



How is the Birth Father Relationship (or Lack Thereof) Related to Preoccupation with Adoption?

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Introduction and Literature Review

- In the field of adoption research, birth fathers (BF) are a significantly understudied population, and information is both limited and dated (Passmore & Chipuer, 2009).
- This current project seeks to understand how aspects related to the birth father relationship (or lack thereof) relate to the adoptee's preoccupation with their own adoption history (the degree of devotion of psychic and emotional energy to adoption as an aspect of identity, Kohler et al., 2002).
- Adoptee's perception of circumstances surrounding their conception/relinquishment and how the BF treated the birth mother (BM), as well as the birth father's reactions to pregnancy and relinquishment, are directly related to the adoptee's impressions/feelings of the BF (Passmore & Chipuer, 2009).
- When contact between adoptees and birth fathers exists, it tends to be experienced positively, although most adoptees do not have contact with their birth fathers (Mendenhall, Berge, Wrobel, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2004).
- Theoretical arguments suggest that possessing more information (including that obtained through contact) can reduce the adoptee's rumination on questions about their adoptions (Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2002). There is some evidence that suggests contact with the birth mother reduces adoption preoccupation, but there is less information regarding the birth father (Passmore & Feeney, 2009).

Methods

- Participants selected from larger longitudinal study of openness in adoption (MTARP; Grotevant, McRoy, Wrobel, & Ayers-Lopez, 2013).
- All adoptees adopted through private domestic adoption prior to their first birthday, had no special needs, and were in domestic, in-racial placements.
- 169 young adult adoptees participated at Wave 3 (2005-2008).
- (n = 87 males, 82 females; ages 20.77 – 30.34; M = 24.95 years).
- Participants were interviewed and given questionnaires through a secure internet chatroom. Participants were compensated for their time.

- Methods**
- Interview transcripts were quantitatively coded using Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) method (Hill et al., 2005)
 - Qualitative coding was used to extract statements from an adoptee about their birth father (BF) from a pre-existing interview (Grotevant, McRoy, Wrobel, & Ayers-Lopez, 2013). BF statements were organized into domains. Domains were: where information comes from, conception, responsibility of relationship formation/maintaining, situation of birth, protecting feelings of birth mother, information withholding, BF's knowledge of child, abandonment of birth mother, possibility of relationship with adoptee, bf's life outside the adoptee, positive and/or negative feelings about birth father, reason for placement, adoptee's interest/lack of interest in incorporating bf into life, and miscellaneous.
 - Interview transcripts were also coded to identify variables including existing relationship with birth father, information adoptee has about birth father (first name, physical appearance, life history, photographs), any existing contact with birth father and if so the type of contact (gifts, pictures, e-mails, etc), frequency of contact, and changes in contact over time.
 - In addition to coding, quantitative data was collected from demographic questionnaires, the Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire, and previously-coded satisfaction ratings which were administered at the time of the interview.

- Outcome Measures**
- How aspects related to the birth father relationship (or lack thereof) relate to the adoptee's preoccupation with their own adoption history, i.e. the degree of devotion of psychic and emotional energy to adoption as an aspect of identity (Kohler et al., 2002).
 - The preoccupation subscale (PRE) of the Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire (ADQ; Benson, Sharma & Roehlkepartain, 1994) was used to assess the adoptee's preoccupation with their own adoptive history ($\alpha = .84, 17$ items).

Results

- Demographic Information**
- Wave III data had been collected from the interview transcripts of 169 emerging adult adoptees aged 20 years old to 30 years old (M=24.95). The sample was composed of 85 (51.5%) males and 82 (48.5%) females.

- Significant Correlations:**
- The correlation between gender and total preoccupation score was found to be significant ($r=.244$) at the $p<.01$ level.
 - The correlation between the satisfaction rating of relationship with birth father and total preoccupation score was found to be significant ($r=-.508$) at the $p<.01$ level.

