (if it had already passed). Artifacts, according to Cresswell (2007) are "the focus of attention for the researcher as he or she determines what people make and use, such

as clothes and tools” (p.241). These artifacts, particularly pictures, gave me a more in depth perspective of the participants experience and story that led them to the adoption of their child. I was able to look closely at the pictures and other artifacts and ask specific questions about their meaning, what story went along with them, and how they are important to the adoption story of their child. Pictures, personal journals, diaries, paintings, as well the house shape and the child’s room and cribs aided in the interview process because they prompted me to ask extra questions and learn more about what the participants experience truly entailed.

Memoing.

Along with reading the blogging participants’ blogs, I took extensive field notes, or memos during the interview process. Memoing, Cresswell (2007) explained, is “the process in grounded theory research of the researcher writing down ideas about the evolving theory. In general, these are written records of analysis” (p.239). These notes and thoughts guided me while asking questions during the interviews as well as later while processing the data. The memos also guided me during my preparation for the second set of interview questions. I asked the participants to ensure accuracy in gathering useful information. Later, I utilized the memos, along with the interviews and artifacts to pinpoint the main themes that emerged from the data.

Blogs and online artifacts.

During the time between interviews, I reviewed various adoption blogs to get a better understanding concerning current issues in adoption. I focused mainly on adoption blogs kept by my blogging participants, but also reviewed other blogs and sites. I used participants’ blogs to better understand the topics and information important to them at the time. My observation of blogs was beneficial to the interviewing process as well because I was able to see updates on the

participants' life, be knowledgeable on current adoption practices and issues, and include specific, pertinent questions during my second round of interviews.

At the completion of the interviewing process, I asked each blogger to reflect on the interview and, if they choose, write about their thoughts after the interview was conducted. This was a request, not something required from the blogging participants.

As mentioned above, I hired a transcriber to aid in the process. This person was required to show the utmost respect for the privacy of the data and participants, and the transcriber was required to give me an electronic copy of the data. They were advised of their legal commitment to delete it from their computers or other transcription devices.

Ethics and Confidentiality

All of my interviews were with individuals who volunteered for my study and were above the age of 18. Much care and sympathy was taken with the adoptive parents, since the topic of adoption is sometimes a sensitive subject to many people who have gone or are going through the process.

I followed The University of St. Thomas' Institutional Review Board guidelines using pseudonyms and confidentiality agreements with care. Once the transcript was prepared, for confidentiality purposes I destroyed the interviews and secured the rest of the field notes and data in a private computer that is not accessible by the public.

Limitations

As in any academic research involving human beings, this study encompasses areas of limitations due the nature of qualitative research, which allows for the closeness of the researcher to the subject of the research. However, I have mitigated most limitations by verbalizing and

addressing them in a manner that would enhance the validity of this investigation. Below I explain both my personal biases, as well as the exclusive participation of women in this study.

Personal bias.

Since I am an adoptive parent and a blogger, I have a vested interest in this subject. I have spent many years writing publicly about parenting and adoption. I have often felt that adopting a child would be much harder for me if I did not have my blog as an outlet for my thoughts and emotions.

However, I also believe that every person is different. I understand that people deal with various aspects of their lives in many different ways and that not everyone will react as I did during the adoption process. I respect others and the way they express themselves and I think that, although I have a bias towards blogging while adopting, I know that this is only my perspective. While the data analysis was ongoing, I became aware of biases I have had towards adoption and blogging that I did not recognize at the outset of this research. The use of field notes and discussion with my dissertation chair helped bring these to light. I tried to minimize any bias I had in completing and presenting this research. A better understanding of the range of reasons and possible value of blogging during adoption to help future prospective adoptive parents is the purpose of my research.

Female perspective.

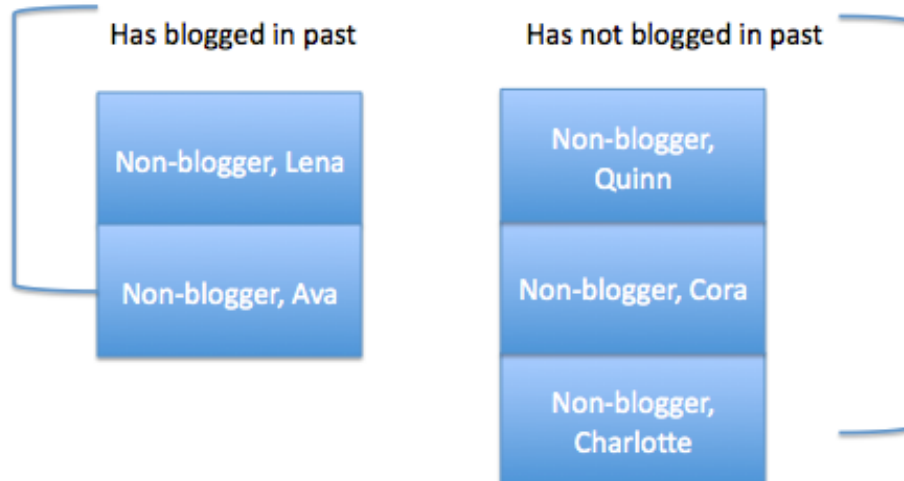
A limitation in this research is the fact that every person interviewed is a woman. While searching for participants, not one male came forward to take part in the study. Also, when researching adoption blogs, I found that men write few, if any blogs concerning adoption. Although further exploration of this topic is important, this study does not undertake it. In spite of the potential researchable nature of male-bloggers for adoption, including them in this study

would detract from the focus of finding a link between blogging and adoption. I hope to add to the academy a new understanding on what it is about blogging that creates a community, and adding an additional factor into the study would decrease the importance of that topic.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of this research, I conducted a total of eighteen interviews with nine different parents. Five of them considered themselves non-bloggers, although two of the five had blogged about their lives and experiences in the past. Figure 1 below identified the participants in this study with non-bloggers who have blogged in the past on the left and participants who have never blogged on the right.

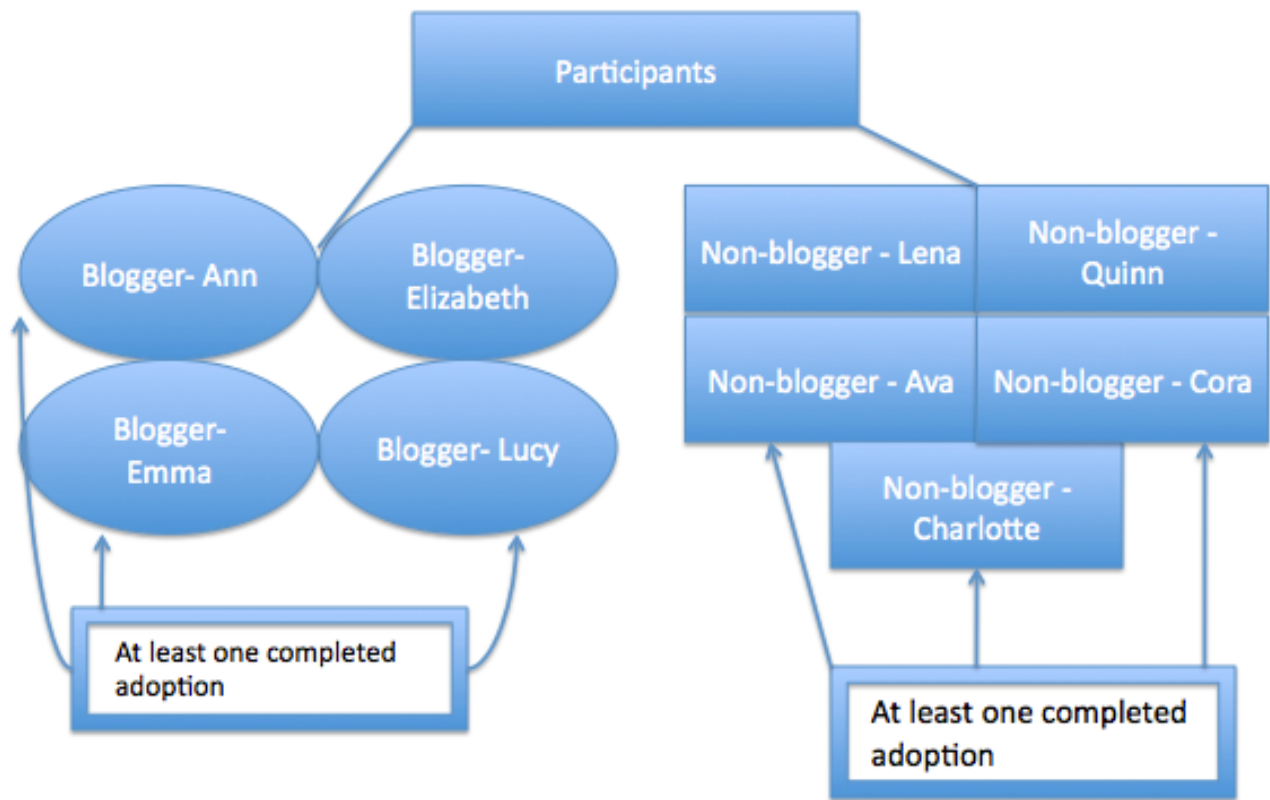
Figure 1: Study participants: non-bloggers



Of these five parents who were not blogging about their process, three were currently in the process of adopting, and one of those three was adopting for the second time. Two of the four blogging participants were currently in the process of adopting, and one of those two was adopting for the second time. Out of all nine participants, only three had not yet completed an

adoption, where the rest of the participants currently had at least one adoptive child living in the home with them. Although the participants were in different stages of the adoption process, their need for connection with other adoptive families was apparent. Figure 2 identifies participants in terms of the status of their adoption process.

Figure 2: Participants by adoption status



The interviews were done in various forms. Twelve of the eighteen were done using Skype, where visual and auditory recordings were made. One interview was done by telephone, which was audio recorded. The remaining five interviews were face-to-face meetings at a location chosen by the participant. The recorded data was destroyed for confidentiality purposes once a transcript was prepared by a transcriptionist, and for all succeeding analysis and reporting the participants were identified by pseudonyms. The pseudonyms I used for the blogging participants are, Ann, Lucy, Elizabeth, and Emma. The non-bloggers are, Lena, Cora, Quinn, Charlotte, and Ava.

Once transcribed, the data was divided by coding the comments by the three questions that underpinned this research. After reading and coding the transcripts by hand, I used the program Nvivo to find out what specific words and topics were found most often within the documents. Two of the most repeated words were “stress” and “help.” Looking more closely at those words and the quotes surrounding them helped guide the research, which ultimately lead to two additional findings that were not directly related to the initial questions but are described in the last two sections of chapter four. These findings relate to:

- Adoptive parents use blogs to help guide other adoptive parents through their process.
- Blogging, and reading blogs can cause stress and anxiety.

