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**HOW CHILDREN DESCRIBE NEGATIVE ADOPTION
EXPERIENCES**

by

McKenzie Paskett

**Capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for graduation with**

UNIVERSITY HONORS

with a major in

**Psychology
in the Department of Psychology**

Approved:

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, UT

Fall 2018



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How children describe negative adoption experiences

McKenzie Paskett

Utah State University

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Abstract

Adoption faces stigmas from society which affects peoples' perceptions of adoptees, their birth parents, and adoptive parents; one of the most prominent being that adoption is the "second best" route to getting children (Baxter, Norwood, Asbury, & Scharp, 2014). Adoption success is mixed with some adapting well, while others have negative experiences. Studying themes about how and why negative adoption experiences happen could be beneficial to preventing them in the future. There is a unique perspective between parents and children and so the central research question for this study is: how do children describe their negative adoption experiences? Facebook, adoption comments were analyzed from January 2017-November 2018 on an adoption dedicated page. The comments were coded and analyzed for themes that reappeared that could indicate negative adoption experiences. The posts revealed themes including loss of family or identity, lies, rejection, and rights to birth records and knowledge. Overall, these themes illuminate negative adoption experiences and hold important implications for practitioners and counselors.

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How Children Describe Negative Adoption Experiences

Adoption is when a child is legally transferred to another home and receives new guardians. There are three main types of adoption. Foster care is a type of adoption that takes place typically when children are older because they have been removed from their homes by the state (Black, Moyer, & Goldberg, 2016). Private domestic adoption typically takes place when the child is typically an infant and is usually negotiated through an agency (Black et al., 2016). International adoption is also usually negotiated through an agency (Black et al., 2016). Since adoption is not the traditional way to form a family, those who are or participate in adoption in some way are often stereotyped or stigmatized.

Stereotypes are mental categories, typically created implicitly, that humans use to organize the world around them. While the stereotype technique in itself is necessary to not overwhelm an individual with information, it needs to be recognized that the stereotype is incomplete and must be flexible because this affects how a person behaves towards that stereotype. There are multiple stereotypes and stigmas related to adoption.

The most prominent stigma is that adoption is the “second best” route to getting children (Baxter, Norwood, Asbury, & Scharp, 2014). In fact, this stigma results in many infertile couples who want children to seek after technological answers rather than attempt adoption (Miall, 1996). 73% of women surveyed reported that they would rather first go through reproductive technologies without a donor than adopt (Miall, 1996). Children who are adopted are frequently not viewed as part of the family in the same way biological children are, which may result in an identity crisis known as Adopted Child Syndrome (Miall, 1996). This plays into two more stigmas: adoptive parents aren’t seen as real parents and the child itself is second-rate because of an unknown heritage (Miall, 1996). 33% of males and 31% of females believed that adopting a child is risk because of the unknown genetics; also 21% of males and 16% of females believed adoptees were more likely to be problem children for the same reason (Miall, 1996). When surveyed, 95% of males desired for the child to be raised by the birthmother rather than be put up for adoption versus 71% of women (Miall, 1996). Rather than being raised by the birthfather, 56% of women desired the child to be put up for adoption (Miall, 1996).

An additional problem is that knowledge and experience does not necessarily erase this bias. Adoption practitioners are often more likely that the community to think that adoption is inferior to biological parenting and give the adoptive parents contradicting messages concerning this (Wegar, 2000). In a previous study only 4 out of 27 interviewed adoption workers viewed adoption as equivalent or very similar to a biological family (Wegar, 2000). This was displayed through emphasizing that adoption is a life-process or that adoptive parents often don’t have “realistic” expectations (Wegar, 2000). It is often viewed to be a more successful adoption if the adoptee is “matched” to adoptive parents through similar physical and mental characteristics (Wegar, 2000). While this could be true, it also emphasizes society’s view on how biological children are best because they are trying to recreate that through matching characteristics (Wegar, 2000).

Despite adoption being a regular form of creating families in America, there are restricted categories that are well researched. Negative viewpoints of children who were adopted are under explored along with adoption viewpoints on social media. If we fill this gap, then we can have a better understanding of what results in negative adoption experiences and could potentially fix them for others. It will also get a clear understanding of people who post their experiences when presented to an audience but they are not going to face direct consequences for.

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I propose that studying themes about how and why negative adoption experiences happen could be beneficial to preventing them in the future. It is hard to solve a problem when the cause is unknown. There is a unique perspective between parents and children and so the central research question for this study is:

How do children describe their negative adoption experiences?

