

**The birth mother and the evolution of  
adoption policy and practice in England  
since 1926**

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# Abstract

This PhD is an empirical investigation of how the evolution of adoption agency policy and practice in the twentieth century has impacted upon birth mothers' motives for relinquishment, and their experiences of adoption. It examines how birth mothers have reached decisions about the adoption of their children, their role in the adoption process and how these answers have varied historically. Further, it attempts to understand the relationship between birth mothers' experiences and wider moral, social and policy environments and how adoption agencies have mediated that relationship. Attitudes towards initiating and maintaining contact are also examined. Understanding changes in birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption have important implications for the adoption support services offered by adoption agencies.

This thesis used a mixed methods approach, combining documentary analysis, with interviews and focus groups. This PhD draws upon archival materials collated from adoption case files, adoption panel meeting minutes (APMM), annual reports and other official documentation. It also utilizes evidence collated interviews carried out with six former Family Care personnel and professionals from six other adoption agencies, along with two focus groups carried out with the seven members of Family Care's current adoption team. Historical research was fundamental to the methodological approach utilised in this PhD in order to uncover changes in birth mothers' motives and experiences of adoption.

In empirically evidencing the reasons for changes in birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this thesis makes important contributions to understanding the constraints posed by birth mothers' gendered and socio-economic identities on their options and motives for adoption. This study also provides a theoretical framework to understand the evolution of child adoption in terms of historic periods, characterised by differing social, moral, religious and legal contexts. This theoretical framework is used to develop a holistic understanding of how different factors came together in the lives, choices and experiences of birth mothers, through the mediating influence of adoption agencies policies and practices. The theoretical framework has been important in clarifying the role of adoption agencies and adoption social workers in how they have shaped the choices and options available to birth mothers. Whilst doing so, it has been possible to

map and evidence the influence of changing ideological and professional discourses; changes in agency religious affiliations and moral agendas; and changes in the external policy environment in birth mothers' options and experiences of adoption. Findings show that these factors have collectively been responsible for birth mothers' changing options, motives and experiences of adoption.

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# Abstract

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In empirically evidencing the reasons for changes in birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this thesis makes important contributions to understanding the constraints posed by birth mothers' gendered and socio-economic identities on their options and motives for adoption. This study also provides a theoretical framework to understand the evolution of child adoption in terms of historic periods, characterised by differing social, moral, religious and legal contexts. This theoretical framework is used to develop a holistic understanding of how different factors came together in the lives, choices and experiences of birth mothers, through the mediating influence of adoption agencies policies and practices.

The theoretical framework has been important in clarifying the role of adoption agencies and adoption social workers in how they have shaped the choices and options available to birth mothers. Whilst doing so, it has been possible to map and evidence the influence of changing ideological and professional discourses; changes in agency religious affiliations and moral agendas; and changes in the external policy environment in birth mothers' options and experiences of adoption. Findings show that these factors have collectively been responsible for birth mothers' changing options, motives and experiences of adoption.

# 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

This PhD examines changes in birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is an empirical investigation of the mediating and conditioning influence of adoption agencies on birth mothers' changing motives and experiences of adoption. This thesis seeks to understand how changes in wider moral and social contexts and changes professional, social and policy environments have been mediated in to the lives, options and experiences of birth mothers through the policies and practices of adoption agencies. This study draws upon documentary sources derived from a historical moral welfare agency of the Church of England. By examining historical evidence, it is possible to gain deeper insights into how and why birth mothers' choices, motives and experiences of adoption have changed. Carp (2002) has argued *“that the history of adoption has been a neglected area of social history. The basic primary sources necessary for writing such a history – adoption case records – have been sealed by tradition and law. This has been an almost insurmountable barrier: no sources, no history”* (2002, p.17). Historical research allows the researcher to be able to situate the study within historical, socio-economic, political, religious and moral contexts (Lauden et. al., 1986). Documentary sources are vital in providing evidence of how the relationship that adoption agencies frequently had with church sponsors shaped adoption agency policy and practice over time along with changes in wider moral and social climates, childcare and adoption policy and the external welfare environment. This study also draws upon findings from interviews carried out with six former Family Care personnel, focus groups with current Family Care staff and interviews carried out with adoption agency professionals from six other adoption agencies.

This study was funded by an ESRC CASE studentship and conducted in collaboration with Family Care, a registered voluntary adoption agency. Family Care (previously known as the Southwell Diocesan Adoption Agency) was established in the 1890s and has been dealing with adoption work since the mid-1940s. In studying a historic moral welfare agency of the Church of England, I have been afforded a unique opportunity to explore the tensions generated for aspects of the Church's historic mission by the increasing demands of social work policy and practice in the face of advancing secularisation and religious and moral pluralism.

## **1.2 Rationale**

The focus of this PhD thesis is birth mothers rather than adoptive parents or adopted children. Historically, adoption literature and research has often focused on the developmental aspects of adoption for adopted children or has focused on the adoptive parents (Grotevant, 1986, 1987; Tizard and Rees, 1974; Singer et al., 1985; Rutter, 1979; Smith & Brodzinsky, 1994; Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1975). However, in more recent years birth mothers' experiences of adoption have begun to be documented (Elliot, 2005; Wells, 1993; Howe, Sawbridge and Hinings, 1992) and we have begun to learn more about the psychological effects of relinquishing a child to adoption (Pannor, Baran and Sorosky, 1978; Rynearson, 1982; Winker and van Keppel, 1984; Condon, 1986; Wells, 1993; Logan, 1996; Kelly, 1999; Elliot, 2005).

Evidence and literature relating to birth mothers' motives for adoption and detailed evidence about their circumstances and options at the time of pregnancy are scarcely documented in literature. In addition, although there is now a wealth of literature on birth mothers' experiences of adoption, the majority of the evidence is derived from years after the act of parting with their children had taken place. There remains a gap in literature on the changing characteristics, motives and experiences of women who have relinquished children for adoption. Further, literature has provided limited explanations for changes in birth mothers' choices, motives and experiences of adoption. This PhD will build upon previous research (Wells, 1993; Elliot, 2005; Howe Sawbridge and Hinings, 1992; Powell and Warren, 1997) to develop a richer understanding of changes in birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption and will offer explanations for these changes.

This PhD offers a timely contribution to a renewed national debate about adoption policy and practice. The previous Labour Government and the current Coalition Government have both supported the use of adoption to provide permanence for children currently in the care system. For instance, under the previous Labour Government, the Department of Health published National Adoption Standards for England (DoH, 2001a) and a new Adoption and Children Act 2002 was passed incorporating White Paper proposals (DoH, 2000a) arising from a wide-ranging review of adoption in 2000 (PIU, 2000). In an attempt to increase the numbers of adoptions of children from the care system and decrease the amount of time they are waiting to be matched with prospective adoptive parents, the current Coalition Government has shown a renewed interest in adoption by publishing revised adoption guidance in February 2011 (DfE, 2011a) and National Minimum Standards in March 2011 (DfE, 2011b) which came into force from April 2011. The current National Minimum standards are important in recognising the wishes and needs of birth parents and relatives. For instance, the National Minimum Standards recognise that Adoption is an evolving life-long process for all those involved - adopted adults, and birth and adoptive relatives and that *“the fundamental issues raised by adoption may reverberate and resurface at different times and stages throughout an individual’s life”* (DfE, 2011a, p.3). This PhD will make an important contribution to understanding the diversity of birth mothers’ needs based on their changing options and experiences of adoption throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Further, the project will shed light on how far adoption reforms address historical ambiguities about the purpose of adoption and who the primary beneficiary is meant to be: the child, the adopters, or the birth parents. This historical survey will make an important contribution to the debate about the nature, purpose and desirability of child adoption as an instrument of family policy.

### **1.3 Contribution to Knowledge**

Through this PhD I will contribute to a historical understanding of changes in birth mothers’ options, motives and experiences of adoption. I also contribute knowledge to a historical understanding of the social, moral, professional and religious influences on the changing role, policy and practice of faith-based adoption agencies. In doing so, explanations for changes in birth mothers’ options, motives and experiences of



adoption are sought. More significantly, I develop a theoretical framework which will serve to understand the extent to which birth mothers' changing motives, options and experiences of adoption are reflective of changes in moral agendas, changes in the policy environment, shifts in professional practice, and changes in wider moral and social contexts, all of which have been mediated through the changing role, policy and practice of adoption agencies.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

In order to understand how the evolution of adoption policy and practice in England has impacted upon birth mothers' motives for relinquishment and their experiences of adoption, the following research questions have been posed:

- How have birth mothers reached decisions about the adoption of their children, what has been their role in the adoption process and how have answers varied historically?
- What has been the relationship between birth mothers' experiences and the wider moral, social and policy environments? And how have adoption agencies mediated that relationship?
- How have attitudes towards initiating or maintaining contact between birth parents and their natural children evolved and what are the implications for birth records counselling today?

A qualitative approach to investigation and analysis of the research questions was undertaken. Archival materials were a valuable source of data, allowing changes in policy and practice and birth mothers' experiences and motives for adoption to be measured over time. Agency records and adoption panel meeting minutes provided quantitative data on birth mothers' changing characteristics<sup>1</sup> and qualitative data on birth mothers' changing reasons and experiences of adoption. Additionally, Adoption Panel Meeting Minutes (APMM) derived from Family Care's archives along with

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<sup>1</sup> Quantitative data on birth mothers' changing characteristics was used to inform analyses of qualitative data on birth mothers' changing motives and experiences of adoption.

annual reports allowed for an examination of the agency's changing mission, values and affiliations, the impact of childcare policy, and changes in wider moral, social and policy environments on the agency's policies and practices. Interviews carried out with six former Family Care personnel and professionals from six other adoption agencies along with two focus groups carried out with the seven members of Family Care's current adoption team provides an historical account of both birth mothers' motives and experiences and changes in social, moral and policy contexts. This PhD drew on the hermeneutic epistemological position which is concerned with the theory and practice of interpretation and the interpretation of meanings (Seebohm, 2004).

## **1.5 Chapter Overview**

The following two chapters will form a literature review. The first of these present a historical review of evolving policy and practice, and the second presents an intellectual review of the state of knowledge relating to birth mothers' choices, motives and experiences of adoption.

The aim of chapter 2 is to provide a historical context for understanding birth mothers' experiences of adoption and motives for relinquishment, in the context of changing adoption policy and practice and changing welfare reforms. The chapter begins by setting the context for understanding the evolution of adoption in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by examining the practice of adoption in previous centuries. The subsequent three sections examine the moral, religious, social, and political context in which adoption policy and practice has evolved. The first of these sections maps changes from 1926 – 1948; the second section discusses changes from 1949 – 1974; and the third section examines the context in which adoption policy and practice developed from 1975 to the present day. Each section will also address changes in welfare provisions since it constitutes a vital element in the framing of birth mothers' options and choices. The penultimate section of this chapter will provide a brief history of Family Care as an adoption agency and will examine how the agency's religious profile has changed over time. In light of the literature reviewed in this chapter, the final section discusses and critically examines changes in birth mothers' options throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The second of the literature review chapters will examine literature and empirical evidence on birth mothers' characteristics, motives and experiences of adoption. In doing so, it will attempt to understand how birth mothers have reached decisions about the adoption of their children, their role in the adoption process and how this has varied over time. In presenting this review of the literature, the overarching aim was to critically evaluate how far previous studies have answered the research questions.