After searching for themes using the Nvivo computer software, I then used the program to sort the five different themes that were discovered throughout the interviews and data analysis. From this, I sorted all of the data and organized the findings by topic.

Conclusion

This research brings new information to the foreground that combines the two domains, adoption and blogging. It shows whether blogging during the different stages of adopting creates a community of support for those involved; it also shows what means of assistance those who chose not to blog use during their adoption process. I used the history of blogging and adoption as a base for my research, and key support theories to guide data analysis. For example, social support theory helped to guide my research about blogging and its importance to adoption and how psychologically having a community of support through a difficult process may be key to a successful and less stressful adoption completion. I conducted this qualitative research through a phenomenological approach, which allowed me to listen and understand others' stories about adoption and community support through the sharing of a common experience. For triangulation purposes, I used multiple interviews, blogs and field notes. My hope is that this research will help provide information to those people adopting, blogging, or doing both, and articulate the importance of community support during this rather stressful event.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

This research explored how blogging helped adoptive parents find a community of support during the process of adopting a child and what mechanisms of support helped them finish their adoption journey. To summarize the findings, I organized this chapter according to the three research questions that underpinned my research and additional issues that arose from the interviews not related to these specific questions.

- 1) How has the experience of blogging helped prospective adoptive parents during the process of adoption?
- 2) How did blogging help prospective adoptive parents fulfill the need to create and join a support community?
- 3) How have “non-blogger” prospective adoptive parents dealt with the frustration of the adoption process?

The first question considering how the experience of blogging helped prospective adoptive parents during the process of adoption identified three significant areas: first, blogging was an easy way to share information; second, blogging was a convenient way to get information from other adoptive parents; and third, blogging gave people a place to vent and talk about their feelings and stress created from going through the adoption process.

The second question about how blogging helped them form a community revealed four positive findings: first, finding a community that understands the hardships of adoption was very important; second, getting comments or communication through the blogs that they wrote made them feel a sense of community; third, blogging could result in close relationships that eventually expanded beyond online communication; and fourth, blogging gave prospective

adoptive parents opportunities for obtaining financial support by developing connections that otherwise would have been unavailable to them.

The third question asking non-blogging parents about the form of support they used uncovered three main forms of support: first, current family and friends were the main source of support for this group; second, non-bloggers found much support through other adoptive parents; and lastly, non-bloggers used various online Internet support to help them get through their adoption process.

A fourth finding relevant to this question pertains to how one of these adoptive parents who did not use blogs felt more lonely than the participants who blogged and/or used the Internet for information. Although this was not directly part of the third question, I find this an important discovery since the only adoptive parent who did not blog or use any web-based support system was the source.

The next two sections pertain to issues that emerged through the interviews that were not directly related to the initial three research questions, and therefore are additional findings. First, an additional finding discovered that blogging participants went out of their way to help other adoptive families through the use of their blog. They did this by relaying important information with the sole purpose to help other future adoptive families. Second, the interviews took many interesting turns where bloggers and non-bloggers alike described some of the downfalls of blogging, and how some who once blogged, no longer considered themselves bloggers. This last additional findings section concerning the downfalls of blogging presents plausible explanations as to why some prospective adoptive parents stopped blogging. In the following sections, I will describe and analyze the aforementioned findings of this study.

The Blogging Experience during the Process of Adoption

The first research question asked how prospective adoptive parents benefitted from blogging about their experience. Findings revealed the following aspects of the adopting parents' blogging experience.

The blogging experience and story telling.

The blogging families desired a place to tell their story so family and friends could follow along on their adoption journey. At the same time, recording information for posterity was also a reason why adoptive parents blogged during their adoption process. It was beneficial that the family could later go back to the blog and reflect on their experience.

A prospective adoptive parent, Lucy recollects why she originally began her blog, "I think, originally, because I wanted to document our journey – our trip – to China." Lucy later recalls how the blog also was an outlet for her as well as a good place to write things down for posterity reasons, "For me, blogging is a creative outlet and it has now turned into a really good way to document our history".

This initial thought concerning documentation and sharing the prospective adoptive parents' story brings up Fisher's (1984) first presupposition. In his narrative paradigm theory, Fisher states that humans are essentially storytellers, and they live life through their own personal story. Adoptive parents had a story to tell and wanted to share it with people, initially family and friends, to help them become a part of their adoption process.

Blogging also gave prospective adoptive parents a way to help people they knew and cared about to stay connected. This draws on Noddings (2003) Care Theory and how if people want to truly care about others, it is important to understand what is going on in their lives. For example, KSP simply explained how, "I just liked it, it kept family connected;" whereas Ava

explained her feelings about the initial start to a blog she wrote for her first adoption and its evolutionary process:

I just started to blog to kind of keep family posted. And it kind of turned into a real blog where I started writing about all kinds of stuff.... It kind of drew people into what we were experiencing. I felt in a lot of ways that it kind of educated my family and friends into what the process really looked like and kind of gave them the ability to join us in it and to become emotionally invested in what we were going through.

With the blog, adoptive parents were able to share their experience through telling their story, as well as finding ways to connect with their family and friends. Noddings (2003) explains the participant's ability to draw on care theory and its third tenant concerning how to show care and interest in people and what they are dealing with and why it is important to understand all the details of the situation. Noddings also argues that Ethical Care helps everyone live the "good life," because individuals who care become better through responding to someone who needs help, and thus enable the other person to become more virtuous because they can focus on their own character once the immediate problem they are facing is solved. These adopting families were looking to those that were presently in their lives to become more invested, more knowledgeable, and more supportive throughout the process. They were looking for their loved ones to care about the process of adoption which they were experiencing, and they found a way to do that through telling their story on their blog.

Fisher (1984), in his narrative theory, describes the concept of how people see the world as a set of stories, and we humans choose stories to recreate to live a good life. In other words, Fisher understands that we choose the stories we want to follow and live by. For example the

stories shared concerning adoption are very important aspects of adoptive parents' lives, and are retold to others with the hope of a mutual understanding.

Charlotte, an adoptive parent who did not blog, felt like she had an important story to tell, one that was uniquely hers. She describes her desire of having a blog to relay her story to others:

I probably should have started a blog or something myself because I do feel like it was an amazing story, and I feel like there was – it was just a very special journey. I felt like there were certain moments that were – where we knew that these children definitely were meant to be in our lives, and I wanted to share that story.

Through blogging, the adopting families were able to tell their stories to those they loved and cared about. With the blog as a medium, they were purposefully seeking out the care and support from family and friends by the use of storytelling. The next section explains how after writing on their own blogs and telling their stories, adoptive parents searched out other blogs as an easy source of adoption information.

The blogging experience and seeking information.

The second finding within the first research question revealed that blogs are a great way to seek out information. Adoptive parents felt that blogs were incredibly useful when looking for real-life experience. In his social support theory, Wills (1991) would concur with adoptive parents on the role of blogging as informational support, which is the advice, guidance, suggestions, or useful information that is given to someone in need of comforting news. For example, Lena describes the informational support she received from her previous blog that she had kept from her first and failed adoption:

I learned most of everything I know through blogging and talking to other people who have done it, as opposed to the webinars, or the education that you have to do for the

Home Study. The webinars were good, but when I would talk to people who have actually adopted or were in the process of adoption or had their kids' home, it was easier to learn from their experiences than just sit through a webinar.

Another adoptive mother, Ann, explained her ability to find more blogs and therefore more information when searching on the Internet:

I started looking at blogs and I was like oh, look, people are talking about specifically the adoptions they've gone through and then somehow, somewhere, I don't remember when it was, I stumbled upon a whole list of Korean adoption blogs and then I started reading all of those. Then it was all so exciting.

In this instance, the adoptive parents were looking for what Wills (1991) describes as companionship support, which is part of the Social Support theory that gives someone a sense of social belonging, or a feeling that they have something in common with other people. These families were searching for a companion to travel with on their adoption process, and many times companions were found through blogs. By reading other peoples' stories they found a sense of social belonging and understood that they were not alone.

Ironically, some non-blogging adoptive parents relied on reading blogs for the sense of belonging just like blogging adoptive parents. For example, Cora, who never blogged herself states, "There would be nights when I would spend hours on blogs just clicking from link to link because it just felt like somebody gets this, somebody understands, it's a shared experience that is very unique."

Reading entries on others' blogs gave adoptive parents a feeling of support not only by providing them with useful information, which the Social Support theory (Langford, Bowsher and Maloney, 1997) defines as informational support, but also by letting them know that they are

not alone in their experiences and feelings. The next finding considers blogs as an arena where adopting parents process their information and emotions.

The blogging experience and processing information and emotions.

The third finding from the first research question was the ability to have a time and place to write and process all the information and emotional difficulties that inevitably happen during the adoption process. The information and emotions sometimes became so overwhelming that prospective adoptive parents would turn to blogging as a way to find clarity on their feelings concerning the situation. For example, Emma explains:

Writing for me has always been a way to work out what I'm feeling. So, that has always been a big part of blogging. When I start writing something, I know that something is on my heart and I can't figure out quite how I feel about it, so I'll just start to write and then it becomes clear and I'll have some sort of realization as I'm typing the words... For me I would say the most important part of blogging for me is the writing. The writing is what I need it for, and that's really why I keep writing on my blog.

Processing information and emotions through blogging goes back to the narrative theory where Fisher (1984) suggests that people are narrative beings, and, as such, they are looking for a story (in their lives) that makes sense to them. Fisher says that people want to see if their story is coherent and understandable – to themselves and others. The participants said they used blogs to describe their story to gain a better understanding of what they were going through emotionally. They would make sure that the telling of the story is coherent and makes sense to potential readers and themselves. For example, Elizabeth discussed the difference between just talking about the adoption versus writing about adoption on her blog as well as becoming coherent through her writing:

Writing on the blog allows you to reflect more than just speaking does, I think. Because you're actually thinking through what you want to say and you're processing as you're writing. I express myself better in my writing than I can in my words – or deeper I guess. I wouldn't just speak a lot of the things that I'm feeling as much as much as I would write them. It's like I'm putting my heart out there for anyone to read.

I think it gives me reflection time. It gives me time to sit because, so many times, my thoughts are just jumbled in all these different places about it, and your heart is going all these different places, and when you write, you have to think coherently. You have to think logical thoughts. You have to think slower. It's given me time to just think about what I'm trying to put out there, and also, it's almost like convincing myself of my story sometimes; my truths.