From here on previous research will be looked into in order to reveal the gaps left open in adoption research. Research from adoption forums and how social media has been used within adoptive families is included along with problems already known about adoption. Method, results and discussion of the study will then follow.

Review of Literature

There are few studies that look at adoption posts and the narrative themes that they hold. Baxter et al's study in 2014 looked at themes in 100 adoption posts for the meaning of adoption. They found four discourses that counters the general stereotypes about adoption: adoption as a valuable alternative to pregnancy, adoption as a worthwhile struggle guided by destiny, adoption as a smooth and predictable process, and adoption as communal kinning (Baxter et al., 2014). The researchers found that the primary purpose behind these discourses was to defend their decision to adopt and was often geared towards potential adoptive parents through explaining their backstories (Baxter et al., 2014). While these discourses challenged the idea of adoption being second rate, this stigma could influence why people view adoption negatively (Baxter et al., 2014).

Another reason that the proposed study is valuable is because the adoptee or their siblings are often under-researched. One study in 2012 studied all three members of the adoption triad by analyzing their posts for coherency (Baxter, Norwood, Asbury, Jannusch, & Scharp). The 2012 study looked at 298 randomly selected adoption stories for sequential organization, orientation, congruence of affect with content, causal explanation, and sense-making (Baxter et al.). While birth mothers were highest on the congruence of affect, they discovered that adoptive parents had the highest sequential organization, orientation, causal explanation coherence (Baxter et al., 2012). Sense-making had no significant data by any of the triad members (Baxter et al., 2012). While this study looked at coherency there has been no studies looking at themes of negative experiences as told by children. As previously mentioned above, there has been another study that has studied positive adoption themes as told by parents (Baxter et al., 2014). A third study looked at negative and positive views of adoption as told by adoptive foster parents (Suter, Baxter, Seurer, & Thomas, 2014). This study used 100 online public adoption narratives and divided them into two discourses: discourse of biological normativity (DBN) and discourse of constitutive kinning (DCK) (Suter et al., 2014). Both of those discourses tried to prove the legitimacy of how they formed their family with the first acknowledging the stereotype of genetic connections being better they focused on physical similarities, while the latter focused on how behavior and communication is more indicative of a family than genetics (Suter et al., 2014). It studies perceptions of adoption in society through looking at the interaction of the two points of view through negating, countering, and entertaining (Suter et al., 2014). The study focuses on how the meaning of family is described and how multiple views blend together rather than the meaning of family being placed in categories; how someone defines the family affects how they view others interpretation of families and their treatment towards them (Suter et al., 2014). Again, this study looks at adoptive parents rather than children, though the focus on what

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being a family means could provide some insight into how adoptees view their worth or place in the world.

Research regarding adoption in social media is also rather limited. Two studies have looked at how Facebook and social media helps birth families and adopted families make and stay in contact. One study done in 2016 analyzed ten adoptive families through interviewing and an online survey to look for themes regarding post-adoption contact experiences (Greenhow, Hackett, Jones & Meins). Traditionally when contact happened between the birth and adoptive parents it was face-to-face or through letters but now technology has opened the options up (Greenhow et al., 2016). Six of the ten families experienced “out of the blue” technological contact with the birth family, only two of which were initiated by the adoptee (Greenhow et al., 2016). Five of those six families had been in contact through letters prior to the technological contact (Greenhow et al., 2016). Meanwhile the other four families were already in contact with more traditional methods before the virtual contact was initiated; this allowed an easier transition into virtual relationships (Greenhow et al., 2016). Depending on the openness about the contact with all parties influences whether the contact experience is positive or negative (Greenhow et al., 2016). A virtual aspect of contact helped the relationship grow and feel more natural than face-to-face and letters provide in this day and age (Greenhow et al., 2016). It is suggested that traditional methods be implemented first and when those relationships are positive a virtual relationship can then be extended (Greenhow et al., 2016). This study shows that Facebook and social media can be a valuable tool in creating positive or negative adoption experiences.