Chapter 4 will present a theoretical discussion to contextualise birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption and will examine the wider ideological context in which birth mothers relinquished their children to adoption. This chapter begins by discussing how we have come to understand concepts such as 'identity' 'gender', 'social class' and 'culture' as a basis for theoretically contextualising birth mothers' choices, motives and experiences of adoption. After which, I go on to examine familial discourses and discourses of respectability and motherhood. The second half of this chapter is dedicated to a discussion of how changes to birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption can be explained by changes in wider ideological discourses, adoption and welfare policy, wider moral and social attitudes, and through the mediating and conditioning influence of the adoption agency and adoption professionals. In doing so, a heuristic device is developed based on the premise that discourses relating to the themes of the family, motherhood and respectability have been key influences in shaping birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption. In developing this theoretical framework, it seeks to understand how the typical birth mother would have viewed the world at different points in history and understand the factors that may have influenced her decision to relinquish and how she may have experienced the adoption process. This chapter also briefly addresses the relevance of the research design to the theoretical considerations discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to discussing the methodological approach taken in this PhD. It will begin by re-capping on the research questions guiding this PhD. Details of sampling methods, methods of data collection and analysis will be discussed with respect to the four planned phases of data collection: documentary analysis, interviews with adoption agency professionals, interviews and focus groups with

former and current Family Care staff, and interviews with birth mothers<sup>2</sup>. The second half of this chapter will go on to explore the limitations of the data collected and discuss ethical considerations.

Chapters 6 and 7 will be dedicated to presenting findings relating to the three research questions outlined earlier. Chapter 6 will examine how birth mothers' characteristics, motives and experiences of adoption have changed over time. The first section will examine findings from the analysis of 150 birth mother case files to provide a clearer understanding of how birth mothers' identities shaped their circumstances and informed their motives for adoption. The subsequent two sections will go on to examine findings relating to birth mothers' motives and changing experiences of adoption. The final section is dedicated to a discussion of how realistic birth mothers' options have been throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in light of the evidence presented in the subsequent sections.

Chapter 7 will explore how Family Care's policy and practice has evolved and whether it has been typical of other adoption agencies. The aim of this chapter is to examine the extent to which different factors have exerted an influence on agency policy and practice and will also shed light on the extent to which these factors have influenced birth mothers' options, choices and motives for adoption. In particular this chapter will concentrate on themes relating to the changing moral, social, professional, religious and policy contexts of adoption agency policy and practice.

The final chapter will present a discussion and draw conclusions for this PhD. Based on findings documented in chapters 6 and 7, this chapter seeks to advance discussions about why pregnant girls don't have their babies adopted nowadays. This chapter will discuss changes in the impact of changing moral, religious and legal contexts and wider ideological discourses (familial, respectability and motherhood) on the changing position of women in society and subsequently on birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption. This chapter will also draw conclusions about the strengths and limitations of the theoretical model proposed in chapter 4, in

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<sup>2</sup> Interviews with birth mothers were not carried out due to a lack of response from selected participants. However, in the interests of transparency, details of this stage have been disclosed in the methodology chapter.

understanding the reasons for changes in birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption. This chapter will end with a discussion relating to the implications of these findings for birth records counselling and recommendations for future research.

# 2

## Adoption in an Historical Context

### 2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a historical context for understanding birth mothers' experiences of adoption and motives for relinquishment, in the context of changing adoption policy and practice and changing welfare reforms. The chapter begins by setting the context for understanding the evolution of adoption in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by examining the practice of adoption in previous centuries. The subsequent three sections examine the moral, religious, social, and political context in which adoption policy and practice has evolved. The first of these sections maps changes from 1926 – 1948; the second section discusses changes from 1949 – 1974; and the third section examines the context in which adoption policy and practice developed from 1975 to the present day. Each section will also address changes in welfare provisions since it constitutes a vital element in the framing of birth mothers' options and choices. The chapter then goes on to examine the evolving religious character and institutional secularisation of adoption agencies, more specifically Family Care. The chapter concludes with a critical discussion of how far policies were likely to have dealt with the issues birth mothers would have faced throughout different points in history.

### 2.2 Background

Adoption is a term used to describe a personal and legal act as well as a social service (Cole and Donley, 1993). Adoption has been described as a man-made process (Booth, 1996), a 'legal fiction' and an 'artificial concept' (O'Halloran, 2009) which heavily relies upon British law. Adoption is the legal act of permanently placing a child with a parent or parents other than the birth parents and is the taking of a child

into one's family, creating a parent-to-child relationship, and giving him or her all the rights and privileges of one's own child. The term adoption can therefore be defined as “*a way of providing a new family for children who cannot be brought up by their own parents. It is a legal procedure in which all the parental responsibility is transferred to the adopters. An adopted child loses all legal ties with their first mother and father (the ‘birth parents’) and becomes a full member of the new family, usually taking the family's name*” (BAAF, 2005). This is the definition used today; however, what constituted adoption has changed over time. This section will go on to briefly discuss the practice of adoption before it became statute law in England in 1926. This section will also provide a historical context to understanding developments in of adoption policy and practice during the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

The purpose and practice of adoption has changed throughout history. Adoption in England and Wales has a much longer history in common law than in statute law (O'Halloran, 2009). The earliest known adoption is mentioned in the bible, which describes the adoption of Moses by the Pharaoh's daughter (Adamec & Miller, 2007), “*a transcultural and possibly a transracial adoption in which the infant of a subjugated people was adopted by a woman of the ruling classes*” (Triseliotis, Shireman and Hundley, 1997, p.3). The custom of adoption which emerged in the Greek and Roman periods aimed to serve the interests of those adopting. Adoptions carried out under Roman law secured the position and rights of the adopted child at birth, namely inheritance rights. Triseliotis, Shireman and Hundley (1997) argue that the majority of adoptions during Greek and Roman times were of males and were arranged in order that a family might not die out. Thus, the purpose of adoption was to provide an heir.

Another form of adoption can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, under the old Poor Law system (pre 1834), through the practice of *indentured apprenticeships* (Cunningham, 1990). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a tradition of care for dependent children in institutions such as the poorhouse or almshouses. The key concern during this period was to provide some security for orphaned and illegitimate children (Triseliotis, Shireman and Hundley, 1997). Indentured apprenticeships aimed to relieve the burden on parishes by placing children in to artisanal households

(Kirby, 2003). It was intended, under a formal contract, that children would be fed, clothed, educated and taught a trade, in return for their work on behalf of the family. Hence, indenture was one of the principle ways in which the Poor Law placed children into families (Triseliotis, Shireman and Hundley, 1997). The apprenticeship system “*gave children secure, surrogate families and delayed the need for legal adoption laws*” (Sorosky et al., 1989, p.30). Indentured servanthood was the only way that poor and dependent children had of securing homes (Babb, 1999). This form of adoption did not provide apprenticed children with any succession or inheritance rights.

Another form of adoption in the era of the ‘Poor Laws’ was an informal or private arrangement. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, illegitimate children received no legal recognition (O’Halloran, 2009). Thane (1978) has argued that throughout the history of the New Poor Law, from its introduction in 1834, women were the majority of adult recipients of Poor Law relief. One of the stipulations of the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 meant that putative fathers were no longer held financially responsible for any illegitimate children. Henriques (1967), in a paper examining bastardy and the Poor Law, has stated that financial support of the child often lay with the birth mother herself. Thus, “*the weight of public approbation and lack of any legal means of securing financial support*” (O’Halloran, 2009, p.18) left unmarried mothers with little option but to relinquish their children to adoption.

The concern with illegitimacy was rife throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The increase in the number of illegitimate births caused a moral outcry as ‘*social hygienists predicted the total breakdown of the family*’ (Elliott, 2005, p.41). From early Victorian times, there was a great awareness and ‘obsession’ with ‘purity’ and ‘social hygiene’, an ‘*offshoot of the sanitarian movement*’ (Elliott, 2005, p.38). Jones (1986) has argued that the social hygiene movement emerged from a “*marriage between the hereditarian ideas of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the public health and sanitary reform movements of the nineteenth century...the sanitary reform movement had long been governed by the perception of the relationship between social class and disease*” (1986, p.5). The social or mental hygiene movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was an attempt by reformers to control venereal disease, regulate prostitution and vice, and disseminate



sexual education. Authors such as Jones (1986) and Reeves (1993) have argued that the people leading this movement belonged to the middle classes and were concerned with rectifying the moral problems of the working classes. These authors have argued social hygienists were concerned with eugenic rationalisations, with the preservation of pure blood or the decline of the British race.

The Church's interest in moral standards was closely linked to the ideals sexual standards of the social hygiene movement. However, there was a fundamental difference both in theory and practice of the social hygiene movement and the Church's interest in moral standards. Social hygienists were only interested in the purity of the race, whereas the spiritual concerns of the Church extended to the redemption of the whole of humanity. Moral welfare work was the direct result of the Church's interests in sexual standards (Hall and Howes, 1965). In order to understand the social climate that surrounded adoptions in this period and beyond (until c1970s), it is necessary to examine and understand the nature and purpose of moral welfare work, how it developed over the years, and more significantly what adoption had to do with the moral welfare agenda.

The moral welfare movement was based upon a Christian moral outlook and was the product of philanthropic and religious efforts. Hall and Howes have stated that "*the basis of rescue work was religious; it was undertaken for the love of God and activated by a belief in the eternal worth of a human soul*" (1965, p.27). Watson (1962) defined moral welfare work as "*a branch of social work and is distinguished from other branches of that work by the fact that it is undertaken on the basis of a religious interpretation of life*" (1962, p.5). The main focus of the moral welfare movement was to rectify the social problems of the time; in particular, illegitimacy, prostitution and orphanhood. Moral welfare work in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was about trying to 'rescue' the 'fallen' (Hall and Howes, 1965), such as prostitutes, those who engaged in sex outside marriage and those who had extra-marital affairs. 'Fallen' was a term used to describe those who had lapsed in moral standards. "*Among those they wished to purify were vagrants, navvies, soldiers and sailors and especially prostitutes*" (Prochaska, 1980, p.182).

Although philanthropic efforts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were linked to certain Christian denominations, there were no consistent denominational efforts to promote moral welfare work; church members who undertook this work did so in a limited and private capacity, although the work was endorsed and most likely resourced by churches. For example, in the 1870s, Catherine Booth, co-founder of the Salvation Army, helped provide the means of support for women who were prepared to give up prostitution (Hall and Howes, 1965). Edward Rudolf, an active member of the Anglican Church, founded the Church of England Home for Waifs and Strays, which eventually became the Church of England Children's Society (*ibid*). Having said this, there is evidence that some parish priests were involved in informal social work as part of their parochial duties (Spencer, 1985). Women were significantly involved in charitable work prior to and during this period. Prochaska (1980) examined women's charitable motives and methods against the backdrop of contemporary attitudes towards women and provides a good account of philanthropic efforts by British women.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we begin to see the Church of England taking further interest in rescue work. For example, as a result of the recommendations made by the Canterbury Convocation<sup>3</sup> (for Church of England adoptions), dioceses began to appoint organising secretaries in the 1890s to carry out work within the community and preventative work in the field of illegitimacy and to arrange adoptions (Spencer, 1985). As a result it can be argued that religious and moral factors have been instrumental in the development of adoption agencies. The Church's moral welfare agenda was central to developing adoption services at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and rescue and moral welfare work flourished. In this context, adoption was a service which sought to tackle the social and moral issues of illegitimacy.