SK used the process of writing on the blog as a way to force herself to make sense of her adoption story. She was able to organize and process her thoughts and emotions while telling her narrative story through her blog. As Fisher (1984) describes, SK became a “narrative being” or in other words, a person who could describe her history, culture, and character in a coherent story about her life.

In sum, findings from the first research question showed that blogging was a practical way to share and receive information, and a place to vent and talk about feelings and stress created by the adoption process. The next section focuses on how adopting families went from telling, sharing, and venting about their story, to finding others who were in the same situation.

Adoption Process and Support Community

The second research question, “how did blogging fulfill the need to connect and join a support community?” was one area where most participants found significant aid through writing

or reading blogs during their adoption process. This section connects to the Social Support theory and specifically its function of companionship support. This type of support gives a sense of social belonging or inclusiveness (Wills 1991). This section also addresses how participants felt included, socially supported, and cared for through blogs.

The findings from participant responses to this question are separated into the following sections: empathy from experience, companionship and networking and financial support. Many parents did not live in communities where adoption was common; so, finding other adoptive families was important for the emotional support and understanding. This research discovered that the desire to relate is a strong human emotion that guides many towards blogging and searching out others' blogs.

Finding a supportive community: Empathy and experience sharing.

Seeking out others who understand the adoption experience or who have a "shared adoption experience" is an important reason to continue blogging as well as to continue reading others' blogs. Cora explained the need well:

Having the real life experience or being able to connect with somebody who has actually walked through it, or been in a town that you're travelling to, or experienced a certain social worker gives you a unique perspective and an upper hand in the process. It's important to connect to somebody who has that shared experience.

The importance of finding others who have experienced similar situations falls under Wills (1991) companionship support in the Social Support Theory. Companionship support, according to Wills (1991), helps people feel as if they have a sense of social belonging, which blogs created for prospective adoptive parents. Even if there were few people in their lives who had adopted, they could find people who shared that common link by reading others' blogs.

Emotional support, according to Wills (1991) is the offering of emotions such as empathy, concern, encouragement and caring, which many adoptive parents found through reading others' blogs. Adoptive parents needed to find companionship support and emotional support through blogging because, as the quotes below describe, there was a lack of understanding from people close to the adoptive parents such as relatives and long-time friends. The feeling of isolation on the part of blogging parents was not due to the fact that friends and relatives didn't try to understand; it was rather due to the very nature of adoption, which constitutes a hard thing for those who have not adopted to sufficiently understand. The next two quotes from different adoptive parents: Emma and Lucy explicate this finding.

Emma says:

I would share certain things (with family) and then you can just tell they don't get it. I feel like when you're not adopting, you don't know how much it's on your mind constantly. Like I said, your family may be like incredibly supportive of you like mine is, but they're not going to understand exactly how it feels either. I think it's important to make those connections with people who really get it.

Lucy explained:

I didn't feel like anybody in my real life understood what was going on in Nepal at all. Even when you tried to explain it – and I would try in vain to explain it. But people that were in the process got it. That part was lonely in my real life, and that's why I kept blogging because I did get support from the people who knew what I was going through, other bloggers who were in it with me.

Care theory discusses the dependency individuals have on others if they want to achieve their goals. For example, Noddings (1984) states that the one caring (people supporting the

adoptive families) must exhibit a strong form of empathy as well as an acute awareness of the adoptive families needs. Noddings would infer that this empathy and awareness needed to be present for the adoptive family to feel cared for, and respond. When the needs such as emotional, informational, or tangible support were not met by the non-adopting relatives and friends, the adoptive families turned to others who were also going through the adoption process. Cora explained the need to find care through other adoptive families:

The biggest piece of advice that I give is to find other adoptive families who are in a similar situation as you. Do this in any way you can because there is something in that shared experience that nobody else understands. As much as your family and friends want to, and as much as they may be supportive- unless you've been through it or are going through it, you just don't get it. Have somebody who can really understand that, and someone you can bounce questions off of, or even just a shoulder to cry on when you're frustrated with the process. That is my biggest piece of advice.

Every parent interviewed stressed the importance of finding companionship, or other people who understood what he or she was experiencing. All parents expressed how going through the adoption process without the emotional support or care of other adoptive parents would be difficult, which is why all prospective adoptive parents except for one turned to blogs and online support when looking for that connection.

Finding a supportive community: The role of feedback and networking.

The second finding in the second research question revealed that many blogging participants commented on how feedback about their blog was a very reassuring act of support. For example, Lucy states:

I like the feedback. I like the fact that people are reading it and taking interest in it. It would just help me just in terms of knowing that other people are excited for us and interested enough to keep reading.

The interest in bloggers' stories relates back to Fisher's (1989) Narrative paradigm, which holds that stories are a central form of human communication. Blogging adoptive parents received feedback, which encouraged them to continue to blog to tell their story. For example, adoptive parents knew that people were following their story on their blog by the comments they left at the end of the posts as described by Lucy, "It provides an outlet of just getting positive feedback because, by and large, I usually only get positive feedback on posts." That positive feedback encouraged prospective adoptive parents in their journey can be explained in Care theory. In fact, Noddings' (1984) posits that individuals are dependent on others for support to achieve their goals, particularly when receiving positive inputs. This was apparent when adoptive families explained how the communication, sometimes with people they don't know very well, helped them feel supported through their process. For example, Elizabeth explained the support she received through various forms of communication, such as positive emails, because people read her blog.:

I definitely connected with people and have gotten emails from people that have read my blog that I never knew – and they didn't know me and they actually couldn't even remember how they found my blog. I would get notes of encouragement from people who are adopting which helped me so much. Even one girl who is pregnant and due around the same time we are supposed to pick up our child. She had a different prospective but thought it was really fun to read an adoption blog and see how a mom is preparing for an adoption-type pregnancy. This online support made me feel so cared for.

This connection and the care that was given to the adoptive family sometimes spilled into the Social Support theory's view on companionship. These families realized that they were not alone, but instead were a part of a social support group, which is what companionship support describes. The connections they made through their blog would also often become a part of their life beyond the Internet. For example, Elizabeth talked about her routine connection with others because of her blog:

I'll go to church and I'll have people that I don't talk to very often come up to me and say 'We love reading your updates, we're getting so excited for you' The blog was such a conversation starter. People would come up and they know what's going on in our lives and would ask about us and tell us they're praying for us - that's huge. (Personal communication, January, 2013)

The personal connections made because of blogs began mostly as comments, but as the adoptive parents described, went on to become much more. With those connections, families were able to see that their story was being communicated to others. Like in Narrative paradigm theory, adoptive parents were feeling cared for and loved. Care theory (Noddings, 1984) and Social Support theory (Wills, 1991) also describe the necessity of feeling supported and cared for. A newfound piece of support was discovered when many adoptive parents met other adoptive parents face-to-face because of online communication.

Blogging adoptive parents sometimes found that "bloggy" friends (as defined by participant, Ann, as online friends that are made through blogging) would eventually become "real" friends (friends they know personally, not just online). These new relationships that are formed combines both tenets of companionship and emotional support within Social Support theory (Wills, 1991). Through communication over the Internet, parents not only connected with

others who were experiencing a similar situation, but also sometimes found a person who was close enough to visit and get to know in a more personal setting. These relationships created a strong form of companionship, which the Social Support theory describes as a feeling of social belonging. This companionship developed because families that first met online and then face-to-face were going through similar situations and were able to be physically close to one another. For example, participant Ann was asked if she had met any friends from blogging; she explained:

One woman I met from blogging is still a really good friend. This particular girl is named Kelly and she was blogging and she being very vague. Eventually I figured out that she had the same agency as us and that she lived in Colorado. I then called up our agency and said to them that I know you can't tell me who this is, but there's a family who just accepted a referral of a little girl and I know they live in Castle Rock. I asked them if they could pass on my name and number to them. I'd like to meet in person because we're kind of at the same stages of the process.

I didn't know whether she would call me back or not but she did. She called my phone and we chatted and then we decided to meet. We had a couples date and we compared where we were in the adoption process and then Kelly and I have since kept in touch. Our kids are a month apart, so we get together like every three months or so. So, yeah, and it originally started because I was following her blog and she was following mine.

Emotional support – the offering of emotions such as empathy, acceptance, encouragement or caring – is offered by the discovery of other adoptive families. From their online blogs adopting parents found good friends; such a phenomenon provides what the Social Support theory describes as companionship and emotional support. With the assistance of blogging, they created connections to other adoptive parents who are in a similar phase in the

process of adoption. The adopting parents' attitudes towards finding new and similar connections felt very positive, and created a long-lasting supportive impact on the participants and their families.

Finding financial support from blogs.

The third finding in the second research question showed that obtaining financial support through blogging is another aspect that made a lasting impact on blogging families. This form of support is what the Social Support theory deems as tangible support. House (1981) explains tangible support as the provision of financial assistance, material goods, or services. Costs of adopting a child can range from a minimal amount to more than \$40,000 (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011). Families find ways to supplement that cost through tangible support. For example, Ava discusses a fund that was discovered to help assist her family and their adoption:

The same week that we needed the money to adopt our child, a woman called the ABBA fund and set it up for us. Then we were called and told, "You won't believe it. But this lady read your blog. And she wants to set up this fund for you guys." The ABBA Fund thought it was really cool. They say it that it was because of blogging that it happened. I was blown away.

Elizabeth purposefully created a section of her blog for fundraising support. She explains, "There's a puzzle fundraiser section. We have a \$10,000.00 financial fundraising goal, and the puzzle will cover half of our adoption costs once the puzzle is done." With adoption costs reaching \$40,000, the use of blogs is a great way to gain tangible support. At the very least, the blog helps the public better understand the financial and material needs of the adopting family.

In conclusion, this section explained the support adoptive parents received by connecting with others through blogs. Because of blogs, families found others with shared experiences;

adopting parents felt connections with people because of the feedback they received through blog writing; they created personal connections; and they garnered financial support. The next section focuses on the ability of certain families to cope when they choose to not blog about their experience throughout the process of adoption.

Support or Lack of Support for the Non-bloggers

Participant responses to the third research question, which asked those who did not blog what form of support they used during the adoption process, identified three main answers. First, “family and friends” was the most important support group. Turning to people to whom they were already close was key to getting the help they needed. Second, aid was sought from other adoptive parents. Finally, non-blogging parents also found solace in online support. These three main categories of support gave these parents what they needed to guide them to the end of their adoption process successfully. Unfortunately, even though most of these participants were successful in their adoption, not all felt thoroughly supported throughout the adoption process.