A similar study looked at forty couples who were communicating with their child’s birth family through technology whether actively, passively, or had no contact (Black et al., 2016). Boundaries are becoming an issue as contact is made outside of the agreement terms when the adoption happened (Black et al., 2016). Interview questions centered around how the adoptive families were maintaining contact with the birth families and how those relationships were being affected and then were analyzed for themes (Black et al., 2016). The types of contact were described as follows: active contact which meant an exchange of information, passive contact where the adoptive family tracked down the birth family using social media but didn’t initiate contact, and no contact via technology (Black, et al., 2016). Those who adopted internationally were the most likely to have no contact via technology (Black et al., 2016). Two types of boundary concerns included one about feeling intrusive if they sought out the birth family and the other a fear that the birth family would be intrusive on their own lives and have a negative impact namely because of mental health issues (Black et al., 2016). For those who want to remain in contact and exchange information with the birth family, social media and email are very beneficial because it is easy to stay up to date, otherwise the effort might have discouraged them long ago (Black et al., 2016). Often families who had no contact with the birth families via technology limited it because of boundary concerns or lack of information regarding essential characteristics to discover them (Black et al., 2016). This study also explores how Facebook and other technology can play a role in negotiating the relationships between birth families and adoptive families.

Issues and problems with adoption is a popular topic of research though it is typically not studied through narratives on social media. One of the prominent concerns that have consistently reappeared when adopting is how to negotiate the relationships between the birth family and adoptive family and the adoptee. This was mentioned in the description of Black et al.’s study in 2016 because the families felt like either they or the birth family would be overstepping boundaries if they reached out through social media. Another study that displays this concern is a

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study regarding college students in 1999. Some students felt a void in their life because there is no way to fill a missing biological tie; for these students and others an interest in finding more about their biological family was peaked when they got to college and many searched their mothers out (Kryder, 1999). Others did not, fearing to hurt their adoptive families by searching for their records (Kryder, 1999). Every adoptee who found their biological parents had a more negative relationship with their adoptive parents afterwards (Kryder, 1999).

The study in 1999 provided a variety of insight into other challenges that are faced by adopted students when they come to college. The researchers interviewed 16 college students about their experiences and adjustment where they showed both similarities and differences to non-adopted students (Kryder, 1999). When explaining their stories multiple themes came to light including the feeling of being special in their family which could counter the feelings of rejection that they might otherwise feel (Kryder, 1999). Several students also describe when they found out they were adopted; some felt no disruption because they were told young so grew up with it and were told the right amount of information for their age (Kryder, 1999).

Another hesitation that people have regarding adoption is the unknown genetic information when accepting an adoptee into their home (Miall, 1996). It is seen as a risk by 33% of males and 31% of females who often believe this unknown heritage could result in them being problem children (Miall, 1996). The study regarding college students indicated that their interest in their genetic history also increased during this time particularly because of the new adult decisions they were facing (Kryder, 1999). One student went to study genetics and they were fascinated about the subject because they did not know where they were from because they had no medical records (Kryder, 1999). Knowing genetics and history can play a large role in creating adoptive families and the adoptee's future.

Academics is an important part of a person's life because it correlates strongly with success. Thus, understanding adjustable differences about how a child could succeed better in academics may provide useful information in improving academics for other children in the future. Studying children adopted from Russia to the United States, researchers analyzed their academic and behavioral progress comparing individual differences such as parenting behavior and age of adoption among others (Hein et al., 2017). They found that different pre and post-adoption factors played into the psychological and sociocultural domains; this evidence suggests that psychological and sociocultural adaptation has differential development (Hein et al., 2017). Age of adoption did not matter as much as adoptive family experiences in regards to psychological and sociocultural adjustment (Hein et al., 2017). In particular, the data support that early parenting behavior has a significant and moderate correlation with behavioral adjustment but age of adoption does not (Hein et al., 2017). In summary, psychological adaptation was strongly influenced by the quality of the family environment and sociocultural adaptation was strongly influenced by the acculturation time with the family (Hein et al., 2017). This study is important because it depicts academic and behavioral problems that could be influenced by being adopted, institutionalized, or their parents' parenting behavior. The quantity and quality of family time is more controllable than the age at which the child is institutionalized or adopted.

When interviewing college students about how they view their adjustments different than non-adopted students, race and culture was identified (Kryder, 1999). The 1999 study had students explain that in college was the first time they felt like a minority because they grew up in a white family even though they themselves weren't white (Kryder). However other students pointed out that by being a different race the child would already know they are different from their adoptive family and so then it is the family's responsibility to expose them to their original

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culture (Kryder, 1999). Many internationally adopted students had no birth records so knew even less of their history (Kryder, 1999). Those who had more positive adoptive experiences and more attentive parents were less intent on discovering more of their culture than others (Kryder, 1999).