It is important to note that adoptions arranged by moral welfare agencies, prior to the legalisation of adoption in 1926 would have remained as private (Howe and Feast, 2003). Therefore, in adoptions carried out in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and before, it may have been common that birth mothers and adoptive parents knew of each other (Howe and Feast, 2003). Prior to the legalisation of adoption, there is no way of knowing

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<sup>3</sup> Convocation was the governing body of the Church of England, like General Synod today.

how successful and prevalent adoptions were as they were not recorded. Moreover, there was no legal requirement to record adoptions that had been arranged privately. For reasons to be discussed in the subsequent section, these types of adoptions caused concern, and amongst other reasons, prompted the legalisation of adoption as a statute law.

### **2.3 Policy and Practice Context: 1926 – 1948**

The interplay of several factors led to the legalisation of adoption in 1926, all associated with illegitimacy. These included problems created by *de facto* adoptions and baby farming (Hall and Howes, 1965; Spencer, 1985, Keating, 2001). *De facto* adoptions caused many problems as children were being placed with adoptive families and subsequently being reclaimed by birth families (see Teague, 1989, pp.59-60), often at a time when the child was old enough to contribute to family finances (Ball, 2003). Baby farming dates back to Victorian times, and was a term associated with the practice whereby unmarried mothers would hand over their child to baby farmers with a sum of money in the hope that either an adoptive family would be found or an informal foster care arrangement could be made (Arnot, 1994). Baby farmers were often untrained women and were often depicted in literature as financially driven (Behlmer, 1982; Hendrick, 1994). By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, baby farming developed a bad reputation due to the uncovering of much physical abuse of children and financial abuse of birth mothers and adoptive parents (Broder, 1988). The panic around baby farming further developed with the infamous case of Amelia Dyer, who was best known for being a murdering baby farmer (Rowbotham, & Stevenson, 2005). It was discovered that some baby farmers were killing the children instead of re-homing them, as this yielded larger profits (*ibid*).

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century women who wanted to keep their children would have faced many of the practical issues women face today. These include considerations such as where mother and child will reside, employment, income and arrangements for childcare. The difference today is that mothers have the support of a welfare state. Bradshaw (2003, p.320) has argued that “*until 1977 there was a good deal of ambivalence about the primary objective of public policy in relation to lone parents*”.

Poverty was rife at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Marshall, 1975). The problem of poverty was beginning to be tackled by the liberal reforms at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which went some way in attempting to provide alternative provisions for the unemployed, old, sick and children<sup>4</sup> (the four main categories of people who previously had drawn on Poor Law provision). However, provisions to support the unmarried mother were neglected. Provisions for the unmarried mother for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were fairly limited. Those who were not able financially and materially to provide for their child either through employment or support from family and friends would have continued to be eligible for workhouse provisions, through the Poor Law Amendment Act (1834), if deemed as destitute or homeless. The harsh conditions and the stigma of workhouses were meant to deter people from claiming Poor Law assistance (Crowther, 1983), which would have had a profound impact on a birth mother's choice to keep her child.

As a result of humanitarian lobbies concerned with the plight of children orphaned by the First World War and the increasing numbers of illegitimate births and problems associated with illegitimacy, the Hopkinson Commission (1921) was set up to investigate whether it was desirable to make legal provision for the adoption of children. This report was sympathetic to the plight of the unmarried mother as Hopkinson recommended not separating children from their birth families unless it was essential to prevent injury to the child (Reeves, 1993). Hopkinson also suggested that cash allowances should be available for one-parent families which would have given unmarried mothers the financial resources to keep their child (*ibid*). As a result, the Hopkinson report made recommendations to deal with the problem of illegitimacy; however, the report did not result in legislation and was not received well within the Home Office (Cretney, 1998). Teague (1989) has argued that the tone and construction of the report were perceived as naïve. In a conference of Home Office officials in 1921 the report was criticised for not being robust and official gave little or no support to their recommendations (*ibid*). Consequently, conference officials advised not to legalise adoption.

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<sup>4</sup> Only through school meals until the introduction of Family Allowances in 1945 (Glennerster, 2000).

Two years later the Tomlin Committee (1923) was set up to examine the problems of child adoption and to report on the main provisions which should be included in the Bill (O'Halloran, 2009). The Tomlin Report (1923) was important in highlighting abuses by baby farmers and cited cases where baby farmers were found to be receiving payments from birth parents after the child had been adopted, and demanding large amounts of money from adoptive parents (Teague, 1989). The Tomlin Committee then went on to make recommendations for legalising adoption, which included specifications for adopters, inheritance and succession rights and consent issues (Keating, 2001). As a result of these recommendations adoption was legalised in 1926.

Ball (2003) has argued that one of the main policy imperatives behind the introduction of legal adoption was the encouragement of the provision of family life for large numbers of illegitimate children and orphans who would otherwise spend their childhood in institutions. However, Teague (1989, p.69) has argued that the legalisation of adoption was a *“compromise between those seeking to protect vulnerable children by promoting new families and at the same time secure their field of employment and operation, and a powerful but indifferent ruling class who recognised adoption as some threat to lineage”*. The Act stipulated that orders would not bestow adopted children any rights derived from the adoptive family, including inheritance and succession rights, protecting ruling class interests (Teague, 1989; Reeves, 1993). Additionally, protecting vulnerable children was an issue prevalent at the time as the Act provided remedies for the problems generated by baby farming and *de facto* adoptions. The Act also made provisions for parental consent to be dispensed with if the child was abandoned or deserted, or the mother could not be found or was incapable of giving consent, or if the child was neglected or the parents had refused to support the child (Lowe, 2000). Further, the Act made stipulations regarding who were deemed to be appropriate adoptive parents (Teague, 1989).

The Adoption Act of 1926 was a landmark in adoption legislation. In the twenty years that followed the 1926 Act, approximately 166,000 children were subject to adoption

orders<sup>5</sup>. As can be seen from Figure 2.1, in 1927 almost 3,000 children were legally adopted. By 1946, the number of adoptions had risen considerably for that year. Certain contextual factors need to be taken into account here. For example, with the two World Wars illegitimacy rates increased due to many women getting pregnant with servicemen out of wedlock. An estimated 22,000 children were born in England during the Second World War as a result of relationships between British women and American GIs (Baker, 1999).

<b>Figure 2.1: Total Number of Adoptions in England and Wales 1927 – 1946</b>	
<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Adoptions (totals for the year)</b>
1927	2 943
1940	7 775
1946	21 272

Source: Houghton Committee Report (1972) – Appendix B.

Although some adoptions may have been arranged privately by someone known to both parties, adoption agencies were at the forefront in arranging adoptions. Hall and Howes (1965, p.67) have argued that by the 1930s “*slowly the Church was beginning to accept direct responsibility for the work done in its name, and the first steps were taken towards the creation of a central organisation*”. The main concerns of this central organisation were with standards, training, education, propaganda and debating issues of sexual morality, enlightening the clergy about the work and delivering lectures at theological colleges (Spencer, 1985).

Thus, by the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Church was beginning to act as a central body for moral welfare work. The Church, in contrast to individual dioceses, was there in an advisory and educational capacity and it was left up to individual dioceses to set up Mother and Baby homes and arrange legal adoptions. Moral welfare work was also undertaken by other denominations during the same period. The Catholic Church was also instrumental in the development of rescue work, providing residential care for orphaned children and Mother and Baby homes for pregnant mothers, while also

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<sup>5</sup> Figures quoted in the second reading of the 1949 Adoption Act in the Commons by Basil Neild (1949, p.639)

playing a frontline role in the development of adoption by establishing its own adoption agencies (*ibid*).

Arranging adoptions had become a key responsibility of the moral welfare movement by the end of the 1930s, and was undertaken by about 20 Christian voluntary adoption agencies<sup>6</sup>. Many social service organisations have their roots in a religious movement, although some have argued that the on-going influence of religion has been variable (Demerath, Hall, Schmitt, & Williams, 1997)<sup>7</sup>. It may have been practical for moral welfare agencies to continue in the work they began as many moral welfare boards had been carrying out adoptions prior to the legalisation of adoption. Despite the differing religious and political agendas, the problem of illegitimacy was still central to both.

By the late 1930s, adoption agencies became more regulated in an attempt to provide more consistency as to how children were placed for adoption. Changes in adoption legislation were implemented through the 1939 Adoption Agencies Regulation Act. The Act was significant for the operation and development of voluntary adoption agencies. It required all organisations involved in the adoption process to be registered. However, registration was limited to charitable institutions. By ensuring that only charitable institutions registered, this ensured that private individuals who placed children for adoption would not be able to advertise or receive payments (Teague, 1989). However, individuals could still arrange adoptions without exchanging money.

The Act also addressed issues relating to the means that adoption agencies used to assess which children were suitable for adoption and how decisions were made about which children were to be placed with which set of adoptive parents (Lowe, 2000). For example, the Horsburgh Report (1937) commended adoption agencies who looked for mental defects in the mother, and identified cases of dubious parentage. In

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<sup>6</sup> Based on agencies that are registered with the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (2002)

<sup>7</sup> The development of adoption agencies is central to understanding the choices offered to birth mothers and changes in their experiences of adoption over time. Therefore, a fuller discussion of adoption agencies and their changing religious affiliations' (more specifically Family Care, the collaborating partner) will be presented in section 2.7.

cases such as these, the Horsburgh Commission advised “*it is safer that a child about which there is doubt should be placed in an institution or provided for in some other way*” (Horsburgh Report, 1937, Para 36). The policies and practice of adoption agencies during this period reflected a eugenic discourse, which advocated the improvement of human hereditary traits through various forms of intervention (Condit, 1999). This is a different agenda to the one that prompted the legalization of adoption. The unmarried mother was seen as deviant and any illegitimate offspring of hers being of bad blood. It was also perceived that there was a genetic transference of poor morals from mother to child (Reeves, 1993). The Horsburgh Committee was critical of those agencies that were not taking these factors into consideration and recommended that they did so (Teague, 1989). This discourse inevitably affected the practice of adoption agencies in making decisions about which children were placed for adoption and which were deemed unsuitable. Under the 1939 Act, adoption agencies were also required to set up case committees which would enable adoption workers to make informed decisions about which children to accept for adoption and which adoptive parents were suitable. The 1939 Act came into force after the Second World War. Cooperation between local authorities and adoption agencies was encouraged from the 1940s, when the Ministry of Health issued a circular to local authorities urging them to make special provisions for unmarried mothers and their children (Circular 2866, *The Care of the Illegitimate Child*). The Ministry advised the recruitment of a trained worker, experienced in dealing with the problems unmarried mothers faced in keeping their children. However, the response to this circular varied from area to area (Hall and Howes 1965).

In practice, adoptions were practiced under a closed model of adoption. The term ‘closed adoption’ is used to describe a permanent severance of all ties with the birth family (Baron and Pannor, 1988). Closed adoptions encouraged a ‘clean break’. The permanent severance of the mother–child bond was first legitimised through the Adoption Act 1926 and was subsequently reinforced by later pieces of legislation until the late 1970s (Lowe, 2000). The closed model of adoption advocated that once the adoption order had been made, birth parents were not to have any further contact with the child or his/her new family in order to facilitate a ‘new start’ for both the natural parents and the child (Baron and Pannor, 1988). Moreover, there was no provision for access to birth records as there is now. Therefore, under closed



adoptions, it was expected that there would be no contact whatsoever between the birth family and the adopted child/adult (Triseliotis et al., 1997).