- Other Analyses:**
- There was a significant relationship between satisfaction with openness in the birth father relationship and preoccupation, where the more satisfied with the arrangement, the less preoccupied with adoption ($r=-.508, p<.000$).
 - Of 169 Emerging Adult adoptees, 69 have identifying information and 34 have a relationship with their birth fathers.
 - 7 of the 69 adoptees with identifying information, have reached out to their birth fathers who rejected contact.
 - Males were more likely to be satisfied with contact, ($M= 2.74$), though fewer have contact/opened relationships ($n=14$) than females, ($M= 2.28$ satisfaction score, $n=20$ with contact).
 - Males were also more likely to be "very satisfied" with less contact ($n=19$) than females ($n=6$). Males, in every arrangement, were less likely to seek a relationship with their birth father.
 - Older adoptees were more likely to be satisfied ($M= 2.62$ satisfaction score), and have no contact ($n= 0$ with contact for males, $n= 4$ with contact for females) compared to younger adoptees, ($M= 2.51$ satisfaction score, $n= 5$ for males, $n= 7$ for females).
 - There were a greater number of adoptees who did not have contact with birth father than those with contact. These adoptees usually preferred to keep it this way ($n= 95$). Negative feelings were more likely when there is no contact.

ANOVA Results for Emerging Adults' Satisfaction with Contact with Birthfathers

Effect	df	F	p value
Gender	1, 161	6.388	.012*
Contact Status	1, 161	0.087	.768
Age	2, 160	0.082	.921

*significant at the $p<.05$ level

- Regressions:**
- Significant relationship between satisfaction and preoccupation score: Beta=-4.97, sig $p<.000$ ***; R square = 26%, as satisfaction increases, preoccupation decreases.
 - Significant relationship between preoccupation and wanting a change in contact: Beta=4.771, sig $p<.000$ ***; R square = 16%; wanting increased contact is associated with increased preoccupation scores
 - Satisfaction at 10th grade has no relationship to current satisfaction with relationship. $p=.646$

Results Continued

Satisfaction with Contact with Birth Fathers

	Mean Satisfaction	SD	N
Gender – Male	2.74	1.060	85
Gender – Female	2.28	1.258	78
Entire Sample	2.52	1.178	163
Age – Low	2.51	1.088	57
Age – Medium	2.51	1.297	85
Age – High	2.62	.921	21
Contact – Yes	2.58	1.247	33
Contact – No	2.51	1.136	130

Frequencies: Contact Status by Gender, Age & Satisfaction

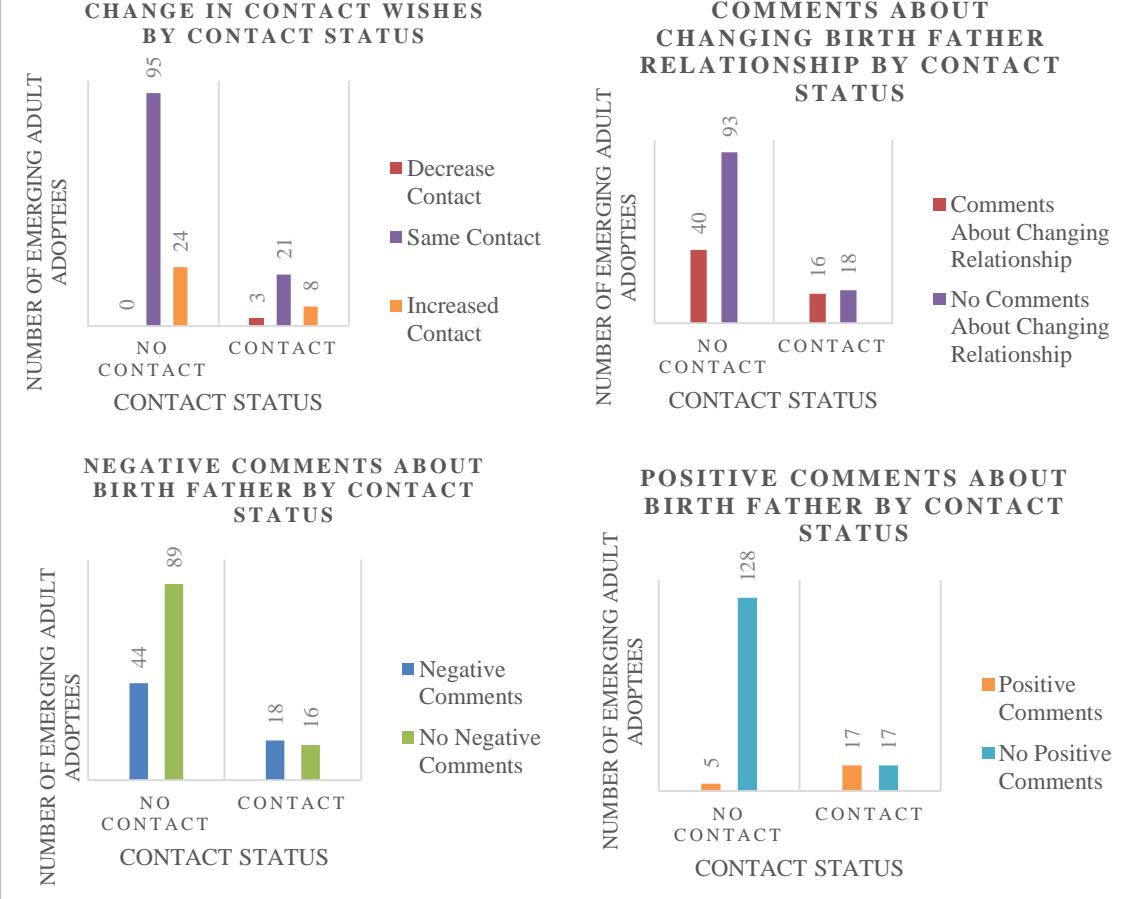
	Male		Female	
	No Contact	Contact	No Contact	Contact
Age – Low	25	5	21	7
Age – Medium	36	9	33	9
Age – High	11	0	7	4
Age – Total	72	14	61	20
Satisfaction – Very Dissatisfied	1	0	4	3
Satisfaction – Dissatisfied	11	0	13	4
Satisfaction – Neutral	18	4	11	5
Satisfaction – Satisfied	22	4	22	1
Satisfaction – Very Satisfied	19	6	9	6
Satisfaction Total	71	14	59	19