A study taking place in 2013 in Spain studied internationally adopted children and their parents' perceptions on their adoption, birth culture identity, and discrimination (Reinoso, Juffer, & Tieman). 48 of these adoptions were transracial while 20 were same-race adoptions with the children being between ages 8 and 12 years (Reinoso et al., 2013). The questions tested included differences between the parent's and child's answers and differences between transracial and same race adoptions (Reinoso et al., 2013). The study discovered that transracial adoptions were more involved in their birth country's culture than same-race adoptees (Reinoso et al., 2013). However the survey discovered that both transracial adoptees and same-race adoptees had a stronger investment in their birth country's culture than their mothers thought they did (Reinoso et al., 2013). About 80% of the children identified themselves from being from their birth country though the receiving country was still mentioned a fair amount of the time, indicating the dual connection adoptees could have towards these places (Reinoso et al., 2013). Mothers, fathers, and children identified the child's view on adoption as being satisfied with their family and overall more positive than negative (Reinoso et al., 2013). Transracial adoptees reported more discriminatory experiences than same-race adoptees, though overall these experiences were rarely reported (Reinoso et al., 2013). Parents appeared to overestimate negative experiences that their children had faced regarding discrimination particularly for same-race adoptions, showing that they are aware of potential societal stigmas (Reinoso et al., 2013). Thus, societal stigmas about race can affect the parents and child's behavior towards their birth culture and their views about adoption.

A researcher in Poland interviewed fourteen 17 or 18-year-olds by asking them to tell the researchers their life story (Kalus, 2016). The purpose behind this was to study identity narratives (Kalus, 2016). Many children hid that they were adopted from their peers and felt that they were different because of it (Kalus, 2016). Being adopted was significant in all stages of the adolescents' life but as they got older many no longer wanted to find their birth parents (Kalus, 2016). Some didn't want to hurt their adoptive parents by searching (Kalus, 2016). Almost all had created a new sense of family (Kalus, 2016). This study shows how important knowing that one is adopted to identity creation and that this affects family relationships and interactions. It affects how they act and say through how they believe their peers will react.

There are several known issues with adoption that makes parents hesitant to adopt such as how much if any contact with the birth family, unknown genetics, academic or behavioral problems, and how to handle identity formation and racism. This research focuses on how children perceive their problems, how they describe them, and their experiences as a result.

Method

Procedure and Participants

The data for this project was collected by analyzing Facebook posts on a public page on adoption rights. This page was a publicly available site, meaning content people shared is accessible to anyone on Facebook. The researcher searched the page for negative posts from January 2017 to early November 2018. Posts that expressed a negative perception or regret regarding adoption was considered a negative adoption experience. Any comment that was about a personal negative adoption experience was then copied and pasted into a word document and

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the names were changed to pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. The analysis revealed seven pages of raw data from eighteen people and twenty-three comments.

Data Analysis

Themes were assessed for negative adoption experiences using inductive analysis. The researcher read through all the comments once to get a general idea of common themes. During the next read through the researcher color coded common themes that appeared. Each of these color-coded quotes were then copied and pasted into another document under the appropriate theme. Two or three quotes under each theme that appeared to emphasize why the subject's experience was negative to use as example quotes.

Findings and Interpretations

The research question analyzed was "how do children describe their negative adoption experiences?" To understand what made adoption experiences negative an inductive analysis for themes was conducted which revealed eight reoccurring themes: loss of identity, loss of biological family, rights to birth records and knowledge, lies, rejection and inferiority, mental and behavioral problems, human trafficking, and how others don't understand. These themes are described in greater detail following.

Loss of Identity

Loss of identity was identified when the adoptee lost their history by being removed from where they were born and the possibilities that come with that such as culture, religion, and language. This theme is demonstrated by person 1 when they say, "I berated a judge at 5 1/2 years of age as he read out the part of the final adoption decree that eradicated my birth name, identity and theoretically my entire family before me-and separated me forever from my youngest sibling." This person specifically identifies how through being adopted she lost her sense of identity along with her family. Losing identity can have a severe impact on the adoptee's life.