Carp (2009), who contests the secrecy in adoption practice during this period, cites evidence from the Horsburgh Report (1937) which condemns adoption societies who “*had the consent form signed before the name and address of the adopters had been inserted or had the names of the adopters covered over*” (2009, p. 27). This suggests that the Horsburgh Report was sympathetic to birth parents needs of knowing the adopters identities. It also suggests that adoption agencies were at the forefront in developing the secrecy in adoption practice. The secrecy in adoption practice during this period was seen to benefit adoptive parents as many were fearful that the birth mother may at a later stage be anxious know with whom their child has been placed with and receive information (*ibid*). Others argue that it was important for the transition of parental rights to remain a secret and adoptive parents could pass off the child as their own to protect themselves from the stigma of being unable to conceive or for raising an illegitimate child (Howe and Feast, 2003). Thus, although in practice adoptions were carried out under a model of it was not until the late 1940s when adoption policy became enshrined in secrecy.

Having now examined the adoption policy context for the period 1926 – 1948, attention will now turn to examining the welfare policy context for this period. It is important to do so in order to understand how far policies were likely to have dealt with the issues birth mothers would have faced throughout this period. Generally speaking, for the most of this period, welfare provisions for the unmarried mother were dealt with through the administration of the Poor Law (see p.15). However, as will be demonstrated throughout the remainder of this section, despite the development of Beveridge’s Welfare State birth mothers’ options for self-support remained limited.

The Poor Law was abolished under the 1948 National Assistance Act and the National Assistance Board was created to assist people whose resources may have been insufficient. Deacon and Bradshaw (1983) have argued that means-tested social assistance played a much greater role in the social security system than Beveridge had originally anticipated. National Assistance was a discretionary means-tested benefit.

Under this piece of legislation, local authorities “*were left the duty of providing residential accommodation, both temporary and permanent, for all persons unable to manage for themselves, either by financing a voluntary organisation or by making the necessary provision*” (Chambers, 1949, p.70). Under the National Assistance Act 1948 local authorities had some responsibility for the provision of accommodation for the elderly, disabled people and for homeless families (Robson et al., 2005). Local Authority Welfare Departments provided temporary accommodation in certain circumstances. However, Davis (2003, p.18) has argued that “*very few homeless single people received help*”. Davis goes on to argue that 60% of local authorities refused to help anyone outside the priority groups, which incidentally would not have included birth mothers. Part III of the Act provided the criteria governing the provision of temporary accommodation. In reality access to temporary accommodation depended on how the means test operated and how discretion was exercised by local authorities. The criteria for temporary accommodation were as follows:

*Temporary accommodation for persons who are in urgent need thereof, being need arising in circumstances which could not reasonably have been foreseen or in such other circumstances as the authority may in particular case determine* (HMSO, 1948, Section 21, para 1)

The key point about the extract above is these provisions were supposed to provide for the ‘*unforeseen and unforeseeable misfortune*’ (i.e. a fire), and not for negligent and foolish action (i.e. foreseeable eviction) (Cowan, 2011, p.147). The National Assistance Board was criticised as “*being able to exercise an unacceptable degree of moral censorship in determining applications for assistance under the Act*” (Robson and Poustie, 1996, p.39). In this context, unmarried birth mothers may have been seen as responsible for their own actions and therefore denied assistance. In actual fact, throughout the 1950s and 1960s there was criticism of housing provisions as inadequate, biased against single persons and single mothers, orientated to the nuclear family (Dobash, 1992). Birth mothers would only have been eligible if living independently. Mothers living at home may well have been ineligible if their parents were earning and on the basis that they were not homeless as they were currently residing in the parental home.

The National Assistance Act also placed a duty on the National Assistance Board to run a national scheme of discretionary means tested benefits (Chambers, 1949). It was perceived by Beveridge that this scheme would fulfil a secondary role in the social security system, *“operating mainly as a safety net for those who were not eligible for one of the comprehensive insurance based benefits”* (Ewing, 1991, p.97). Under this statute, divorced, separated and unmarried mothers if living independently could claim means tested benefits without being required to register for employment (Rummery, Greener and Holden, 2009). The Board who was responsible for processing claims took account of the applicant’s needs and resources. The scale was determined by Parliament at the time. The Board did have discretionary powers to make provisions for top-up benefits to meet special needs in individual cases, such as *“those of an infirm old person who may require an additional allowance to enable him to obtain domestic help or pay for laundry”* (Hall, 2003, p.53). Provisions for emergency cash allowances were also made. These were lump sum payments designed to meet exceptional needs, such as *“clothing, tools to enable an unemployed man to take a particular job, bedding so that a tuberculosis person can sleep alone, or fares to enable parents to visit a child in a distant hospital”* (ibid). Writing at the time, Chambers (1949, p.71) argued that *“the monetary assistance required will vary widely, not only with the persons relieved but also from place to place”*. This suggests that access to such provisions may not have been a realistic option for most birth mothers. Furthermore, the stigma of financial embarrassment continued to be associated with claiming this benefit (Deacon, 1985).

#### **2.4 Policy and Practice Context: 1949 – 1974**

The post-war period was a period of the ‘perfect baby for the perfect couple’ (Shireman, 2003) where adoption became a solution to the problem of infertility (Bean, 1984), although adoption had not ceased to be a solution to unwanted pregnancies for unmarried mothers. Figure 2.2 shows that by 1950 the numbers of adoptions had halved (12,793) from 1946 (21,272). This can probably be explained by an increase in the numbers of children orphaned by the war, subsequently placed for adoption. Despite this post-war decline, from the 1950s until 1968, the numbers of adoptions continue to rise, after which, towards the end of this period we start to see the numbers of adoptions gradually begin to decline.

<b>Figure 2.2: Total Number of Adoptions in England and Wales 1927 – 1998</b>	
<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Adoptions (totals for the year)</b>
1946	21 272
1950	12 739
1960	15 099
1968	24 831
1970	22 373

Source: Houghton Committee Report (1972) – Appendix B.

Lawton (1950), argued that *'by 1949, when war conditions had caused an extension both of the practice of adoption and the scope of its problems, several changes in the law were overdue'* (1950, p.51). The Adoption of Children Act 1949 was an important milestone in adoption policy and practice for several reasons. Firstly, this statute laid down time frames for consent and adoption orders. One of the hotly contested issues in Parliament during the late 1940s and early 1950s was concerned with the length of time a birth mother should have to consent and then change her mind over adoption. The reasoning behind this was to *'protect adoptive parents from the unnecessary pain'* (Levy, 1949, p.677) of separation if the birth mother changed her mind. Birth mothers could not consent to the adoption of her child until six weeks after the birth as it was felt this was the minimum time needed for the birth mother to make an informed decision (Teague, 1989). Additionally, adoptive parents could not apply for an adoption order until at least three months after the child had been placed with them, during which time the birth mother had the right to *'reclaim'* the child (Lowe, 2000).

Secondly, it further reinforced the permanent severance of the mother-child bond, and enshrined adoption practice in secrecy. For instance, it was under this statute that adopters' identities were to be concealed by serial numbers (Teague, 1989). This reinforces the assertion by Carp (2009) that some birth mothers may have known the identities of adopters prior to this law being enforced. Additionally, the Act stipulated that if the birth mother had withdrawn her consent to adoption on the grounds that she did not know of the adopter's identity, this consent was deemed unreasonably withheld, thus reinforcing the secrecy in practice and a permanent severance of links with the birth family (Teague, 1989).

Finally, under the 1949 legislation, the interests of the child began to be recognised. By the late 1940s, we begin to see a push for adoption law to become more child centred (Stone, 1955). To encourage a more child centred approach to adoption, the 1949 Adoption Act stated that *Guardian ad litem*<sup>8</sup> were to be appointed in every adoption case to represent the child's interest during the adoption process. But even with these provisions in place, the child was not always the paramount consideration in placement decisions. The Hurst Committee (1954) highlighted problems with the Adoption Act 1949. Hurst illustrated this point by presenting a case where a doctor had written to a voluntary adoption agency asking for a child to be made available for adoption for a particular couple, which meant that the adopters' needs were put before the best interests of the child, a situation illustrated in the quotation below (quoted in Stone, 1955, pp. 275- 76):

*Mrs. X tells me that her husband threatens to leave her unless another baby is forthcoming and adoption is the only way. I feel myself that, although the home is not ideal, a baby might go a long way to settle down the whole family and without itself suffering in the process.*

This case portrays adoption as a service that provided children for infertile couples, without any guarantee for what was in the best interests of the child. Such cases suggested the need for better qualified *Guardian ad litem*s. The Hurst Report (1954) also found that adoption orders were being granted to unsuitable adopters and the work of untrained or poorly trained *Guardian ad litem*s was also criticised. Hurst explains this point further in this quotation below.

*We have had evidence about cases where adoption orders have been granted to unsuitable adopters, and it was clear that an unskilled Guardian ad litem had failed in his duty to investigate all the circumstances of the case and report them to the court.....some courts are satisfied by reports which contain little information in support of the recommendation of the guardian ad litem (1954, p.25).*

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<sup>8</sup> A Guardian ad litem is a person appointed by the court and entrusted with powers to initiate legal proceedings on behalf of a minor or an incompetent adult to safeguard their interests and represent them in law suits and legal formalities.

Subsequent legislative changes in this period came with the Adoption of Children Act 1958 which consolidated previous adoption statutes. The Act was largely based on the recommendations of the Hurst committee (1954) and made changes to the law governing the consent of natural parents, qualifications of adopters, adoption procedure and the procedure used in cases where the adoption is disputed (Stone, 1955). The 1958 Adoption Act also remedied the problems of untrained *Guardian ad litem*s, as discussed above, by stipulating that *Guardian ad litem*s were to be a children's officer, assistant children's officer<sup>9</sup> or a probation officer. Further, the Act also gave local authorities power to arrange adoptions without having received the child into its care<sup>10</sup>, which meant that voluntary adoption agencies no longer monopolised the arrangement of such adoptions (O'Halloran, 2009).

During this time the majority of adoptive parents sought to adopt babies; older children, children with mild or severe forms of disability and mixed heritage children who were offered for adoption were often branded as un-adoptable (McWhinne, 1967). The fate of these children often lay in foster homes or children's homes, run by both the public and voluntary sectors (Rowe and Lambert, 1972). This indicates that there was a certain level of social prejudice against the adoption of such children. Values associated with the social hygiene movements are relevant here. Concerns about 'bad blood' and the genetic transference of poor morals from mother to child (Reeves, 1993) created a criterion by which children were assessed on their suitability for adoption. Triseliotis (1969) has argued that until the 1930s, it was mainly the working class who were encouraged to adopt as it was thought they were not too concerned with ideas about 'bad blood' and poor heredity. Reeves (1993) has argued discourses about bad blood and poor heredity were concerned with preserving the class structure; she argues the "*transference of children between classes was, within official discourse, unthinkable*" (1993, p.413). After the Second World War, attitudes towards heredity and 'bad blood' began to change where adoption became almost the exclusive preoccupation of childless middle class couples (Triseliotis, 1989).