Non-bloggers support from family and friends.

Five participants didn’t blog during their adoption process. The first finding from the third research question is that although every person participating in the study stated at some point that family or friends provided important support during their adoption process, the ones who did not blog emphasized the support of family and friends much more. Emotional support, as described in the Social Support theory, is what these adoptive parents found with people close to them. They were shown empathy, affection, and encouragement through the asking of questions and interest in their story. This was true even for those adoptive parents whose family had never been directly exposed to adoption before. Charlotte explained:

My sister just showed incredible interest in the whole process. She'd call a lot and ask, "What's going on?" and "What do you know?" and I think it was a lot of conversation, a lot of phone calls, a lot of requests to get together, just making sure I was okay. She would ask a lot of questions about "Where are you in the process?" That was what my support looked like- just time together, talking.

Yeah, I would say I do have a close relationship with my family, my mom and dad, my in-laws. I think when we would get together for dinner or whatever, I was very open just to talk about what had been happening, and they were good about asking.

Cora had adoption stories already woven throughout her family's history, so she received strong emotional support from family and friends. The encouragement and care her family gave her was apparent and helpful. Cora explains:

My family was great. There was lots of adoption – very open to it and very willing to talk about it, wanting to know a lot. I spent a lot of time with them and with my cousin talking through that. I spent a lot of time with my aunt who had adopted.

The emotional support the non-blogging families found from family and friends gave them the help they needed, particularly if those providing the support had been through the process.

Non-bloggers support from other adoptive parents.

The second finding from the third research question was that that non-blogging parents seemed to find just as much support from other adoptive families as the families who had blogged about their experience. This connection gave these parents the emotional support as described in Social support theory. Langford, Bowsher, Maloney and Lillis (1997) explain that emotional acts of support far outnumber all other types of support, and that this kind of support

makes people feel esteemed and valued. Quinn explains a relationship she has with a work friend who has mentored her during the adoption process:

Yeah. I kind of almost think of her as a mentor. She adopted two little girls, one of them from Heart to Heart, and that's how I ended up going with that agency. She's just my person that I go to and ask questions. She gets it, she totally gets it.

Lena discussed the importance of receiving emotional support and sharing her story. She felt that it was important to share her personal story, since humans are essentially storytellers as suggested by the Fisher (1984) and the Narrative paradigm theories:

Allison and I get together probably about once a year and we have lunch or dinner together and share kind of our stories. The last time we were together, she was talking about having a lot of grief and sadness over not being able to get pregnant. I guess she has a sister too, who is just giving birth to her first child, and a lot of those old painful memories were coming back, and we were kind of sharing our story of how everybody with adoption comes to the table with grief... She is a big source of support.

Many of non-blogging families find connections through their family and friends, but many of them also turn to online resources to become connected. The next section discusses the online support the non-blogging parents use.

Non-bloggers' support from the online community.

Non-blogging prospective adoptive parents search for information and a connection with other people just like blogging parents. Informational support, according to Langford, Bowsher, Maloney, and Lillis (1997) is information that is provided to another person during a time of stress. Quinn, a non-blogging parent sought informational support through an online source:

I go online a lot and look at Heart to Heart's Facebook page. It's refreshing when I see that they've had five placements this month. Or I go onto their website and I check out the new situations they add, and it helps me know that things are moving along: adoptions are progressing. They're still in business; they're still out there. It would be hard without any type of social media to know that. Right now I can just jump on the computer and see that, "Oh, look! They placed two babies this week!" That's almost like a little bit of therapy right there. It helps a little knowing that things are moving along.

Cora described the importance of the Informational support she received through her online experience. Additionally, she explained how finding companionship support is also a significant benefit to using an online support system:

I think we've come to rely on the Internet and social media so much to provide the support and information and I think you get certain information you can't get easily anywhere else. But especially, being able to connect with somebody who has actually adopted gives you such a unique perspective.

Informational and companionship support is instrumental for prospective adoptive parents during the adoption process. While these parents were not choosing to tell their stories online, they were still using information from the Internet to aid them in their adoption process.

The next section discusses the support received by a parent who did not blog.

Lack of blogging support and feeling of isolation.

A fourth finding revealed one non-blogging adoptive parent and the difficulty that she had during her adoption process. Although Charlotte stated in previously referenced quotes that her family and friends supported her adoption plan, her need for support from other adoptive parents was something that she lacked. Charlotte desired two of the Social Support theory tenets

– companionship and informational – but felt like she didn't have either of them from other adoptive parents. Charlotte did achieve her goal, which was to successfully adopt her two children with the help of her family and friends, but as she states below, it was not done without hardship:

Quite honestly, I had very, very little support, especially when Mattie came along. I really felt like I was on an island by myself. I was the only one really that I knew at the time that had adopted. I had a couple of kind of acquaintances out of state, but really I don't think I had much support in place, other than just the support and love of family and friends, and it was nobody that had been through my experience. I never used online forums; I guess I never thought to look for it. So, yeah, looking back, it would have been really nice to have a forum- online or otherwise- to talk with other waiting families and to have support groups. I just never found that support which, now looking back, I really needed.

Charlotte specifically discussed the need for companionship support when she focused on her desire to find other families similar to her own. Her need to connect with someone else in a similar situation that could help her feel as if she belonged to a social group was very important, yet something she never really achieved.

In conclusion, most of the non-blogging adoptive families interviewed found the support they needed in different venues: family and friends, connections with other adoptive families, and online forums. Although one family had more difficulty than others in finding support during their adoption process, they successfully adopted two children who became a part of their lives. The section below discusses how blogging parents relayed information about adoption to help those in a different stage of the adoption process.

Additional Finding 1: Blogging as an Aspect of Servant Leadership

In addition to the aforementioned research results that were literally generated by the three research questions, the analysis of data also produced some striking findings. While the previous findings focused on the lived experience during the process of adoption, the additions are external to that experience as they look towards future generations.

Although blogging adoptive parents embodied some leadership characteristics during their adoption experience, these additional findings clearly demonstrate that they exerted servant leadership. In effect, instead of addressing exclusively their own feelings, those adoptive parents projected the benefits of blogging to future generations. Particularly, the first additional finding indicates that prospective adoptive parents not only blogged for their own benefit, but also that of other potential adopting parents who had not yet gone through that process. I have analyzed this aspect of “blogging for future generations of adopting parents” through the lens of servant leadership theory.

Bloggng as empathizing and fore-sighting.

The first discovery from the first additional finding refers to Greenleaf’s (1991) Servant Leadership theory. This sheds light on why blogging prospective adoptive parents provide help to other parents who are adopting after them. Greenleaf explains that the underlying force causing people to provide support is “empathy.” Greenleaf states, “men grow taller when those who lead them empathize, and when they are accepted for who they are...” (p. 14). Adoptive parents who blog about the difficulties, processes, and issues of adoption with the intention of helping others who have not yet started the adoption process are empathizing with these adoptive parents who are not in the same place in the process that they are.

Emma, who had already been through the adoption process, but was in the process again to adopt another child, explained her feelings about relaying information and empathizing with people who were adopting for the first time:

I feel like I want it now to be more about other people than about me because I've been through it. Because I know how isolating it can be and how you don't know what it's like until you're in it. I want other people to know that they're not alone... I've been there so I want to help others who are there for the first time...

I thought people don't know what it's like. People don't know what they're getting into all the time, especially at the beginning. I thought people needed to know what it's really like. So, then it became important to me to become sort of a source of information for others.

The act of relaying information and empathizing with future adoptive parents is also explained by the Servant Leadership theory as foreseeing the outcome by using lessons from the past. Greenleaf (1991) states, "Prescience, or foresight, is a better than average guess about *what* is going to happen *when* in the future" (p. 16). Blogging adoptive parents use their experiences to help guide others through their future course and, in so doing, make future adoptive parents' paths easier and less bumpy than their own.

Bloggng as a persuasive awareness of the world's orphans.

The second discovery in the first additional finding reveals that Servant leadership applies to bloggng adoptive parents when they express an awareness of the world around them. Without awareness, "we miss leadership opportunities" (Greenleaf, 1991, p. 19). Some of these adoptive parents used their writing to educate readers of their blog of the benefits of adoption. Greenleaf notes that "A fresh look is being taken at the issues of power and authority, and people

are beginning to learn, however haltingly, to relate to one another in less coercive and more creatively supporting ways” (pp. 3-4). Adoptive parent Elizabeth explained her thoughts on blogging about adoption and the large impact it can have on future adoptive parents: “This isn't just about me. I can do this (writing on my blog) to help other people.” Elizabeth later went on to discuss how she wanted to tell her adoption story to persuade others to consider participating in the act of adoption:

And like I said, I don't want our story to just stop at us. I don't want it to just be hey, look at us! Look at us! I want our story be used and be read by others who think they may someday adopt a child. That's what we said from the very beginning, we want God to use us. Use us however.

Adoptive parents who put their heart and journey on a blog are acting as subtle servant leaders to future adoptive parents and orphans. Greenleaf (1977) describes servant leaders as “a servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant - first to make sure that other people's needs are being served” (p.2). Prospective adoptive parents who blog want their adoption journey known to help guide and encourage people towards the act of adoption. This act of leadership is not aggressive, but very intentional and done with empathy and foresight with the goal of helping others find their way.

In conclusion of the first additional finding, blogging adoptive parents find that their blogs can be used as a tool. The act of blogging can be a way for adoptive parents to lead others through the adoption process, and can be used to advocate and persuade others to see that adoption is something that they should consider for their family. These blogging parents used Servant Leadership with the hope that their writing will lead others in a direction they believe

will be helpful. The intended audience for this support is both people who want to adopt as well as the orphans of the world. The blogging adoptive parents who were interviewed were advocates of adoption, and they used their blogs to get their message across. Ironically, even though they used blogs in this way, many saw the blogging process as a burden at times. The last section below explains the difficulties that blogging created for the parents involved.

Additional Finding 2: Downfalls of Blogging During the Adoption Process

When talking to the participants, I discovered that although blogging has helped many adoptive parents in various ways, some respondents cautioned to not overlook the negative aspects of blogging. The second additional finding explains what those aspects are.

Bloggng as a waste of time.