Notes for both tables: Notes: Satisfaction code: 0 = very dissatisfied; 1 = dissatisfied; 2 = neutral; 3 = satisfied; 4 = very satisfied. Age: low = 20.77-23.96; medium = 23.96-27.149; high = 27.149-30.34

TABLE: QUALITATIVE THEMES REGARDING BIRTH FATHER IN SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW DATA

Theme	Description	n	Representative Quote
Where Birth Father Information Comes From	Statements related to the keepers of information about the birth father – birth mother? Adoption agency? Birth father himself?	115	"I got the information from my birth mother directly." (204)
How Adoptee Was Conceived	Statements provided by the adoptee reflecting the (usually unplanned) nature of their conception, often related to reasons for being placed for adoption	21	"I don't think my birth father ever will [search for me] because from the little I know, I think it was a one-night-stand" (201)
Birth Father's Responsibility to Initiate a Relationship	Statements concerning waiting for the birth father to take initiative and get in contact with the adoptee, or to return contact from the adoptee	35	"...if [he] would try to contact me I would give time for the opportunity...more of a waiting game I guess." (3619)
Adoptee Protecting Birth Mother's Feelings	Statements related to changing behavior in order to protect the birth mother's feelings – avoiding asking about birth father, searching privately, etc.	6	"I have one picture of him, but I don't like to press [my birth mother] about him." (1502)
Information Being Withheld from Adoptee	Statements concerning information being kept (usually by birth mother or adoptive parents) about the birth father	15	[Adoptive parents] "never told me they had these letters and pictures that I found, and they didn't tell me about the adoption agency that I was adopted from so I could find any record of anything so that I could find my birthparents." (1002)
Birth Father Never Knew About Adoptee	Statements indicating the birth father was never made aware of the adoptee's birth	17	"my birth mom didn't tell him she was pregnant with me." (415)
Birth Father Abandoned or Left Birth Mother	Statements related to the birth father leaving the birth mother – usually before the adoptee's birth	31	"ran off when he found out my birth mom was pregnant and didn't show for the court stuff before the adoption." (603)
Relationship with Birth Father Impossible	Statements suggesting a relationship with the birth father is impossible – he doesn't know about the adoptee, or the adoptee has no information about birth father; or someone keeps the adoptee from the birth father intentionally	25	"I only know small details about my birth mother; she didn't know who my birth father was." (1415)
Birth Father Has Another Life	Statements describing the birth father's current life – usually concerning not wanting to intrude, or the birth father has moved on from the adoption	18	"I guess he's got a whole new family and tried to keep things...or like really don't want that to come out of the closet and ruin his new family or something." (428)
Positive Feelings About Birth Father	Statements reflecting positive feelings/attributes about birth father/birth father relationship	22	"[He] is the dad I call late at night, crying or laughing about anything and everything." (203)
Negative Feelings About Birth Father	Statements reflecting negative feelings/attributes about the birth father/birth father relationship	62	"He's a loser and very selfish, the person who I build my life around not being." (1201)
Reasons for Placement	Statements reflecting the Birth father's involvement in the adoption plan/choice for adoption	55	"From what I've been told, the reason why she put me up for adoption is I guess my birth dad was married at the time to someone else." (409)
Adoptee is Satisfied with Life/Doesn't Want a Change	Statements reflecting the adoptee's feeling that they are satisfied with arrangements as they are, don't feel the need to contact birth father	57	"I guess I'm usually asked if I would like to contact or find out info about them. I guess more no than yes, cause I'd sure rather go fishing...or just live really." (207)
Miscellaneous	Statements that could not be categorized in the above themes	64	"My birth mother told me that her and my birth father wanted to get me back after the adoption was finalized but my birth mother thought we can't do this to her now. And they no longer had any legal grounds to stand on." (420)