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<sup>9</sup> A children's officer/assistant Children's officer would have been employed through the Children's Department or through an appointed *Guardian ad litem* for each adoption agency.

<sup>10</sup> Local Authorities were initially granted the authority to arrange adoptions under the Children Act (1948).

The findings of research studies in the 1950s and 1960s were pessimistic about the long-term effects on children of deprivation or separation early in life. Bowlby's 'maternal deprivation' theory (1951) stipulated that breaking the maternal bond with the child during the early years of life was likely to have serious effects on its intellectual, social, and emotional development. Bowlby (1951) also claimed that many of the negative effects of maternal deprivation are permanent and irreversible. Triseliotis has argued that "*as a result child care workers were discouraged from placing older children for adoptions because the separation trauma was thought to be irreversible*" (1989, p.23). This theory proved very influential in the field of adoption. It was seen as best practice if the child was placed with the adoptive parents as soon as possible so the child was able to form that maternal bond with its adoptive family; this was further reinforced in adoption legislation<sup>11</sup>. However, later studies (Clarke and Clarke, 1976; Tizzard, 1977; Triseliotis and Russell, 1984) challenged this theory as results showed that child development was an on-going process and, provided the negative experiences were not reinforced and new positive experiences were secured, children could overcome many early negative experiences (Triseliotis, 1989).

During this period, a great deal of effort was put into matching infants and parents to create a family as much like a biological one as possible (Goodacre, 1966). However, research indicated that the importance attached to matching varied from agency to agency. Goodacre found that the interpretation of what matching actually meant was subjective, even amongst those working for the same agency. He revealed that "*none of the statutory or voluntary agencies reviewed were able to provide a formal policy statement on matching*" (1966, p.55). Goodacre's research highlighted that although there were few acknowledged criteria, the religion of the adoptive parents and the birth parents were important:

*Even where the natural mothers had not exercised their right to specify their child's religious upbringing, all the children in the sample had been placed in homes where the adopter's religion and that of the natural mother was the*

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<sup>11</sup> 1949 Adoption Act and 1958 Adoption Act

*same, although not necessarily of the same denomination.* (Goodacre, 1966, p.56).

Goodacre's study of adoption agencies indicated that other factors were taken into consideration when matching the backgrounds of the birth and prospective adoptive parents. These factors included educational qualifications, job attainment, material circumstances and social class. However, matching policies were not as successful as had been originally thought. Ryan (1996) has argued that "*it was the poor, the sick and others deemed inadequate who gave up their children for adoption and those who gained them were primarily from the middle classes*" (1996, p.4). Ryan's claims are evident in Goodacre's data on birth parents' and adoptive parents' social class backgrounds, which shows that birth parents were likely to come from a lower social class than adoptive parents. For instance, a fifth (20%) of children of mothers from social class backgrounds IV and V were placed with adoptive parents from social class I. A tenth of children of mothers from social class backgrounds IV and V were placed with adoptive parents from social class II. However, a much larger proportion of children of mothers from social classes IV and V were placed with adoptive parents from social classes III and IV (59%).

It is important to note that social class classifications in Goodacre's study are based on the occupations of the male head in the household, which in the case of birth mothers would have been the birth mother's father. Nevertheless, Goodacre's analysis suggests that although agencies made some attempt to match the social backgrounds of birth parents and adoptive parents, it was not as successful as had been originally thought. It is also important to note that Goodacre's study was based on a small sample of adoption agencies and local authorities and thus cannot be said to be representative of the general population of adoption agencies in operation in the 1960s. Nevertheless, this is an issue where data collected from Family Care's archives will be able to provide further insights. The criteria by which adoption agencies matched children with adoptive parents also needs further attention. By doing so, it is possible to understand the extent to which adoption agencies' developing mission, operations, thoughts and practices were an influencing force in shaping birth mothers' experiences of adoption.



By the 1960s, local authorities became responsible for maternity and child welfare and were encouraged to co-operate with and reinforce the work of voluntary moral welfare associations (Howe, 1965). As a result, by the 1960s relationships between moral welfare associations and local authorities were slowly beginning to develop. Howe (1965, p.186) goes on to explain that “*some authorities employ their own social workers and have their own Mother and Baby homes, but the majority leave the work to voluntary organisations,*” indicating that moral welfare agencies were still playing a crucial role in providing services for birth mothers. Nevertheless, these developments amounted to a further growth in the influence of the public sector on adoption practice; suggesting the public sector provided the regulatory framework in which third sector organisations continued to operate.

The welfare policy context also changed throughout the period of 1949 – 1974, impacting on provisions for lone mothers. These policy changes had important implications in the provision of alternative options for birth mothers, namely self-support. State support for unmarried mothers began to change in the late 1960s when the Social Security Act abolished National Assistance and replaced it with Supplementary Benefits. Ewing (1991) has argued that “*by the time National Assistance was replaced by Supplementary Benefit in 1966, the number of people in receipt had risen from 800,000 in 1948 to over 2,000,000 in 1966, partly as a result of the low rate of insurance benefit but in part also because of the increasing number of claimants such as single mothers for whom there were no appropriate insurance benefit*” (p.97). The National Assistance Board became the Supplementary Benefits Commission which operated a system of means-tested, non-contributory benefits and allowances (see Smith and Hoath, 1975; ch.4 for further details). Essentially Supplementary Benefit was sharply distinguished from National Insurance benefits (Unemployment, Sickness and Invalidity Benefits) by the basis of entitlement, which in the case of Supplementary Benefits was the claimant’s need assessed by a means test, but for National Insurance was the claimant’s contribution record. Thus, for unmarried mothers their entitlement to National Insurance benefits would have depended on how much they had been able to contribute to National Insurance through employment. However, the means test in assessing entitlement to Supplementary Benefits would have provided a more realistic level of entitlement, especially for birth mothers who had been largely economically inactive.

The key point about the 1966 Act is that Supplementary Benefits generated a greater sense of entitlement, partly because eligibility was assessed against fixed national scales, but also because single parents were eligible for the more generous long-term rates. (See Marshall, 1975, p.119 for further details of how the rate of benefit was calculated). The additional weekly payments or lump sum grants were appropriate to cover the cost of large items such as cots and prams. However, its scope, operating principles and generosity have varied enormously. Picton (1975), in a study examining the training of a Supplementary Benefits Officer, found that *“differences in interpretation between regions and between local offices within regions showed how policy that appears clear and unequivocal at the top, passes through a series of filters before it emerges at the bottom, often transformed”* (p.45).

As we move into the 1970s, the benefit regime started to change, as did the levels of welfare support for lone mothers. For instance, the Finer Committee of 1970 recommended a number of changes be made to the tax and benefit system which sought to recognise the extra cost of bringing up a child alone (Bradshaw, 2003). As a result, one-parent benefit was introduced for the first child in a lone parent family. In addition a Tapered Earnings Disregard (a proportion of part-time earnings not taken into account in the means test) was introduced to encourage lone parents to supplement their benefit income with part time earnings (*ibid*).

The Rent Act (1965) introduced a formal rent regulation procedure to cover unfurnished rented properties in the private sector. The 1965 Act embodied the notion of ‘fair rents’, security of tenure provisions, and a statutory control system for future regulation of rents. Since 1965, rent control measures have been progressively extended and following the introduction of the Rent Act (1974), rent registration and full security of tenure provisions were extended to the previously relatively uncontrolled ‘furnished’ sector (Albon and Stafford, 1987). Additionally, people on very low incomes became entitled to rent and rate rebates under the Housing Finance Act 1972, which may have made independent housing a realistic option for birth mothers. Under this Act, rents were determined using the concept of ‘fair rent’ innovated in the private sector by the 1965 Rent Act. Fair rents were to be initially estimated by the local housing authorities by their final determination was to be the

responsibility of Rent Scrutiny Boards (Merrett, 1979). With respect to subsidies, the essential feature was that any difference between reckonable housing revenue account expenditure and income would be met by the Exchequer and the local rate fund in prescribed proportions (*ibid*). Under the Act of 1972 both private and council housing was bought under the ‘fair rent’ system (Marshall, 1975, p.88). Although ‘fair rents’ were perceived to control the rising cost of renting, it realistically meant that levels of increases were controlled and “*this must increase, not reduce, the number of families unable to pay their rent without the help of a rebate. Rent rebates imposed a statutory obligation on councils to reduce the rent for low income families*” (*ibid*). Most significantly, this scheme allowed claimants to continue claiming supplementary benefits without any change in the levels of benefits they received (Smith and Hoath, 1975). Thus, for the first time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the option of self-support became a realistic one for birth mothers.

In summary, this period saw important developments in adoption policy and welfare reforms. Adoption laws were significant in legalising the secrecy in adoptions, and reinforcing the severance of links with the birth family. Throughout this period there is a change of emphasis in adoption from adoption being a solution to the problems caused by illegitimacy to providing ‘perfect children’ for infertile couples. Further, values related to the social hygiene and eugenics discourses, and theories relating to maternal deprivation continue to influence adoption policy and practice, automatically excluding older children and children with mental and physical health problems leaving large numbers of children without any plans for permanence. This begins to change from the mid-1970s, reasons for which will be explored in the subsequent section. Finally, changes in welfare support during this period would have been important in providing mothers with some financial assistance, should they have wanted to keep the child. However, it is important not to give too much precedence to these reforms, since birth mothers may have faced other obstacles, such as finding suitable housing and childcare.

## **2.5 Policy and Practice Context: 1975 – Present**

The context in which adoption policy and practice evolved significantly changes from the mid-1970s, as does the level of welfare support available to lone mothers.

Generally speaking, during this period we see the purpose of adoption changing, a greater emphasis is placed on child welfare and important developments are made in the area of intermediary and post-adoption services. These three areas will now be examined further.

<b>Figure 2.3: Total Number of Adoptions in England and Wales 1975 – 1998</b>	
<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Adoptions (totals for the year)</b>
1975	21 299
1980	10 609
1990	6 533
2000	4 940
2005	5 558
2010	4 472

Source: a) 1975 – 1990: Marriage, Divorce and Adoption statistics (ONS, 1999). Quoted in Lowe (2000, p.314). b) 2000 – 2005: Marriage, Divorce and Adoption statistics (ONS, 2009). C) 2010: Adoptions in England and Wales, 2010 (ONS, 2011)

From the 1970s, the numbers of babies being offered for adoption begins to steadily decline (see Figure 2.3). The adoption of babies is rare today. For instance, as can be seen from Figure 2.4 the percentage number of children aged under 1 was small in proportion to the total numbers of adoptions for the year. National Statistics (ONSb, 2007) shows that only 6% of children adopted during 1995 were under the age of 1. This figure has continued to decrease during the past decade, with just 2% of children under the age of 1 were adopted during 2010 (BAAF, 2010).