Age of adoption can affect how identity is formed. In response to adoptions at birth person 9 says, "Being that exclusive just ignores that it's healthier for kids growing up knowing their identity, regardless of age. Older children will have an intact identity as they will not have lost their name or knowledge of their family, and have a better idea of why they are in alternative care, whereas the biggest identity problems lie in infant adoptions that promote complete erasure of any kind of origin and identity." Person 9 is saying that those who were adopted at birth are actually more at risk for the problems that come with a loss of identity. Adopted Child Syndrome can result from an identity crisis when the adoptee is not viewed as part of the family in the same way biological children are (Miall, 1996). However, this sense of not belonging may be stronger in children who were adopted older because they remember their heritage.

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Birth country and culture play a large role in understanding identity. Person 10 shares, “I’m a biracial international adoptee from Colombia with no concrete evidence of my prior existence to when the welfare department of Colombia took me in at the supposed age of 18 months as an ‘abandoned’ child. And still to the point of an unjust system, they have no records of where I was or with whom for the 18 months that followed when I was under their supposed care until I was adopted to the United States at approximate age of 5 by a Catholic family who then proceeded to strip me of anything that had to do with my roots... Language, music, art, customs, culture, history...” Person 10 gained the impression that where he came from was not good enough. Others tell a different story. As mentioned previously, a study in Spain interviewed international adoptees and among their findings was that compared to same-race adoptees, transracial adoptees were more involved in their birth’ country’s culture (Reinoso et al., 2013). Culture did play a larger part in their life than their mothers thought they did which is important to understand when considering identity (Reinoso et al., 2013). Despite the differences in being raised, in all cases an understanding of culture from their birth country is important in order to form a sense of identity. This is also shown when 80% of the children identified themselves from being from their birth country (Reinoso et al., 2013). Benefits come with being invested in the birth country and culture, so adoptive parents have the responsibility expose their child to the original culture (Kryder, 1999). This could help preserve a sense of identity for those who are adopted older while it helps those who are adopted at birth to create an identity.

Loss of Biological Family

Posts qualified for the theme of loss of biological family when they mentioned that they had lost family that their either knew or didn’t know at the time or if they wanted to know their ancestry and roots. This desire is characteristic of many adoptees who often seek out their biological family at some point in their lives. In a 1999 study, college students were surveyed and many admitted that they searched their birth mothers out once they got to college (Kryder). Others still resisted the temptation because they did not want their adoptive family to feel like they were rejecting them (Kryder, 1999). Another study supports this idea when the interviewed adolescent says they don’t want to hurt their adoptive parents (Kalus, 2016). Person 8 displays this common desire by saying, “Just even having an opportunity to ‘possibly’ know my ‘roots’ means everything to me.”

Some people were more aware of their situation when they were adopted and had relationships with biological family already. Person 1 remembers that “my sister and I were abandoned , separated , conscripted to a system known as adoption, with records sealed (now purged) and histories gone forever because all involved are deceased. My sister, who was only about 7 months old in 1948 when this happened, may well not know to this day that she is adopted.” At another point person 1 describes further, “The other sibling, our brother, was taken with our parents while they abandoned their daughters. I found my brother in a grave seven decades later... my sister is still MIA because the adoption state maintains its draconian laws regarding adoptees and adoption -aided and abetted by the society which allows this to continue.” This person lost their entire family whom they remembered and had relationships

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with. No one was ever going to replace them even though she never saw those siblings again. Family is the building block of society and is supposed to remain and support an individual eternally. When this doesn't happen, it affects everyone involved for the rest of their lives.

This theme is important to understand because when all the quotes were categorized, this was the largest section with almost two pages of posts. In order for an adoption to take place there will be some kind of loss of family or the adoptee cannot be given to a new one. Thus, while the problem itself may not go away there could be options to negotiate the power the loss could have. A way to balance these relationships would be to have continued communication after the adoption has taken place. This is not without its own problems, but it would provide the opportunity to discover one's 'roots' as person 8 would have liked. An increasingly popular way to do this is through social media such as Facebook. In order to initiate this, researchers suggested that more traditional forms of communication such as letters and face-to-face be implemented first and then when it is time that relationship can be extended virtually (Greenhow et al., 2016). This is because of concerns like boundaries where both the adoptive family and birth family do not know if the other wants connection and if so how much (Black et al., 2016). They do not want to be intrusive on each other's lives (Black et al., 2016). A virtual relationship is still encouraged because in present times virtual contact is normal and can feel more natural than letters (Greenhow et al., 2016).