Results Continued



Discussion

- Gender Differences**
- Gender is a significant factor in satisfaction with openness arrangements with the birth father.
- This could be because the male-male relationship has different archetypes to draw from other than father-son. The male adoptee may be able to perceive the birth father more like a friend/buddy, and may put less pressure on the "fatherly" aspects of the relationship. However, the relationship between the female adoptee and her birth father may fit more solidly in the father-daughter archetype and be more difficult to perceive as another arrangement.
 - This may be due to increased relational competence among women that is not matched by their birth fathers, or that increased relational and/or emotional intelligence allows adopted women to better notice and reflect on gaps and faults in the birth father relationship.
- It might also be that men are socialized to be less emotive/expressive and so hide some feelings from interviewers. Along these lines, interviews with men tended to be less verbose than interviews with women.

- Satisfaction**
- It seemed the most common qualitative themes showed less positive thoughts about the birth fathers (e.g. not wanting things to change, negative feelings, the reason for placement, and abandoning birth mother). This is perhaps reflective of no relationships and low quality relationships.

- Preoccupation**
- Those who were interested in increasing contact with the birth father were also more likely to experience higher preoccupation with adoption.

- Women were more preoccupied with adoption, and those who were the most preoccupied had lower satisfaction with the openness arrangements with the birth father. Preoccupation and satisfaction with openness arrangements with the birth father may tap into aspects of gender socialization more for the female adoptee. Women are socialized to do the emotional labor (DeVault, 1991) of maintaining family relationships - as such, the birth father may feel like a missing piece, or an area of life where the female adoptee is concentrating more of her mental space.

- Family Construction and Individual Considerations**
- Birth mother's feelings and opinions of the birth fathers may have an influence on adoptees' perception of the birth father. Additionally, stereotypes of the birth father may have an impact on adoptees who do not have contact with their birth fathers - it may be easier to paint a person as good or bad without having the humanizing experience of meeting a real person.

- Many adoptees in our sample have very happy adoptive family lives. Many expressed contentment with the families that raised them and don't feel any strong pressure to change that arrangement. E.g. "But over time, I just kind of got to where...I mean, I'm happy with what I've got. I'm happy with my mom and my dad that I have. And there's no replacing those 2 people that have raised me. And I just don't have really, any interest in anything else. I'm so happy with what I've got that it just kind of doesn't matter to me any more." (1305)
- Relatedly, many adoptees may have put off search to deal with other normative life experiences. E.g. "I've been meaning to do this for a while now, life is hectic. I would like to do this by the beginning of next year." (505)
 - This is also reflected in the number of adoptees, regardless of contact arrangements, who said they hoped the arrangement would stay as it was, and had no wish for increased contact.

- Special needs in this sample is extremely low. And many adoptees were adopted into religious families/through Christian adoption agencies. Overall, this is a very low-risk sample. Selection criteria and familial values of this group of adoptive families may be operating as protective factors with respect to relationship satisfaction and preoccupation with adoption.

- Older adoptees may have achieved resolution in identity and may be less interested in big changes in family structure (like initiating contact with a birth father).

- Many adoptees who mentioned the birth father as a factor in the decision to be placed for adoption also expressed negative comments about the birth father. E.g. "Well, my birth mother was 15 when she got pregnant. My birth father offered to pay his half of the cost of an abortion. She told him that she planned on going through with the pregnancy. And he kind of split and bailed on her, basically. And you know, being 16, she just made the choice to give me up for adoption just in that." (403)

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