<b>Figure 2.4: Age of children adopted 1995 – 2005</b>										
<b>Year</b>	<b>Ages of Children</b>									
	<b>Under 1</b>		<b>1-4</b>		<b>5-9</b>		<b>10-14</b>		<b>15-17</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
1995	322	5.5	1 493	26	2 215	38	1 435	25	322	5.5
1997	225	4	1 606	30	1 914	36	1 265	24	297	6
2000	251	5	2 019	42	1 549	31	906	18	215	4
2003	183	4	2 260	47	1 503	31	683	14	189	4
2005	223	4	2 915	52	1 561	28	684	12	199	4

Source: ONS, (2007b) *Marriage, Divorce and Adoption Statistics Series FM2 No.2*

This is further reinforced by rates of relinquishment by mothers of their children in more contemporary times. As can be seen from Figure 2.5<sup>12</sup> below, since the mid-1970s the percentage number of children born outside of marriage who are then subsequently relinquished to adoption has significantly declined. The figures presented in the table show that in the period 1975 – 1980 the numbers of unmarried mothers relinquishing their children to adoption had less than halved (from 20% to 9%). The figures also show that only a very small minority of unmarried mothers relinquish their children to adoption today (1% in 2008). This suggests that increasing numbers of single mothers are choosing to keep their babies rather than relinquish them to adoption.

<b>Figure 2.5: Percentage number of children born outside marriage who are placed for adoption</b>			
	<b>Live birth rate for children born outside marriage</b> <sup>(1) (2)</sup>	<b>Children born outside marriage, placed for adoption</b> <sup>(3)</sup>	<b>Percentage of children placed for adoption</b>
<b>1975</b>	54 891	11 179	20%
<b>1980</b>	77 372	6 074	9%
<b>1985</b>	126 250	4 175	3%
<b>1990</b>	199 999	4 006	2%
<b>1992</b>	215 225	4 247	1.9%
<b>1994</b>	215 536	3 694	1.7%
<b>1996</b>	232 663	3 605	1.5%
<b>1998</b>	240 611	2 941	1.2%
<b>2000</b>	238 605	3 654	1.5%
<b>2002</b>	242 032	3 960	1.6%
<b>2004</b>	269 724	3 880	1.4%
<b>2006</b>	291 376	4 134	1.4%
<b>2008</b>	320 781	4 106	1.2%

Sources:

- (1) 1990 – 1998: ONS, 2000. *Birth statistics*, Series FM1 no.28.
- (2) 2002 – 2008: ONS, 2008. *Birth statistics*, Series FM1 no.37.
- (3) ONS, 2011b. Historical Adoption Tables 1974 – 2010.

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<sup>12</sup> More details of historical trends in the numbers of children born outside of marriage, who are then placed for adoption, would have been insightful here. However, adoption statistics for children born outside of marriage only date back to 1974.

Triseliotis et al. (1997) have attributed the declining number of baby adoptions to a number of factors including the use of new and more effective contraceptive methods and the legalisation of abortion. Official Statistics (ONS, 1998, p.9) show that since abortion was legalised in 1968, there has been a steady rise in the numbers of abortions being requested (from 25,000 in 1968 to 170,000 in 1997). They also show that in 1968 almost equal numbers of single and married women were having abortions (46.8% - single women, 43.9% - married women). However, by 1997 there were larger proportions of single women requesting abortions than married women (64.8% - single women, 20.1% - married women). Bowie (2004, p.263) has argued that although the decline in adoption “*coincides with the liberalisation of abortion laws in 1967, the increasing reluctance of unmarried mothers to relinquish their children also reflects greater support for single parents and an increase in non-marital cohabitation – a growing proportion of extra-marital pregnancies were planned or accepted and those which were unwanted tended to end in a termination*”.

Additionally, wider use of contraceptive practices since the 1970s has meant that unwanted pregnancies can be avoided. Fisher (2006), who has provided a historical account of contraceptive practice, has argued that “*the changes in contraceptive behaviour during the course of the twentieth century are seen as revolutionary*” (2006, p.1). However, neither of these factors appears to have had much impact on the teenage pregnancy rate. The fact remains that, despite the advent of easily available contraception and abortion, the birth rate among single young women is as high as ever, yet hardly any of them want to have their babies adopted. For instance, as can be seen from Figure 2.5, the live birth rate for children born outside marriage has generally increased. Yet, fewer numbers of women are relinquishing their children to adoption. This suggests that the explanation for the declining popularity of adoption lies beyond the availability of contraception and abortion.

Today, the majority of children who are adopted are of children from the care system. For example, of the total numbers of adoptions for 2009 (4,655) (ONS, 2010), 71% of these were adoptions of children from the care system (3,300) (DCSF, 2009). Trends for year 2000 – 2010 are further detailed in Figure 2.6.

<b>Figure 2.6: Total Number of Adoptions of Children from the Care System in England 2000 – 2010</b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Adoptions (totals for the year) (1)</b>	<b>Children Adopted from the Care System (2)</b>	
		<b>Number of adoptions</b>	<b>Percentage of total adoptions</b>
2000	5 086	2 700	53
2002	5 486	3 400	62
2004	5 372	3 800	71
2006	4 765	3 700	78
2008	4 939	3 180	65
2010	4 472	3 200	72

Sources:

(1) 2000 – 2006: Marriage, Divorce and Adoption statistics (ONS, 2009). 2008 - 2010: Adoptions in England and Wales, 2010 (ONS, 2011).

(2) 2000- 2010: Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2010 (DfE, 2010)

Adoption policy and practice has changed to accommodate the types of children who are available for adoption. In more recent years we have seen a higher level of political involvement in adoption. For example, the National Adoption Standards were the result of Tony Blair’s request for a study as part of a major review of the adoption of looked after children<sup>13</sup> (PIU, 2000). The Performance and Innovation Unit’s primary purpose was to address whether there should be more use of adoption as an option for looked after children and whether the process could be improved in the interests of children. Overall, the report concluded that the government *should* promote an increase in adoption for looked after children to provide stable environments for children in care to grow up in. The PIU report states “*given the changes to the population of looked after children, and especially the indications of a rising level of need, promoting more adoption will involve finding more families for increasingly vulnerable children*” (PIU, 2001, p.14). This undoubtedly raises questions about the current care system and its potential to meet the needs of children today. More generally, these developments raise questions about the changing purpose of adoption.

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<sup>13</sup> Looked after children refers to children who are in the care of the local authority.

Another important change in adoption policy and practice during this period is concerned with the on-going development of child welfare discourses. Although we began to see 'child welfare' discourses emerging as early as the late 1940s with the introduction of the *Guardian ad litem* under the Adoption Act 1949, it did not become a prominent issue until the 1970s. Parton (1991, p.3) states that "*discourses are developed, which can be understood as 'historical and political frameworks of social organization that make some social actions possible whilst precluding others'*". A push for a child welfare discourse within child care policy and practice became increasingly prominent by the 1970s. This was due to a number of factors. Firstly, during the 1970s empirical research revealed that there were a large number of children who were in institutions or in unstable fostering arrangements without a realistic prospect of returning home (Rowe and Lambert, 1973). These children were often branded as unsuitable for adoption because they were older than the age of two, had slight or severe mental or physical difficulties or came from a mixed heritage background (Triseliotis et al., 1997). The explanation for discarding so many children as un-adoptable was because it was perceived that adopters would not be interested in them, yet when adopters were told in the 1970s and 1980s what children were available, they responded far more positively than was anticipated (Triseliotis, 1989). Secondly, the national press had picked up on cases where children had been fostered out, in some cases for a number of years, after which the mother had attempted to reclaim the child. Davis (1973) illustrates this point further.

*Not many people were aware of the deficiencies rife in this field of law until the summer of 1970 when the daily newspapers reported a number of instances of children being forcibly re-united with their parents. One particular case infuriated public opinion. It was the case of nine year old Jeanette Bartlett whose picture appeared in many daily newspapers and on television as she was forcibly taken from the foster mother who had cared for her for all but six months of the child's life. Jeanette was being returned to her natural mother who, having re-married, was "collecting" her six children who had been placed in foster homes some years before. The public were horrified at the "inhumanity" of the law (1973, p.245).*



The extract above shows that because parental rights had not been extinguished, Jeanette's parents were able to remove her from foster care. This issue may have been a possible problem for many children who were in fostering arrangements and were faced with the prospect of being reclaimed by their natural parents, despite initially being removed from the care of their natural parent(s).

Parton (1991) explored discourses of child protection and child welfare in an historical context and argued that "*a disease model of understanding and responding to 'child abuse' was developed in the United Kingdom (and elsewhere) during the 1970s and 1980s, in the context of a series of high profile public inquiries into child abuse deaths*" (p.660). The plight of fostered out children was further reinforced with the publicity surrounding the horrific death of Maria Colwell by her stepfather in 1973 (Davis, Finlay, and Bullman, 2000). Cases such as these created a public outcry against how children were being treated. In situations such as these, adoption was seen as the best solution as it would provide some form of long-term security for the child and could also extinguish the rights of the natural parents, thereby solving the problem of natural parents reclaiming children after a lack of contact and also perhaps preventing future child abuse.

As a result, after the 1970s we see a greater emphasis on decisions where the interests of the child were the primary consideration. More generally adoption practice became more child centred (Cullen and Lane, 2001). From the mid-1970s, all childcare legislation along with adoption legislation was driven by the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child (Lowe, 2002). The Children Act 1975 was crucial in establishing the primacy of the child's welfare in adoption proceedings, as the decisions of adoption agencies and the courts must '*have regard to all the circumstances, first consideration being given to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child throughout its childhood*' (Children Act, 1975, s3). This was further reinforced in the Adoption Act 1976 (s6).

The Children Act 1989 built upon statutory instruments governing the review processes for children in care that emphasised the rights of children to be heard in decision-making (Aldgate and Stratham, 2001). It addresses a wide range of issues concerning parents and children. Amongst some of the changes brought about by the

Children Act 1989, one of the most significant was the strengthening of children's rights through further guidelines to ensure that the child's welfare was paramount in all decisions about its future (HMSO, 1989). It aimed to develop more positive attitudes and support for families and to create more effective powers to protect children, while safeguarding parental interests and encouraging parental responsibility (Osmond, 1992).

The most significant changes brought about by this statute were those that changed the concept of parental rights, which was replaced by parental responsibility. The Act defines parental responsibility as '*all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his property*' (HMSO, C41, s3, 1). Kent perceived the Act would "*pose major problems for childcare agencies, who have formerly been possessed of considerable control over the lives of children and their families*" (1990, p.69). The emphasis on parental responsibility had implications for issues of consent. Thus, the 1989 Act reversed the state-centred protectionist trend of the mid-1970s and reasserted the rights of birth parents to at least some degree.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 aligns adoption law with the relevant provisions of the Children Act 1989 to ensure the welfare of the child as the paramount consideration in all decisions relating to the child's adoption (DOH, 2000a), wellbeing and future (Eekelaar and Dingwall, 1990; Hughes and Lewis, 1990). These changes are also evident in the values which underpin the National Adoption Standards where, "*the child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process; the child's wishes and feelings will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages*" (DoH, 2001a, p.13).

From the 1970s, important changes are also made in the development of intermediary and post-adoption services, specifically with the introduction of the Children Act 1975 and Adoption Act 1976 (Lowe, 2000). Access to birth records was recommended by the Hurst Committee as early as 1954; however, it did not become law until the 1970s, when the Houghton Committee (1972) took note of emerging research findings (Sants, 1964; McWhinne, 1967). The work of McWhinne (1967) and Triseliotis (1973) was especially significant in highlighting the importance of the

knowledge of origins in the development of identity. Triseliotis (1973) in his study *'In Search of Origins'* found the absence of such information and detail led to greater confusion and uncertainty surrounding the adopted person's identity. Kornitzer (1971) has argued:

*Background knowledge of one's family is like baby food – it is literally fed to a person as part of the normal nourishment that builds up his mental and emotional structure and helps the person to become acquainted with what he is so that he can seize his inheritance for himself* (1971, p.65).