In the first discovery of the second additional finding, many participants felt as if both writing and reading blogs could simply be a waste of time. People want to tell their story, just as the Narrative paradigm describes, but sometimes parents feel as if they are thinking and/or writing on their blogs more often than is helpful, perhaps as an unneeded diversion. For example Lucy explains:

It's a time-suck. I feel like, sometimes, that in an effort to document what's happening, you lose the moment. You know, it's like, "Oh, this would be perfect for the blog. Restage it!" I'll even do a blog post when I should be doing something like balancing Microsoft Money. Because of that I've abdicated all of the money stuff back to my husband who's not very happy about it. He doesn't begrudge my blog obsession because he knows that it's my outlet, but, on the other hand, he's like, "Do you really have to do one every single night?"

The same can be said for the reading of blogs as well. The informational support that is given through blogs can be helpful, but it can also cause some families to spend too much time online looking for more information of marginal potential value. Lucy says it well here:

If I had to be without social media and the computer during the adoption process it would be good in the sense that I wouldn't be sitting in front of the computer hitting refresh, refresh, refresh for news all the time. I wouldn't be badgering and emailing and checking every possible resource I could for data on what's coming, what's happening, what's going on.

Emma also described that feeling by saying, "once in a while I need to fast from blogs because otherwise I can't live my life." Although it has helped these parents in the past, blogging can simply become too much a part of their lives to the extent of neglecting other necessities of daily life. While adopting parents see the benefits of blogging, they also consider the costs in the time and effort it takes to write and read blogs.

Blogging creates competition through one-way conversation.

In the second discovery of the second additional finding, some parents felt that blogging created a feeling of competition between families. When parents were seeking informational support through blogging, they sometimes found that hearing someone else's good news made the process more difficult for them. Emma explains that here:

It was competitive for me. I would especially follow families whose dossiers got to Rwanda about the same time as ours did, and would obsessively follow them. All I wanted to know was what they were hearing and how it affected me. If they got good news, it was devastating if I didn't get the same news. If I didn't hear the same thing or it didn't apply to me, I would feel crushed. So I think there is an element of competition in

the blogs because I think you're removed from it a bit because that person writing is in control of that space because there are no other contributors.

Companionship support, something blogging was supposed to provide, was hindered here because of the one-way communication. Instead of feeling as if she were a part of a supportive group of adoptive parents, this one-sided conversation made the participant feel alone and frustrated, and as though she were one of the few who was not proceeding successfully through the adoption process. Emma talks about this lack of communication later by stating that in a blog, "you can comment, but it wasn't a conversation. It was just like a one-way thing and you couldn't see the support if nobody responded to your blog post."

Competition was also observed by Lena as she discussed how the difficulty of her adoption process tainted her view when reading others' blogs:

I just don't blog about it because now if I look at anybody else's adoption blog I'm feel like they like they have a completed adoption and they didn't start the process until two years after we did. It's all competitive – I can't even look at them now.

When parents are having a difficult time during their adoption process, blogs can sometimes be hard to read and painful to write. The one-way conversation in blogs may inadvertently create an unsupportive environment. Companionship support cannot occur if adopting parents do not receive feedback from others on their blogs. The care that they desire from other adoptive parents is not apparent when the act of reading a blog makes them feel as though they are the only ones not being matched with a child. This can cause distress and risks altering an adoptive parent's outlook on their adoption journey.

Blogging can create unwanted emotions.

In the third discovery of the second additional finding, people find that becoming parents is an emotion-laden experience. Adopting a child is no different, and when prospective adoptive parents are waiting for a child, they seek informational support to help them through their process. Blogs can provide adoptive parents with information about their potential adoptive child's country of birth, or situations with birth mothers. Lena explains that when looking for information on blogs, "every piece of news would determine my mood for the day."

These parents need emotional support, or the offering of emotions such as empathy, concern, affection, love, trust, acceptance, intimacy, encouragement, or care to help them get through the adoption process. When blogging only provides one-way communication and informational support about other families, it runs the risk of causing distress just as KV explained. As Lena reflected on the amount of time she spent on others' blogs finding information that, in the end, didn't help her process, she stated, "Ignorance would have been a little more bliss." This statement contradicts the informational support aspect of Social Support theory because of the desire by this prospective adoptive parent to be a little less informed. Information, in her experience, just made her more anxious and worried and did not provide the support that she desired.

The lies that blogging creates.

Informational support, which is the advice, guidance, suggestions, or useful information to someone (Wills, 1991), is an essential form of support for many adoptive parents. However, in the fourth discovery from the second additional finding, it should surprise no one that sometimes the informational support provided through blogging is not fully truthful since the stories that some adoptive parents tell on their blogs are dishonest. Lucy explains this downfall of blogging:

The bad part of blogging is that you read other people's stories, and so many times it's flowery, and rainbows, and puppy dogs, and kisses, and everything is perfect, and it's the child they were meant to have, and, you know, God placed this kid with us because he is *ours*. Then they leave out so much of the other stuff that is also important, sometimes even more important- the stuff that isn't so pretty to talk about, but is still a truth in adoption.

The participants stated that families who blog choose to tell only one side of their story, which then presents an inaccurate and, ultimately, misleading description of what adoption is truly like. Narrative Paradigm can explain how these bloggers are choosing only the positive stories so that others can believe that they are living a good or sometimes perfect life. Unfortunately, that "rose colored glasses" approach to blogging runs the risk of leading other adoptive parents to believe that the process is easier and less chaotic than it truly is. Ava describes a family she knows that fits this description:

Another reason I haven't blogged is because I know someone who blogs, yet is untruthful. Her blog is beautiful, you would read her blog and think that she has a perfect life, and that she's just really happy. And that's not the case. I know her, and she really doesn't have friends. As someone who's tried to be her friend she constantly holds people at arm's length, but she really feels like her blogging friends are her true friends. And if she lived near those friends, they'd be best buddies. I've kind of been down that road. And I know that your blog friends only see what you choose to put on your blog, whereas, someone you know face-to-face, they see you with whatever you have going on. And you can't hide it. I think that blogging for all of its benefits can kind of create an artificial personality.

Although blogs are an easy way to find informational support, it is important for users to understand that not all the information on blogs is accurate and complete. This lack of honesty through lies of omission may lead people to think that adoption is something that it is not. If the whole truth is not presented by a blogger, then expectations of the adoption process will be tainted.

In conclusion of the second additional finding, according to participants, blogging, for all of its benefits, can also be a waste of time, create competition between adoptive parents, alter one's mood about adoption, and not always provide reliable information. The positive support received from blogs as discussed in the earlier sections must also be weighed against the negatives of making prospective adoptive parents more stressed and feeling less support.

Summary

To conclude, the act of blogging supports prospective adoptive parents in different ways. Parents feel more connected and supported because of the ease of relaying and gaining information that blogging gives them. Blogging also gives parents a place to talk about their adoption process that can be both informational as well as emotional. Blogging creates a place for adoptive parents to virtually congregate and find each other so their support system can expand. On the other hand, adoptive parents who do not blog frequently still use blogs and other online resources as a part of their support system, but they also find that their family and friends and other adoptive parents are the most important people to help them through the difficult times in an adoption process. Adoptive parents expressed that they write blog posts with the intention of helping other adoptive parents, but also recognize that there are some drawbacks with the blogging process. Blogging helped many of these prospective adoptive parents as they navigated

through the process of adopting a child, but they also realize that blogging can become a distraction and hindrance.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

This research investigated how prospective adoptive parents use blogging as a form of support and a means to create community. The research questions that I discussed with prospective adoptive parent bloggers concerned their choice to blog while in the adoption process, what their rationale for blogging was during the process, and what, if any, form of community support came from it. I also questioned non-bloggers on the forms of support they used during their process, and why they chose not to use blogging. This chapter summarizes the analytical theories I ingrained within the study, the methodology I utilized, and a restatement of the findings. Finally, I suggest recommendations at the end of this chapter for prospective adoptive parents during their process of adoption as well as areas for further research.

Theoretical underpinnings

The analytical theories ingrained in this study focus on how people interact and care for each other. Servant leadership theory, social support theory and care theory expand **on how** people care for one another. Narrative paradigm theory describes how people interact and live their lives based on the stories they create. All of these theories give insight to how prospective adoptive parents use blogs and why blogging creates a community.

Servant leadership, as Greenleaf (1977) explains, “begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve first” (p.2). Blogging adoptive parents have displayed leadership in their inventive use of blog as a social media tool at their disposal, becoming pioneers by leading the way for current and future generations of people who consider adoption as an option. They are servants by virtue of writing their blogs encouraging others to adopt, as well as giving future adoptive parents an online ‘blue-print’ for the adoption process. Some of the main tenets of servant leadership include characteristics such as listening, empathy, awareness of the world, the ability

to persuade rather than coerce, and foresight (Spears and Lawrence, 2004). Adoptive parents who participated in this study have embodied the tenets of servant leadership by displaying these characteristics through listening to others, having empathy for future adoptive parents, expressing their awareness of the world by the care they show for the world's orphans, and their ability to encourage others to consider adoption as a part of their families.

Social support theory describes the mechanisms by which interpersonal relationships buffer someone against a stressful environment (Cohen & McKay, 1984). Blogging gives prospective adoptive parents support through the creation of a community of other adoptive parents. Families find each other through blogging and online support and provide the main tenants of the social support theory: emotional support, tangible support, informational support and companionship support.

Care theory's focus is on the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility (Held, 2006). The main tenets of care theory include the dependency that individuals have on others for support; how more care should be given to people who are vulnerable; and that it is very important to understand all the details of a situation to express care for others. Prospective adoptive parents and the children that they are hoping to adopt are dependent on people for support through the process. The care and understanding that is expressed through family, friends, fellow adoptive parents and others are central reasons that parents are able to finish the adoption process successfully.

The last theory within this research is narrative paradigm theory. Fisher (1984) describes narrative paradigm through five presuppositions: humans are essentially storytellers, and they live their life through their own story; the paradigmatic mode of human decision-making and communications is characterized by "good reasons" which vary in form among communication

situations, genres and media; practice of “good reasons” is ruled by such matters as history, biography, culture and character; the nature of people as narrative beings determines rationality; and the world is a set of stories, and we choose the stories we recreate to live what we consider a good life. The narrative paradigm explains how blogging about the adoption experience is a way for prospective adoptive parents to describe these important aspects of their life through story. Through blogs, prospective adoptive parents explain some of the most important aspects of narrative paradigm including the following: humans are essentially storytellers; stories aid in decision making; the world is a set of stories; we choose the stories we recreate to live what we consider a good life (Fisher, 1989). Blogging, in essence, is the medium through which many of these prospective adoptive parents choose to tell their adoption story, is a place to process the decisions or “good reasons” for their purpose of adopting, and to share the story of adoption that they recreate in their lives.