A broader suggestion would be open adoptions. Open adoptions are on a continuum depending on how much information the parents get about each other (Black et al., 2016). Closed adoptions are when both sets of parents have no information about each other (Black et al., 2016). Adoptions used to always be closed for a couple reasons such as protecting the birth mother from stigmatization and the idea that not having information about the birth family would allow for the families to move on better (Black et al., 2016). These may be true for some circumstances. With open adoptions the adoptees would have a connection with their biological family or at least information about them. By using a form of these suggestions, adoptees would be able to have some kind of connection with their biological family, so it would not be a mystery or complete loss.

Right to birth records and to knowledge

Posts that fell into the right to birth records and to knowledge category fought for the idea that adoptees should have the right to access their birth records and have knowledge about their family history just like biological children. For person 1, it is an issue of equality. She says, "Shame on CT to deny equal rights to adoptees by placing limitations (age or whatever) on adoptees that are never placed on the child who is born to and kept by his natural parents? An why the UN-certified OBC to adoptees when non-adoptees receive certified documents? Every child has the right to know his or her birth circumstances, to know parents' names, not to mention the place they were born and who and where their siblings are, and about the rest of their family. No one asks to be born and we certainly don't ask to be adopted and to have our identity stolen... We demand equal rights and equal justice under the law, a law that is for ALL people not just

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some people.” Her desire stems from her experience with losing biological family which is described when she says, “In more modern times, my sister and I were abandoned , separated , conscripted to a system known as adoption, with records sealed (now purged) and histories gone forever because all involved are deceased.” Finding her birth records is very important to person 1 because it is essential to find her family. She wants to know her history and roots which is mentioned previously, but to do this she needs her records. Biological children are given theirs, so person 1 asks why adopted children are any different.

The obvious solution to this issue would to allow original birth certificates and other records to be given to the adoptee. This issue is not so cut and dry however because of birth parent rights. Reiss argues that the right to privacy protects birth parent confidentiality and the increasing number of adoptees who receive their records is violating that right (1998). Person 1 does recognize this issue when she says, “Our rights to know and to access information pertaining to our birth and our DNA families is a Constitutional Right to Equal Treatment/Justice Under the Law-- Right to EQUALITY. It is a human right as well as a civil right. But the right to know does not negate the birth parents' rights of refusal to allow us into their lives; they should not, however, have the right to maintain secrets about their part in our creation and subsequent birth, or to ask a state to redact their identity from a birth certificate! They relinquished us, and in so doing have no rights to determine what we know or do not know in connection with our births.” Person 1 wants the right to knowledge of her birth but does recognize that birth parents have the right to choose to be in contact with their child. Reiss supports this idea that birth parents may not want contact with their child because they have moved on in life and possibly haven't told their new family about their past (1998). Reiss also claims that the right to heritage is not protected (1998). This debate about adoptee rights has been going on since the 1970s because courts do realize that adoptee and birth parent rights do conflict (Reiss, 1998). Almost in direct response to person 1's argument, Reiss also adds that the equality principle in the constitution does not mean identical treatment, and so receiving names and records just like biological children is not necessary (1998). Reiss's proposed suggestion to balance these rights is to give non-identifying information to adoptive parents at birth which includes genetic and ethnic information and anything else the birth parent desires (1998). By giving the information to the adoptive parents it would mimic the bond between biological child and parent which is the point of adoption (Reiss, 1998). More research could be valuable in this area in order to figure out a solution for both parties.

Lies

The category of lies included posts about when adoptees were lied to about who they were or their history was kept a secret. This can be implemented in a variety of ways. Person 2 said, “I meet far too many folks who discover much too late in life (even in their 60s & 70s) that they have been lied to/betrayed/brainwashed. It's devastating.” People spend a lifetime trying to figure out who they are, only to discover they have been missing a key piece or being misled by the people they love their entire lives. Those they have trusted the most are the ones that have been lying to them. It would be amazing if they weren't affected by the deception.

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Person 12 had a different experience with lies, “The 'jobs' of my mothers sibling & her parents were fabricated by the agency to make me look like i came from , 'good stock' as if i wasn't good enough as is.” The worth of an individual is often judged off of their heritage and what their parents do, so lying about the jobs of this individual’s parents is not a surprise. However, someone’s worth is not necessarily based off what their ancestors did for a living and people have been fighting against that idea for centuries.