However, not all studies support this conclusion, as some researchers were still advocating severing contacts with birth parents on the grounds that contact would impede the attachment process with the adoptive parents (Goldstein, Freud and Solnit, 1973: 1980).

The Houghton Report (1972), recommended that adopted adults over the age of 18 should be given access to their birth records; *"the weight of the evidence as a whole was in favour of freer access to background information, and this accords with our wish to encourage greater openness about adoption"* (1972, p.85). The Report was also important in laying the responsibility of post-adoption support for adopted adults with the agency that had arranged their adoption or local authority in which they live;

*We therefore suggest that all adopted adults who apply either in person or in writing to either of the two General Register Offices for access to their original birth records should be advised, at the time the original birth certificate is handed to them, that if they would like further help or information, the agency which arranged the adoption or the social services department in whose area they live would be willing to discuss the matter with them* (1972, p.83).

This recommendation by Houghton was enacted in the Children Act 1975 and was reinforced in the Adoption Act 1976 and paved the way for developments in intermediary services and post-adoption work. An amendment made to the Adoption Act 1976, under the Children Act 1989, meant that an Adoption Contact Register was

established, which allowed adopted people and birth parents to register their willingness for contact (DOH, 1991a). However, the need for post-adoption services for the adopted adult was recognised far sooner than the need for services for the birth mother. It is only since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that the Government has issued various guidelines to assist practitioners and professionals to set up suitable post-adoption support for birth families (DOH, 2000a and b; DOH, 2003; DOH, 2005). For example, the circular issued by the Department of Health entitled ‘Intermediary Services for Birth Parents’ (DOH, 2000b) is an important circular in that it provides guidelines and information for practitioners in providing intermediary services for birth parents, including locating the adopted person and/or adoptive family, acting as an intermediary, the impact of a birth relative enquiry, different stages in the process of reunion and advice on working with complex situations, dilemmas and issues. Further, within government circulars it is now acknowledged that adoption does have life-long implications, for example, The National Adoption Standards for England (DOH, 2001a, p.23) states *“birth parents and families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoptions. They will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process”*.

The National Adoption Standards for England also states that birth parents should have access to a range of services, including access to an independent support worker, a professional who is independent of the adoption process, and access to a range of services before and after the adoption, including information about local and national support groups. Further, the introduction of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 provides an important opportunity for adoption agencies to deliver appropriate support for birth families. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 ensures the right of birth relatives to request an assessment of their adoption support needs (DfES, 2004b) and request intermediary services. This is a significant development for birth mothers as this allows adoption agencies to contact an adopted adult to ascertain his/her views about renewed contact or communication, or an update of information with a specified birth relative (DfES, 2004a).

Changes in the purpose and context of adoptions have meant there has been a greater need for post-adoption work. We have gradually seen adoption policy shift from

advocating adoptions based on the practice of closed adoptions, which advocated a permanent severance of all ties with the birth family, to that of open adoptions, which leave open the possibility of the child retaining links with its birth family (Triseliotis et al., 1997). Today, the need for openness and a general awareness by children of their birth family runs through all adoption practice, from the recruitment and preparation of prospective adoptive parents to the provision of post-adoption services (Howe and Feast, 2003). Retrospectively, this discourse is influenced by earlier research carried out on tracing origins and the need for adopted adults to know their origins (Sants, 1964; McWhinne, 1967; Triseliotis, 1973).

The openness in adoption is also a response to the changing nature and purpose of adoption. The changing demographic profile of children being placed for adoption has also contributed towards openness and contact in adoption. As noted earlier, prior to the 1970s, the majority of children being placed for adoption were babies (Lowe, 2000). However, today there are larger numbers of children from the care system being placed for adoption (DCSF, 2008). In many of these cases, children may have already established relationships with members of their birth families; therefore to banish these relationships may not be in the best interests of the child. The circumstances of children who are adopted today differ considerably from those of children offered for adoptions fifty years ago, leading to doubts about the appropriateness of the closed model of adoption. Fratter (1989; 19) has argued:

*It became increasingly apparent during the early 1980s that in extending the range of children for whom adoption was deemed appropriate, practitioners had also to question the philosophy and practice underpinning the traditional model.*

Since the early 1980s we have seen a growing professional and academic interest in the notion of 'open' adoptions. Research has now become more directed towards openness and contact in adoption (Blanton and Descher, 1990; Dominick, 1988; Van Keppel, 1991; Fratter, 1991; Hughes, 1995; Iwanek, 1987; McRoy et al., 1988; Quinton et al., 1998; Neil, 2002; Neil, 2003), although evidence about the impact of such arrangements is still emerging. The benefits of openness in adoptions are certainly a contested area. Some studies have provided evidence of the benefits of

such practices, others studies have heavily criticised openness model (see Brodzinsky, 2005 for a fuller discussion). For example, numerous studies of children in both foster and adoptive homes suggest that for older children, continuing contact with families of origin is a protective rather than a destabilising factor (Fratter, 1991, 1996; Borland et al., 1991; Wedge and Mantle, 1991; Ryburn, 1994). Others have argued that “*the customary severance of all links between adopted child and birth parents is by no means necessary for the best interests of the child, nor for that matter, in the best interests of either birth parents or adoptive parents*” (Howell and Ryburn. 1987, p88). However, there are problems with such studies as they are often small scale, so generalisations are often difficult (e.g. Hall, 1991; Beek, 1994; Stone, 1994; Hughes, 1995).

Openness in adoption relates to openness in contact as well as openness in adoption practice. For example, Howell and Ryburn (1987) describe how birth parents are able to choose adoptive parents through access to a family profile completed by the prospective adoptive parents. Additionally, birth mothers have more option and choices in the arrangement of adoption. For example, “*in open models of adoption, birth parents and adoptive families can choose what information to share before and after placement, the birth parents may exercise a degree of choice regarding the adoptive placement, the two sets of parents may meet before placement, and subsequently, on a one off or on-going basis, maintain contact through letters via the agency or by face to face meetings*” (Fratter, 1989, p.19).

Another element of openness in adoption practice is contact between birth relatives and the adopted child and/or the adoptive parents. There are several variations of openness. Argent (1987) describes ‘open adoption’ as “*a whole range of situations, from occasional, formal, supervised contact between a birth parent and child to free, frequent and informal visits between birth and adoptive families. An open adoption can be technically open and enshrine access while closing every emotional door. Or there can be an emotional openness without any access at all*” (Argent, 1987, p.22). In an American study of openness in adoption, McRoy (1988) identified 33 categories of openness. Thus, the wide variety of post-adoption arrangements makes it difficult to categorise patterns of contact in a meaningful way and to draw firm conclusions from the views reported (Hughes, 1995). In a more recent study of contact in

adoption, Henney et al. (2004, p.30) identified nine categories of openness, ranging from ‘*confidential*’ openness, where no information is shared between the birth family/child/adoptive parents beyond six months post-placement to ‘*fully disclosed on-going*’ openness arrangements, where the parties are or have shared identifying information and/or contact directly. The nine categories of openness identified by Henney et al. are detailed in Figure 2.7

<b>Figure 2.7: Categories of Openness Definitions</b>	
<b>Type of contact</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Confidential	No information is shared between triad members beyond six months post-placement. Any information shared before the six months is non-identified.
Confidential with updates	Information is given to update agency files after placement, and this information is not necessarily intended for current transmission.
Mediated stopped	Any contact has stopped for at least 1 year past the point when it normally should have occurred. Before the stop, all contact was arranged through the agency or agency personnel and occurred beyond six months after placement. Information shared was intended for the other party and was perceived as received
Mediated stopped with updates	All criteria for mediated stopped adoptions are met, plus file updates have occurred at the agency.
Mediated paused	Contact has occurred through the agency, but there has been a temporary cessation of a regular pattern of contact without an agreement or a conscious decision to stop.
Mediated ongoing	Contact is occurring through the agency. Contact should be reciprocal or one-way only. The party sending believes the information is being received, and the party receiving believes it was transmitted with the other party’s knowledge and approval.
Fully disclosed stopped	The parties have shared identifying information and/or contact directly, without agency mediation. The same rules for stopped contact that apply to mediated cases apply here.
Fully disclosed paused	The parties have shared identifying information and/or contact directly, without agency mediation. The same rules for paused contact that apply to mediated cases.
Fully disclosed ongoing	The parties are or have shared identifying information and/or contact directly, without agency mediation.

Source: adapted from Henney et al., 2004, p.30

Figure 2.7 demonstrates the different levels of contact that can be maintained with birth families. Generally, there are two forms of contact: direct contact which relates

to some face-to-face contact; and indirect contact which relates to the regular exchange of letters and photos (also known as letterbox contact), often mediated through the agency (Hughes, 1995). Fratter (1991) examined the contact arrangements of 32 children with special needs found a wide range of patterns of direct and indirect contact. In a Department of Health (1995) study, thirty agencies reported on post-adoption contact arrangements for 371 children who had been placed for adoption between 1993 –1994. Direct contact with birth family members was less common (52 children - 14%) than indirect contact (155 children - 41%). The study also reported both direct and indirect contact for a small number of children (49 - 13%) and no contact for 115 children (31%). Other studies also suggest that face-to-face or direct contact seems to be the less commonly practiced (Neil 2000, 2002, 2009)<sup>14</sup>.

Adoption agencies play an important role in the development of post-adoption contact plans with birth families and adoptive parents (Neil, 2003; Logan 2010). The Adoption of Children Act 2002 places duties on local authorities to ensure greater consistency and quality of service in adoption support as well as in care planning, and specifies that contact issues have to be thoroughly explored prior to the making of an adoption order. More specifically, the Adoption Support Services Regulations (2003) give birth relatives the right to request an assessment of need regarding contact arrangements (O’Halloran, 2008). These are important developments in recognising birth relatives’ needs. The regulations also require agencies to maintain services to assist contact arrangements. This suggests that adoption agencies play an important role in birth mothers’ experiences of adoption.

Neil (2002, p.25) in a study examining contact after adoption and the role of agencies in making and supporting plans found that “*while most children were planned to have some form of contact, adoption agencies differed in the extent to which this was promoted, especially face-to-face. Agencies seemed to play a leading role in determining whether or not face-to-face contact should occur, and what form it should take*”. However, it is important to note that in Neil’s study, 65% of the cases where contact arrangements were made were for children who were adopted from the

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<sup>14</sup> Empirical literature on the types of contact birth mothers are likely to retain with their children and their satisfaction with contact arrangements will be explored in more detail in chapter 3.2.



care system, where face-to-face contact may not have always been appropriate. Logan (2010, p.315) states that “*little guidance however, is offered on how to explore contact issues and practitioners struggle with questions about what kind of contact, how much contact is desirable, between whom and at what stages in life*”. This lack of guidance is bound to affect the quality and options of contact offered to birth mothers.

The context in which adoption policy and practice has evolved has had important implications for changes in birth mothers’ experiences of adoption, the shift from the practice of closed adoptions to a model of practice based on openness being the starkest change. However, it still remains to be understood how the adoption agency mediated these changes into birth mothers’ experiences of adoption.