Methodology

I used a qualitative research approach to evaluate the use of blogging by prospective adoptive parents. Qualitative research guides phenomenology, and grounded theory methodology supports data analysis. Qualitative research, according to Creswell (2007) begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Phenomenology is a way to describe the meaning of several individuals of their lived experience of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Finally, grounded theory is a systematic, yet flexible guide for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories that are grounded in the data themselves (Charmaz, 2009). These three methods of study allowed me to describe

and analyze the process of adoption as well as to learn about each participant's shared experience of blogging and support.

To investigate the connection between adoption and blogging, I conveniently selected nine participants, four who were prospective adoptive parent bloggers, and five prospective adoptive parent non-bloggers. Once identified, I conducted a minimum of two interviews with the participants through face-to-face encounter, videoconference or over the phone. Before, during, and after the interviews, extensive field notes were taken as well as notes from observations of the blogging prospective adoptive parent online blogs. To guide the interviews to better understand the participant and their story, field notes and observations were used. I transcribed the interviews and coded them using grounded theory as a basis of my research.

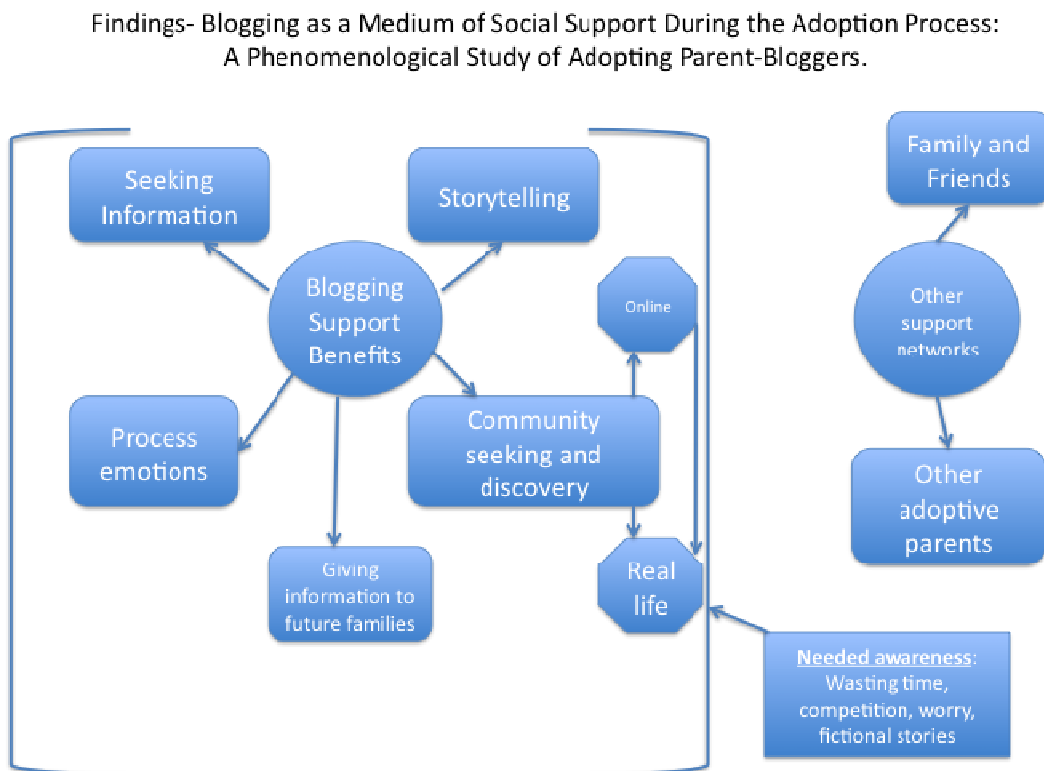
A major limitation to this research revolves around personal bias, since I have been extensively involved with blogging and adoption-related matters. However, I believe that my experience is not everyone's experience, and understand that everyone's story of adoption and blogging is different. To aid in overcoming this limitation, my extensive use of field notes, and discussion with my dissertation chair helped bring these views to light. Also, I followed The University of St. Thomas' Institutional Review Board guidelines using pseudonyms and confidentiality agreements with care.

A second limitation to this study is the fact that every participant involved is a woman. Since there were no volunteers that were men, the experiences of the participants in this study are inherently only representative of female perspectives.

Restatement of Findings.

The research questions posed to participants organize the findings. Due to the grounded theory methods I used in this research, two more themes emerged within the data. In Figure 3 below, I organized data in a manner that explains the findings:

Figure 3: Benefits of Blogs and Support Networks for Prospective Adoptive Parents



Blogging support benefits vs. other support networks.

I have organized the chart above in two sections, “Blogging Support Benefits” and “Other Support Networks” due to the dialectic nature of this study, which included both bloggers and non-bloggers. Below, I will describe the main tenets of my findings through the information on the chart above, and briefly present their relationship to the study while including theories that pertain to each subheading.

Storytelling.

The first set of data describes how blogging creates a format for prospective adoptive parents to tell their adoption stories. Initially, storytelling was the main reason why many prospective adoptive parents chose to begin their blogs. Data gathered describes how many parents are looking for venues to explain their story so that their family and friends would have a place to look and discover updates on their adoption process.

Participants also notice that blogging creates an emotional connection between people because of the passing of information. By reading the adoption stories on their blogs, families of prospective adoptive parents are able to understand the needs that the adoptive families have. The blog gave a different place to connect and find ways to help the families that are struggling through the process, which makes those families feel more cared for and supported.

The theories in this section deal with caring. Noddings (2003) explains through care theory that if people want to truly care about others, it is important to understand what is going on in their lives. Narrative paradigm is also an important theoretical underpinning for adoption blogging. For example, Fisher (1984) describes the first presupposition in the narrative paradigm theory as how humans are essentially storytellers, and that they live their lives through their own

personal story. With the blog as a medium, prospective adoptive families seek out care and support from family and friends through the use of storytelling.

Seeking information.

The second finding was that prospective adoptive parents used blogs as a main source of information. Data show that prospective adoptive parents sought information about the adoption process online and felt that some of the most useful information was on other families' blogs.

Information that prospective adoptive parents gained was a form of informational support as described in the social support theory (Wills, 1991). Informational support is the advice, guidance, suggestions, or useful information that is given to someone in need of comforting news. Prospective adoptive parents reported that they found comfort because of the access of information that blogs provide. Families felt that although other sources of information were helpful, the blogs that explained experiences in detail were the most significant.

Companionship support, another tenet of social support theory, explains how people desire a sense of social belonging, or a feeling that they have common interests with others (Wills, 1990). Through information seeking, prospective adoptive families felt connected with other families who had gone through or were going through a similar process as their own. Through reading other peoples' stories, they found a sense of social belonging and realized that they were not alone while going through the process of adoption.

Processing emotions.

A third finding describing blogging support benefits was how prospective adoptive parents used blogs as a place to write down their thoughts and feelings concerning the process of adoption. Participants in the study described the processing of emotions on their blogs as a main reason they continued writing. Prospective adoptive parents expressed in the data that writing on

the blog was a way to force themselves to make sense of their story. By explaining their adoption process in detail, parents were able to organize their thoughts and emotions while telling their story on their blog.

This finding explained through Fisher's (1984) narrative paradigm suggests that people are narrative beings and that they are trying to make sense of their life through story. People want their life story be coherent and understandable to themselves and others. By using the blog as a medium the participants were able to become what Fisher describes as "narrative being[s]", or individuals who could describe their history, culture, and character in a coherent story about their lives.

Community seeking and discovery.

One of the largest and most important pieces of this research revolves around the idea that blogging is a place for prospective parents to seek a community of other adoptive parents for support. Within the data various aspects of relating to and finding a community emerged. First, blogging adoptive parents as well as readers of blogs felt that through the use of blogging they experienced empathy and a place to share experiences. Participants felt strongly that due to the difficult nature of the adoption process people who had not been through the process had limited understanding of the stresses it puts on adoptive parents. Participants focused on the feeling of not being alone as an important aspect of blogging since through blogs they could read other stories online that were similar to their own. Sharing experiences created a strong bond between families because they looked at each other's stories with an empathetic eye. Through adoption blogs, families found ways to connect with each other that were unlike connections made with their family who may not have shared the same adoption experience.

Creating community from online to real life.

Although reading others' blogs and sharing experiences began a connection between families, many times the bond would go beyond a simple interchange into a more conversational mode. Blogs are created to be able to easily comment on the writer's posts, and therefore readers are encouraged to create a two-way conversation. Through comments, participants began conversations with their readers, which sometimes led to newfound relationships between families. With the help of blogs, several participants became good friends with another adoptive family. Networking through blogs, data suggests, is an important aspect to blogging and the formation of a community.

Data also suggests some of the blogging adoptive parents received financial support after explaining their adoption story on a blog. During the interviews, numerous adoptive parents discussed how both complete strangers and friends read adoption blogs and then decided to help through financial means those who were trying to adopt a child. This form of support eased the stresses of the financial burden that adoption creates and then provided families with a feeling of being cared for.

Thus, it is apparent that blogging creates a strong companionship bond when a community is formed through it. Companionship, in the social support theory (Wills, 1991) helps people feel as if they have a sense of social belonging. Families find each other through the interest in adoption, and create a strong bond through the medium of blogging. Emotional support, or the offering of emotions such as empathy, concern, encouragement and caring (Wills, 1991) is found through the connections that are made between bloggers and other adoptive parents. The empathy that is portrayed and expressed between people who may be experiencing a similar part of the adoption process is an important aspect of having the feeling of being supported. Finally, tangible support is the provision of financial assistance, material goods

or services (House, 1981). This type of support is provided through the financial gifts people give to prospective adoptive parents after reading through their adoption blog. These three forms of support are key to completing a successful adoption, and with the help of the blog, prospective adoptive parents are given the social support they need.

Giving information to future families.

My data revealed that prospective adoptive parent bloggers realized they were pioneers in blogging, and therefore they used their leadership skills to pave the way for future adoptive families. Participants stated that one of the main reasons they kept their blog was so that future adoptive parents would have a resource to turn to when they had questions about the adoption process. They believed that the information given through the blog could be of use to other adoptive families sometime in the future, and they wanted to lead them in an educated direction with the help of the blog.

Bloggers also felt that their blogs were a kind way of educating the world and future adoptive families about the plight of the world's orphans. Participants described portions of their blogs as a vessel for social change. In a servant leadership oriented manner, bloggers relayed facts and figures concerning the orphan crisis and at the same time told their story of finding their adoptive child.