A possible solution to this is to tell the adoptee early in their life that they were adopted. As mentioned in the loss of biological family category adoptions used to be more closed and secretive so that the adoptee would not be confused to which family they belonged to (Black et al., 2016). While this might help in some cases this otherwise could be devastating for trust between parents and the adoptee. There are a variety of reasons that this lie could be revealed like the need to know genetics because of a disease or if biological family contacts them out of the blue. This has increasingly happened through social media (Greenhow et al., 2016). In the study with college students, many students reported that they were told young enough that they grew up with the knowledge of being adopted so they felt no disruption of their lives at the knowledge (Kryder, 1999). A stipulation with this is that they were told the right amount of information for their age (Kryder, 1999). Thus, telling the truth from the beginning would be best but only as appropriate to the individual’s age and maturity.

Rejection and Perceived Inferiority

The rejection and perceived inferiority category was created to contain the posts where someone rejected the adoptee resulting in hurt and trauma or when the adoptee felt like they were second rate to those who wanted or lived with their biological families. Person 18 describes the comparison adoptees can feel when the adoptive parents really wanted their own baby. They say, “add to that the additional nuance of having to bear their unresolved grief around their infertility in most circumstances, being compared to the fantasy child they couldn’t have, the anger that underlies all of it, and then we get diagnosed with RAD.” Families tend to attempt for biological children first and only turn to adoption when they have no other choice. Technological attempts are preferred over adoption for 73% of women surveyed (Miall 1996). This could be influenced by the perception in the community that adoptive parents are not real parents (Miall, 1996). This thought process is not without evidence. In 1996 Miall studied the perceptions of adoption in the community and clinical settings; he mentioned that adopted children and biological children are often viewed as not belonging to their family in quite the same way and this can hurt the child’s sense of identity who are often viewed as second-rate. After being forced to announce to the class that they were adopted person 17’s experience can exemplify rejection. They said, “After school, some kids followed me and threw tin cans at me yelling ‘here’s some garbage! Your mom threw you away, you are garbage!’”

There are those who do not have anything against adoption and want to adopt but there is still an element of rejection. Person 3 brings up the point that, “we often hear as adoptees, ‘well they chose you to adopt’ yes, but that doesn’t change the fact that we were first rejected. If you were adopted at birth, you experienced your first trauma at birth.” Person 3 is saying that every adoptee experiences rejection even if their adoption experience is positive. Person 1’s

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experience shows the trauma that sometimes happens before the adoption when she says, "I was abandoned when I was about 2 yo, and adopted when I 5 years and 3 1/2 mos old." After receiving a family there is still not a guarantee that the adoptee will not be rejected. The most prominent example of rejection was in person 5's simple statement, "I was returned."

This theme is important to understand so that people will be more aware of what they say and the repercussions that can have on an individual's life. By being viewed as not belonging the same way biological children are, adoptees could develop Adopted Child Syndrome (Miall, 1996). They are at least perceived to be more prone to identity conflicts, personality development problems, psychological disturbances, and anti-social behavior (Miall, 1996). This leads into the next theme.

Mental and Behavioral Problems

Whether true or not, adoptees and sometimes adoptees are viewed as having mental or behavioral problems that could hurt their relationship with others. It is known that these issues can be a turn off because children with developmental disabilities and illnesses are among the groups that are harder to be placed (Avery, 2000). These mental and behavioral problems affect far more than those who develop Adopted Child Syndrome as mentioned with rejection and perceived inferiority theme. Person 5 describes their experience, "I had behavior problems that the adults wanted me to explain. I'm just not, at almost XX, understanding the reasons for my behavior. I did all the typical messed up kids things, drugs, running away... They decided I was too much to deal with. The truth is, they were too much to deal with for me. It ruined a good portion of my life. I blamed myself for EVERYTHING.... Even now, I still occasionally think my birth probably broke up my birth parents marriage." Children with mental and behavioral problems tend to be harder to raise, but how they are raised can also affect how those problems are displayed and managed. Otherwise it could end up being like the rest of person 5's story, "I was returned. I became a ward of the state throughout my teen years." It has also been shown that in psychiatric patients, adoptees make up a larger percentage than they should (Reiss, 1998). This theme explains that parents' and others' actions can make a difference in how the adoptee views themselves throughout their entire life. They can impact the risk of mental and behavioral problems and the severity. Everyone wants to be loved and disabilities don't change that desire.