As my data has shown, these bloggers evidenced many of the aspects of servant leadership. Greenleaf (1991) states that servant leaders express empathy for others, which is what blogging adoptive parents do when explaining, in detail, the information that will be useful for future adoptive parents. Greenleaf also explains how foresight is a key trait of servant leaders, a trait adoptive parents portray when writing for families who have not even begun to think that adoption is a part of their family plan. Greenleaf also describes servant leaders as those

who express an awareness of the world around them, which the prospective adoptive parents do when writing on their blogs about the issues that orphans of the world face.

Needed awareness.

Surrounding the entire issue of blogging during the adoption process was a recognition that adoptive parent bloggers needed to be aware of the potential conflict between their online life and their “real” life. All participants that spent time online felt as though it was a very useful tool, but it was a tool that could be overused and misused. Participants felt that it was important to bring to light issues they encountered while using blogs as well as other social media sites when researching and processing their adoption process. Families felt as though they could easily get caught up in the online world and spend an infinite amount of time sitting on the computer. They felt that more often than not they would lose track of time and not pay attention to the life they were living at the moment. All participants felt it was important to be aware of this potential problem.

Another issue that prospective adoptive parents discovered was that blogs can create a one-way conversation. Blogs are not forums for discussion. Although they can be used that way within the comments section, typically blogs are a place for bloggers to express their thoughts and/or feelings. Many participants saw this one-way conversation aspect as a drawback and felt that it created a competitive atmosphere instead of a feeling of cohesion and community. Participants also noted the unwanted emotions that sometimes came along with reading blogs. For example, when other people reported that they had been matched with a child, families sometimes felt left out, or uncared for if they were still waiting to be matched. At times, reading others blogs created stress, something participants felt as though others should take into account when beginning the blogging process.

Finally, participants discovered that blogging might not always be truthful. They told stories of bloggers who painted a false picture of what an experience was truly like. Participants wanted future generations to be aware of these lies, and to be cautious when reading blogs. These negative aspects of blogging in turn do the opposite of what the social support theories' tenants describe. Informational support is sometimes inaccurate, emotional and companionship support is then non-existent when the adoptive families don't feel loved and cared for. Although these negative aspects in blogging are difficult to overcome, data suggested that if people are aware of the issues, they could be realized and therefore managed.

Other support networks.

While conducting this research I felt like it was important to understand what, outside of blogging, prospective adoptive parents used as a support network. The data that uncovered this aspect of the research came mainly from prospective adoptive parents who did not blog. The main tenant uncovered while talking to these participants was that the prospective adoptive parents' friends and family were the most important piece of support. Participants cited that siblings, parents, and close friends were key to seeing them through the entire process of adoption.

Another support community that prospective adoptive parents noted was the connection with other prospective adoptive parents. Many participants had close family or relatives that had gone through the process of adoption in the past, or became connected with other adoptive parents through people that they knew. This connection was an important aspect of their support community since, like the bloggers, the adoptive families were looking for others who understood the process of adoption from shared experiences.

A significant portion of this section connects with the social support theory and its

importance of emotional support (Wills, 1991). Family, friends and fellow adoptive parents provide empathy, concern, encouragement and caring by being a main part of the prospective adoptive parents' lives. Without the emotional support that is given from these essential people, the process of adoption would be much more difficult to finish.

Conclusion.

This study has led to the understanding that aspects of support not related to online blogging -friends, family and other adoptive parents - are also important to blogging adoptive parents. The difference between these two areas of research, online blogging support versus other support, is the depth of support that is created through blogging versus non-blogging. Non-blogging adoptive parents have a base of support. They note that their family and friends as well as connections they have with other adoptive parents successfully leads them through the adoption process. Bloggers, on the other hand, have a similar support system of family and friends, but they have the extra-added support of the online community.

When collecting data, I became aware that bloggers appreciated the support given from their loved ones, but realized, because they were a part of the online blogging community, that the support from close family and friends was not as sufficient as the online support community. Blogging gave them a much deeper feeling of support because they had access to adopting families who are scattered around the globe. Although non-bloggers felt as if they have the support they needed through the adoption process, bloggers realized that through the online community, the support they received was exponentially larger.

Finally, I discovered through my research that blogging was an easy way to seek information, a useful place to share adoption stories, a place to process emotions, a place to give information to others, and most importantly a place to seek community and create connections,

first online and then sometimes in person. While all of these benefits seem to outweigh the potential negative issues that might arise, the participants cautioned that blogging can waste time, create competition, and increase stress. In addition, my data showed that for non-blogging parents, other support networks are key and helped them feel supported throughout the process of adoption.

Recommendations

The suggested recommendations below derive from the data and focus mainly on the benefits of blogging during the adoption process. Suggestions concerning research, support groups, caution while online and being circumspect of expectations are given after analyzing the data. Following those suggestions are ideas for possible future research that revolve around the main tenets of this study.

Research information about adoption.

One recommendation that became apparent during the interview process was the need for prospective adoptive parents to do extensive research by reading blogs, social media sites, and other adoption resources before and during the adoption process. This research ties in with social support theory's tenant informational support- or support that is given through the passing of information. Perhaps the best example of the importance of informational support and the value of blogging came from Ann when she emphasized this need by stating:

Read as much as you can about real life experiences, whether that be talking to people or reading adoption magazines, or hearing stories from families. There are other ways to get research than social media, but the Internet social media is the easiest. There's the blogs and the adoption forums, just make sure to get the real life experiences. When doing this though, keep in mind that each of those people who is posting or writing has their own

biases. You need to filter. That's why you need to read as many different sources as you can, so that you can get the overall picture rather than just listening to one person and their biases and then be influenced by what they think.

Take a break from blogging and online research.

My second recommendation of taking breaks from online research comes because, during the interviews, at least three adoptive parents noted that it is important to limit the time online. Many families explained how they would often become engrossed in reading or writing blogs, looking at adoption forums, or researching whatever they were using during the adoption process, only to realize that they needed to attend to the life they were living at the moment. For example, when asked for advice for future adoptive parents, Emma said simply, "Take a break from the online stuff sometimes. It can be hard, but it is important to do it to keep yourself sane."

Find support groups.

Fulfilling the need for support groups that include other adoptive parents became my third recommendation because it was found to be one of the most important types of assistance blogging provided to the participants. Adoptive parents explained that this could be online through blogging, with other social media forums, or in person, but the need to have support from other people who have been or are going through the process of adoption is essential. For example, Charlotte, the one parent who felt like she didn't have a community such as this explains why she felt this was so important:

Finding a support group of other adoptive parents and learning about other people's journeys is so important. You have to know that you are not alone, as well as what you're up against because adoption is a hard process. Don't go into it thinking that it's going to be dreamy and easy because it's not. Adoption is beautiful. And it's lovely. And it's

wonderful. But there's a lot of sadness involved. There's a lot of pain that comes to the table on all fronts. And it's hard and it can be an intensely emotionally draining process, and doing it alone without the support of others makes it even harder.

Don't have expectations.

This fourth recommendation of limiting expectations for adoptive parents came about when four different participants specifically addressed the "mind set" that people should have when beginning the adoption process. They expressed that when going into the adoption process, it was essential to have very few expectations on how the process was going to unfold. This is the reason why prospective adoptive parents urged people considering adoption to do their research, as the first recommendation suggests. If parents read blogs and other people's stories, they will then have a better understanding of the varying factors that go into the adoption process. With that understood, they may in the end feel more prepared for the reality of adoption. For example, Elizabeth very passionately explained her advice to future adoptive parents:

Let go. Just let go. There's the tendency to want to control and you just can't have that in adoption. You just have to surrender to the fact that you have no control in the process in the end, and that is really hard and was very, very tough for me. At the beginning of our adoption process I used to worry and get so stressed about so many different things- I would drive myself nuts just thinking about them all. Finally, through processing my thoughts on my blog and in my heart, as well as reading others' blogs, I've just realized that I need to let go and trust that however this ends up, whatever way this goes is the way it's supposed to be.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research on other social media.

Every participant except for the one who did not use online sources noted that other social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, were currently the most active forums for finding informational support. Blogging was an important medium for many prospective adoptive parents, but when it comes to getting accurate information from parents who have traveled to a foreign country to pick up their newly adopted child, Facebook and Twitter were currently the best places to look. Further research could be done to understand the specific uses of both Facebook and Twitter including their effects on prospective adoptive parents and the process of adopting a child. This could be a comparison study looking at the various social media forums to better understand the attributes of the technology that benefits prospective adoptive parents. Social media is ever evolving, and an evaluation of what aspects of online tools such as Facebook and Twitter provide aid to prospective adoptive parents would be valuable.

Further research on women bloggers.

The population I interviewed for this project consisted of women alone for the simple reason that they alone volunteered for this study. While spending time online searching adoption blogs, I noticed that women wrote a large majority of adoption blogs as opposed to a very small percentage men who blogged for the same reason. It appears that there would be scientific value to a study that focused on why the majority of adoption bloggers are mothers, and what it is about women that give them the desire to write blogs about adoption and parenting.

Longitudinal study.

A longitudinal study on how social media tools could be a valuable medium during adoption process would provide a more controlled and detailed study of the merits of the new social technologies for adoptive parents. This could be done in various ways. First, a longitudinal study could examine a group of prospective adoptive parents and their use of blogs and/or other social media sites for a more significant period of time during and after the adoption. This research could evaluate how many families kept blogs or used other sites specifically to benefit their adoption and the various issues that come along with it after the adoption was completed.

A different approach to a longitudinal study could evaluate a larger group of prospective adoptive parents and how often they use social media during their adoption process. This study would vary in the sense that it would be ongoing and therefore, once an adoption was completed, another prospective adoptive family who was at the very beginning stages of an adoption would fill that spot. This would bring to light any changes in how prospective adoptive parents are using social media and possibly find a common characteristic that is most beneficial to all prospective adoptive parents.

Conclusion

My research examined the benefits that blogging offered for prospective adoptive parents. Analysis of evidence collected through interviews with prospective adoptive parents produced five findings pertaining to how blogging affects the process of adopting a child. This research confirmed that writing and/or reading blogs does indeed offer many benefits to prospective adoptive parents, such as the community it forms, the assistance that it gives others in the beginning stages of adoption, and the emotional outlet it provides. I also discovered that while the participants emphasized the importance of using blogs diligently as a means of seeking

support they cautioned future adoptive parents about spending too much time reading or writing on blogs. It is also important for adoptive parents in particular to consider everything on the Internet with careful eyes and not to believe all that is written.

Prospective adoptive parents who participated in this research provided many insights into the benefits and risks of blogging during the adoption process. In the end, their main message was abundantly clear: Having a community of people to share information with and gather emotional support from made the adoption process much easier. Finding that community of people, either online or in person, who are working together towards a similar goal helped adopting parents face the joys and difficulties of the adoption journey with a great feeling of support.

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Appendix A: Participant Consent Form**CONSENT FORM
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS**

Blogging as a Medium of Social Support During the Adoption Process:

A Phenomenological Study of Adopting Parent-Bloggers.

IRB# [384769-1]

I am conducting a study about how blogging creates a community for prospective adoptive parents. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you have been a prospective adoptive parent and have either blogged during your process of adoption, or did not blog. I am going to be interviewing 8 adoptive parents. 4 people who have blogged about the adoption process and 4 people who did not use blogging as a tool. I am asking all participants to hold 2 interviews with me roughly 1-2 months apart. Each interview will not last more than an hour to an hour and a half in a place of your choosing. If we are not able to meet face to face then I would prefer to interview via Skype, but would also be willing to have a phone conversation. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Erin Carson and her professor Fr. Jean-Pierre Bongila, EdD, as part of Erin's doctoral research in the department of Educational Leadership and Administration at the University of Saint Thomas.

Background Information:

The purpose of this research is to understand if and how blogging creates a community of support for prospective adoptive parents, and/or how prospective adoptive parents find community and support during their adoption process. Interviews will be conducted with both parents who did blog about and during their adoption process, as well as with parents who didn't blog about and during their adoption process. The data from this project will be used to help Erin complete a dissertation for a Doctoral degree in Educational Administration and Leadership at the University of Saint Thomas.

Completion of this research will create greater understanding of how social media invites interactions and connections between people that may not happen otherwise. It will investigate what type of support prospective adoptive parents turn to during their adoption process, and how, if at all, blogging benefits their process.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things; you will participate in at least two interviews, which is expected to last between an hour and an hour and a half. These interviews will be audio recorded, and may also be videotaped if you agree to participate in this manner. If for some reason we need to continue the interview past this time you and I will agree to another time and place to continue. All interviews will take place in a location of your choosing that offers the privacy needed for audio and videotaping. If distance is a problem, the interviews will be conducted via Skype or telephone. Once the interview is complete a printed transcript will be created and sent to you. You will be asked to read the interview and if you think of anything else that relates to the research, please take note and we will talk about it more extensively in the next interview or through other forms of communication within two weeks after the transcript is sent. This extra information will help the researcher understand your perspective more fully. There is a possibility that more than two interviews are needed, which will be scheduled depending on your time and availability. All recordings, transcripts, and videos will be kept with the researcher. Electronic files or backups that were created to make the printed transcripts will be destroyed once the final transcript is complete.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There may be a risk in this study that you could share sensitive information about yourself or others. There are no benefits.

Compensation:

You will not receive payment for participation in this study. A copy of the completed study will be given to you when the research is finished if you would like.

Confidentiality:

While data is being collected access to the information will be limited to the researcher, her advisor, Fr. Jean-Pierre Bongila, the editor and research assistant, Kenneth Ronald Laughery Ph.D and a transcriptionist who will be completing the printed transcripts. The information in your transcript and/or videotape may be reported in published materials or in multimedia presentations according to your wishes. All recordings, transcripts, and videos will be kept with the researcher. Electronic files or backups that were created to make the printed transcripts will be destroyed once the final transcript is complete.

Please initial your consent to:

_____ The Interview
_____ Interview being audio recorded
_____ Interview being video recorded

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you

are free to withdraw at any time up to and until your final interview transcript is complete. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will not be used as long as you make your wishes known by the time the final interview transcript is complete. You are also free to skip any questions that I may ask during this study.

Contacts and Questions

My name is Erin Carson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 612-207-7825. You may also contact my advisor, Fr. Jean-Pierre Bongila at 651-962-4799. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I consent to be audio and/or videotaped for the interview.

Signature of Study Participant

Date

Print Name of Study Participant

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix B: Confidentiality Agreement for Transcription Services**Confidentiality Agreement for Transcription Services****CONFIDENTIALITY**
AGREEMENT

This Confidentiality Agreement (the “Agreement”), made effective this ____ day of _____, by and between _____, a provider of transcription services (“Transcriber”) and Erin Carson, a doctoral candidate (“Carson”).

As part of his dissertation, Carson desires to hire Transcriber to transcribe audio data files of interviews conducted under an agreement of confidentiality into written files (audio and written files “Files”). Transcriber agrees to maintain the Files in confidence and not to disclose, distribute or disseminate the Files to anyone, except Carson. Transcriber shall exercise at least a reasonable degree of care to prevent unauthorized disclosures of the Files. Disclosure of Files by Transcriber to third parties shall constitute a breach of this Agreement.

Upon the request of Carson, Transcriber agrees immediately to return or destroy all written, machine readable or otherwise tangible Files received or created.

Transcriber
Printed Name:
Signature: _____
Address:

Erin E. L. Carson
Signature: _____
212 6th Street East
Northfield, MN 55057
612-207-7825

Appendix C: Institutional Review Board Approval

Institutional Review Board



UNIVERSITY of ST. THOMAS

Institutional Review Board - University of St. Thomas
2115 Summit Ave. - Mail #ACU319
St. Paul, MN 55105-1078
Phone: 651-962-5341 - Email: irb@stthomas.edu

DATE: January 4, 2013

TO: Erin Carson

FROM: University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [384769-1] Blog Therapy; How a social media has created and supported a community for prospective adoptive parents.

REFERENCE #:

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: December 5, 2012

EXPIRATION DATE:

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # [enter category, or delete line]

I thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board has **APPROVED** your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and assurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPI-BUs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of .

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Erin Roullis at 651-962-5341 or eroullis@stthomas.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Appendix D: Research Assistant Confidentiality Agreement

RESEARCH ASSISTANT CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.
Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

Project Name Blog Therapy: How a social media
has created and supported a
community for prospective
adoptive parents. **IRB Tracking Number** 354769-1

Agreement

I agree to assist with this study.

I agree that I will:

1. Keep all research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the primary investigator of this study.
2. Keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession. This includes:
 - using closed headphones when transcribing audio taped interviews;
 - keeping all transcript documents and digitized interviews in computer password-protected files;
 - closing any transcription programs and documents when temporarily away from the computer;
 - keeping any printed transcripts in a secure location such as a locked file cabinet, and
 - permanently deleting any e-mail communication containing the data.
3. Give all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the primary investigator when I have completed the research tasks.
4. Erase or destroy all research information in any form or format that is not returnable to the primary investigator (e.g., information stored on my computer hard drive) upon completion of the research tasks.

Statement of Consent

By checking the electronic signature box, I am stating that I understand what is being asked of me and I agree to the terms listed above.

Signature of Research Assistant:

Date:

I check to sign electronically.

Print Name of Research Assistant:

Kenneth Ronald Laughery Ph.D. January 10, 2013

Signature of Researcher:

Date:

I check to sign electronically.

Print Name of Researcher:

Erin Elizabeth Laughery Larsen January 1, 2013

*For electronic signatures refer to:

Appendix E: Blog Post

<http://eecarson.wordpress.com/2012/10/02/adoption-bloggers-and-non-bloggers-all-call/>

So many of you know that the topic for my dissertation research has to do with adoption and blogging. Currently, my dissertation is titled: “Blog Therapy; How a social media has created and supported a community for prospective adoptive parents.” There are many reasons why I wanted to research this topic. First, I think it’s interesting. Blogging is a relatively new phenomenon that has spread like wildfire. People with all sorts of interests (seriously, you think of it, you’ll find it) blog about whatever it is they are passionate about. For me, it began with pregnancy, and then went on to blog about adoption. Seemed logical since that was the path my life was taking me.

But, when I started this whole blog thing many years ago I had no idea that it would take me this far. I had NO idea that during the process of adoption I would start searching for other people like myself, who were going through the frustration and pain of adoption. But, as you can tell, I did. I found, through my own blog and searching through others blogs, a community of people who were looking for answers, looking for support, and looking for someone to connect to. Currently, I still read blogs written by those parents who were trying to adopt from Nepal and Rwanda like we were. I have followed along with their stories of hardship and joy and frustration and happiness. And, although I have never met many of them, I celebrate and sympathize with them whenever they share. I eagerly pore over their blogs to see what is currently going on in their lives, and their children’s lives, even though my adoption process (and possibly theirs) is over.

This blogging thing has made quite the impression on me.

So- I am looking for ‘subjects’. Adoptive, or prospective adoptive moms and dads who have both blogged about their experience, and NOT blogged about their experience. I am curious how people found a community of support while trudging through such a crazy process.

If you’re interested, please email me at: erinelcarson at yahoo dot com and let me know your info. I’m hoping to get 3 bloggers and 3 non bloggers to help me out. All you would have to do is say that you will sit down with me, let me buy you coffee or lunch, and let me record probably 2 interviews (more if needed) about your experience (promise that each interview won’t last more than an hour!) Since I’d really like to do it in person, I’d love Minnesota or Colorado participants, but I welcome others if interested. I am not teaching this year. I may just need to go somewhere cool to do an interview.

Thanks for considering it! I can’t wait to see what you all have to say!

Appendix F: Guiding Questions for Participants

To those who chose to blog:

1. Why did you begin blogging about your adoption experiences, instead of writing journals/diaries?
2. What aspects of blogging have helped you in your process?
3. How did blogging during the adoption process create a support community for you?
4. How has blogging about adoption helped you personally reflect?

To those who chose not to blog:

1. Explain the reasons why you chose not to blog while working on adopting your child.
2. Elaborate on what helped you emotionally through this adoption process, including any support you might have received from a community.
3. Were ever you to adopt again, would you choose to blog about your experience? Why or why not?

Appendix G: Table of Participants

Name	Age	Profession	Educational Level	Number of adopted kids	Number of biological kids	If blogger, how many years blogging
Charlotte	40	Stay at home mom and music educator	Bachelor's	2	0	0
Lena	31	Dietician	Master's	1	2	Was blogger for 5 years, took a break writing about adoption.
Ann	34	Stay at home mom and student	Master's	1	0	5
Ava	33	Stay at home mom	Bachelor's, currently enrolled in graduate school	1	0	Was a blogger for 6 years, currently non-blogger.
Emma	33	Writer	Bachelor's	1	2	2
Lucy	46	Stay at home mom, former designer	2 Bachelor's degrees	1	1	5
Elizabeth	27	Photographer	Bachelor's	0	0	1
Cora	32	Clinical social worker	Master's	1	0	0
Quinn	31	Operating room nurse	Bachelor's	0	0	0