Adoptees even believe that adoptees end up with mental and behavioral problems. Person 10 says, "I want the whole adoption and foster systems overhauled but the people who would know the most about how to do it (adoptees and foster kids) typically end up screwed up in their heads that they don't even get the opportunity for good quality education that could land them in decision-making positions where they could start to effect change." In a survey, 21% of males and 16% of females believed adoptees were more likely to be problem children because of their unknown heritage (Miall, 1996). Mental and behavioral problems can be a factor in choosing to adopt and how the adopted children are viewed and treated.

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Human Trafficking

The human trafficking theme was interpreted as when the child wasn't given willingly. Person 11 claims, "I am NOT an orphan. I was made one so I could be sold. I was born in Busan but my birth was registered in Seoul." This example shows that human trafficking really does happen all over the world and it is known to be complex. In Ecuador there was an adoption scandal in 1989 where workers, including three lawyers, in a private orphanage had threatened the original parents and stolen children (Leifsen, 2008). Policies quickly changed but it was also revealed that very few of the children left the country without their documents in order which means that there were people in every department willing to manipulate the adoption procedures (Leifsen, 2008). One of the main draws into this unethical line of work is the low wages which can make irregular international adoptions appealing (Leifsen, 2008).

While this is a serious problem in the world, person 7 mentions, "The sense of not belonging & of being removed from your family is there whether you were trafficked or not. Illegal or unethical adoption adds an extra dimension to those feelings--an awareness that this never should have happened to you." Person 7 is not mitigating the seriousness of human trafficking but is explaining that everyone acknowledges that human trafficking is a problem because they were obviously taken against their will. However, adoption is similar in that regard because the child did not choose to leave their family. The situation in Ecuador deepens this statement because it is through adoption that those children were trafficked. Only through awareness of how and why these things happen can people respond to the problem.

Others Don't Understand

The others don't understand theme centered around the idea that no one can understand an adoptee's story without living it. This is demonstrated by Person 3 when they said, "People who have not been adopted, do not understand... not because they don't want to, but because they can't." Each person's experience is their own. People want to help others and comfort them but person 3 is saying that despite this desire it is impossible for anyone who is not adopted to understand.

Sometimes people's comments in response to an adoptee can come off insensitive. Person 1 expressed their opinion about this when they said, "Only nincompoops would tell you to " fageddaboutit!, and only fools tell you that you can have two mothers. ... or three or more... no way Jose." Person 1 believes that there is a connection between biological mother and child that is irreplaceable. Adoptive parents may be caretakers, but it would never be the same. Person 1 has experienced others telling them to move on and accept what has happened, but she feels that this is impossible. When trying to comfort someone person 14 says, "I'm sorry you feel that way... But you made the best decision you could at the time for your situation, you gave life to XXX. Don't let people have that power over you, they can't know what you went through." Person 14 supports the idea that others can't tell the adoptee what to feel because they do not know what they went through. Person 14 is also supporting the idea that the adoptee can choose to be influenced by what others say.

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This theme is important for adoption practitioners and therapists to understand in particular so that they are sensitive to the adoptee's emotions. Many people believe that a family cannot be replaced and that idea needs to be respected appropriately in order to validate the adoptee's emotions.

Conclusion

Through using inductive analysis to look for themes in Facebook comments on an adoption rights page from January 2017 to early November 2018, eight themes were found. These were: loss of identity, loss of biological family, rights to birth records and knowledge, lies, rejection and perceived inferiority, mental and behavioral problems, human trafficking, and others don't understand. Suggestions of potential solutions have been included in the theme analysis though many of those suggestions would require further research in order to conclude if it would be successful. Some themes only require individual implementation such as lies. By telling children while young that they were adopted then the child would grow up knowing and the transition could be easier (Kryder, 1999). Other themes such as human trafficking would take an international effort to prevent because it is a national problem involving multiple people as seen in the Ecuadorian scandal (Leifsen, 2008). So while more research is needed to conclude the success of these suggestions, there is at least a place to start. This research has added to adoption social media research because in the past it has centered around how birth and adoptive families navigate their relationship. It has also added to negative experiences of adoption which has not really been studied on social media before.

There were several limitations with the study. The first would be the quantity of the sample. There were twenty-three posts and while it included every negative comment on the page January 2017 to early November 2018, more data could have been gathered if the timeline was pushed back or more Facebook pages were researched. The goal was to get around ten male and ten female posts but the male comments were greatly outnumbered by the female comments. This research could also be expanded to other social media platforms. Using other social media platforms or analyzing more than one Facebook page would be a good step into further research.

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