The welfare policy context in which women have relinquished their children to adoption continues to change throughout this period. It is important to examine these changes to understand how birth mothers’ options changed during the period 1975 - present. This period is witness to important changes in the benefit regime for single-parents. Changes in housing provisions for the homeless were significant in improving welfare provisions for single parents. The main elements of the current homelessness legislation first appeared on the statute book with the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. These were later incorporated into Part III of the Housing Act 1985, and more recently Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002. The provisions made under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 were a major breakthrough in recognising the problems faced by poorer people in obtaining housing (Walsh, Stephens and Moore, 2000). It was ‘a major landmark in social legislation’ and put a duty on local authorities to “*provide, secure or help to secure local authority accommodation for homeless persons and those threatened with homelessness*’ (Robson and Watchman, 1981, p.2). By the mid-1980s this definition included “*assured tenancy of housing association accommodation*” (Robson, Robson & Roberts, 2005, p.51). The statutes obliged local authorities to provide accommodation for 'unintentionally' homeless people who were in priority need. Priority groups were defined as families with children, pregnant women and people sharing their households (which could include a male partner, disabled people and elderly people and others who are vulnerable for various reasons) (Walsh, Stephens and Moore, 2000). These provisions would have been important for

those mothers who were residing in the parental home and whose choices were constrained by factors such as a lack of parental support. However as Pascall (1997) points out, the Act was less comprehensive than originally intended as local authorities were faced with duties to re-house the homeless but received no additional resources. This would have impacted on the numbers of people they were able to physically assist and also the quality of housing offered.

Changes in homelessness legislation were brought about by the practical problems caused by previous statute. Walsh, Stephens and Moore, (2000) have argued, at the time, “*debates were centred around young, never married mothers who were jumping the housing lists and receiving priority*” (p.329). It was also considered that the majority of people placed on the priority list for permanent accommodation were those who were being threatened with being thrown out by their parents or by friends or relatives (DOE, 1994), although Walsh, Stephens and Moore (2000) have argued there was limited evidence to support these assertions. As a result, the Housing Act 1996 made it more difficult for homeless people to secure permanent housing (Robson, Robson & Roberts, 2005). These changes in policy would have had profound implications for the level of support available to birth mothers as local authorities were only able to provide provisions for up to two years and not necessarily in council housing or housing association accommodation (Walsh, Stephens and Moore, 2000). However, these measures were subsequently repealed by the Homelessness Act 2002 (Luba and Davies, 2002).

A change in the benefit regime was also brought about when Supplementary Benefit was abolished and replaced by Income Support in 1988. The introduction of Income Support meant that the complex set of entitlements geared to meet individual family circumstances under Supplementary Benefit was replaced by less complex arrangements based on family type (Malin, 1995). Where Supplementary Benefits provided assistance through weekly additions, which were worked out specifically on the particular circumstances of the claimant, Income Support replaced this with a variety of premiums at fixed rates. Arguably, a more significant aspect of this reform was the replacement of single payments for large items with discretionary loans under the Social Fund that had to be repaid from basic benefits (Miller, 2009). The Social Fund did not favour single mothers over those without children (Rugg, 1999). The

single mother may have been able to access the Social Fund assistance, but the repayment aspect would have reduced their disposable income (Millar, 2009).

This chapter has demonstrated that the wider context in which adoption agencies have operated in has changed over time. Adoption agencies have been at the forefront in offering the service of adoption to birth mothers, mediating choices and offering alternatives, and in shaping their experiences of adoption. If the argument is taken that adoption agencies have been a crucial mediating factor on the changing experiences of birth mothers, then the developing missions of these agencies requires careful examination. It has been noted in the introduction of this thesis that the research for this study was undertaken in collaboration with Family Care. Thus, it is important to examine how the directive, organisation and religious profile of Family Care has changed over time, especially since the much of the documentary evidence collated for this project was derived from their archives.

## **2.6 Family Care and its Evolving Religious Profile**

Like many other adoption agencies, Family Care has religious roots. The Report of the Bishop's Commission on the Work of Moral Welfare in the Diocese of Southwell (Watson, 1962) provides a detailed account of how Family Care was established and how Family Care's adoption work fitted in with the moral welfare work being carried out in the Diocese. Watson reports that the Church of England's Southwell Diocese was first established in 1884, and just a year later Lady Laura Ridding, wife of the first Bishop, Dr George Ridding, played her part in forming a committee in order to coordinate and oversee all the moral welfare work being undertaken in the Diocese. Dr Ridding's reputation as a staunch campaigner for moral purity was well established. He had previously helped Mrs Josephine Butler, another campaigner, fight for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, which had introduced the licensing and medical examination of prostitutes in dockyard and garrison towns to stop the spread of venereal diseases (Crow, 1972).

With the Bishop's approval, Lady Ridding urged a support group to be formed to help vulnerable people within the Diocese and during Lent 1885 a committee was set up which became the direct forerunner of Family Care. In 1943 an Adoption Committee

was formed based at the Mother and Baby Home in Nottingham. The Southwell Diocesan Board for Moral Welfare re-organised in 1944 to become the central body responsible for the negotiation and administration of grants and planning policy for the Diocese. In 1945 the Retford branch was registered as an Adoption Society, with responsibility for Worksop as well. It may have been the case that adoptions were being arranged prior to these dates in the Diocese<sup>15</sup> under the *aegis* of ‘moral welfare work’ as legally committees were not required to be set up until the late 1940s<sup>16</sup>. In 1976, the Diocesan Council for Family Care was formed, encompassing over time all the Deanery<sup>17</sup> Moral Welfare Boards. This remained the case until 1991 when Family Care dropped the religious element of their name (Diocesan Council for Family Care) and became an independent charity named Family Care. These changes were prompted by several factors including changes in the organisation of the agency and changes in the Diocese’s interests and work. Further, as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter and in chapter 7, in the prior 20 years to this date Family Care began to undergo significant changes constitutionally and financially. These organisational changes reflect a shift in the religious influences on the agency. Today, Family Care is still affiliated to the Diocese. For example, the Bishop remains the Patron of the agency. However, the Diocese’s involvement in the day-to-day running of the agency has considerably changed. For instance, the Diocese has very little involvement in the work the agency carries out and in governing the policies and practices which guide the work of the agency.

A number of American authors have tried to conceptualise the religious elements of faith-based organisations (Goggin and Orth, 2002; Monsma, 1996; Jeavons, 1997; Smith and Sosin, 2001). In doing so, they have been able to examine the way in which religion manifests itself within an organisation. Jeavons (1997) has argued that the current term ‘faith-based organisations’ does not take account of the different degrees of faith-relatedness and as a result no clear definition exists of what ‘faith-based’ means. Sider and Unruh (2004, p.110) have argued that “*this lack of clarity creates*

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<sup>15</sup> Diocese refers to a district under the pastoral care of a bishop in the Christian Church.

<sup>16</sup> Adoption agencies were required to set up Case Committees under the Adoption (Regulation of Adoption Agencies) Act 1939.

<sup>17</sup> Defined as a geographic grouping of Parishes within a Diocese.

*problems for studying, funding and making policies regarding social service entities with a connection to religion”.*

In essence, this is a valid statement as adoption agencies have differing degrees of faith affiliation. Developments in adoption and childcare policy and practice may affect affiliated agencies in different ways. For example, in January 2007 when Tony Blair announced that there would be ‘no exemptions’ for faith-based groups from the Equality Act 2006 which stipulated that all faith-based organisations had to accept homosexual applicants or face closure, there was an outcry from the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches (Petre and Jones, 2007). Church leaders in England and Wales felt that its teachings prevent its agencies placing children with homosexuals and they would close if bound by the rules (BBC News, 2007). This was an interesting and important development for church-based adoption agencies in this country, as many agencies had managed to survive in the current climate where the numbers of babies being offered for adoption had declined (the sole purpose of their work in the past) and some agencies had still been able to retain their affiliation to their parent church.

There grew a debate regarding the conflicting priorities of equal treatment or family values (HC Deb Dec 2 2009 c1204). The Government’s position is important in delivering the equality perspective which was enforced under the Sexual Orientations Regulations, under the Equality Act 2006. Adoption agencies were given a small time frame of two years to conform to this requirement, with the deadline of the end of 2008. As a result, we have seen many adoption agencies losing their church affiliation. As reported in the Daily Mail in 2008, the “*Roman Catholic Church is pulling out of three of its top adoption agencies because it cannot comply with Labour’s new gay equality laws*” (Petre, 2008)<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, agencies’ faith affiliation had important implications for voluntary adoption agencies as Catholic agencies have had to disaffiliate because of the Catholic Church’s position on homosexuality and the enforcement of the Sexual Orientations Regulations under the Equality Act (2006). Thus, the development of adoption agencies has been affected by changes in

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<sup>18</sup> In more recent developments, Leeds-based Catholic Care’s appeal was heard by the High Court and its plea to be allowed an exemption was accepted and ordered the commission to reconsider the case in the light of his judgement (BBC News, March 2010)

legislation, which amount to an institutional secularisation that has profoundly affected their character and purpose.

Generally speaking, adoption agencies have gradually undergone a process of secularisation during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sommerville (1998), who has re-conceptualised use of the term ‘secularisation’, defined it in relation to six different areas. These are summarised in Figure 2.8. Somerville’s definitions show how complex the process of secularisation is. The second definition outlined in Figure 2.8 below, is probably the most significant for understanding the changing religious profiles of adoption agencies.

**Figure 2.8: Uses of the Term ‘Secularisation’ (Sommerville, 1998)**

1. When discussing **macro social structures**, secularization can refer to *differentiation*: a process in which the various aspects of society, economic, political, legal, and moral, become increasingly specialized and distinct from one another.
2. When discussing **individual institutions**, secularization can denote the transformation of a religious into a secular institution.
3. When discussing **activities**, secularization refers to the transfer of activities from religious to secular institutions, such as a shift in provision of social services from churches to the government.
4. When discussing **mentalities**, secularization refers to the transition from *ultimate* concerns to *proximate* concerns. This is a personal religious decline or movement toward a secular lifestyle.
5. When discussing **populations**, secularization refers to broad patterns of societal decline in levels of religiosity as opposed to the individual-level secularization of (4) above. This understanding of secularization is also distinct from (1) above in that it refers specifically to religious decline rather than societal differentiation.
6. When discussing **religion**, secularization can only be used unambiguously to refer to religion in a generic sense. For example, a reference to Christianity is not clear unless one specifies exactly which denominations of Christianity are being discussed.

Adapted from: Sommerville (1998, pp.250 – 51)

However, it is important not to ignore other definitions in explaining the development of adoption agencies. For example, Sommerville refers to a process of *differentiation*, which might be exemplified by adoption agencies becoming disaffiliated from parent churches (definition 1). Further, there has been a secularisation of the activities adoption agencies have carried out. For example, the Church was largely responsible for adoption work at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; however, from mid-century, Social Services Departments also began to carry out adoption work (definition 3).

Based on the seven agencies examined in this PhD, Family Care along with the two other CoE agencies and two Independent agencies (formerly CoE and Methodist agencies) showed earlier signs of independence than the Catholic agencies. Catholic agencies were found to have had stronger relations with their affiliated Churches<sup>19</sup>. Generally speaking, many adoption agency professionals attributed their agency's changing affiliations with the Church to wider contextual factors such as changes in values informing the work of agencies, the nature of work carried out by agencies, the impact of changes in wider policy environments and changes in society more generally. Evidence for these themes, along with other relevant themes emerging from the data will be presented and explored further in chapter 7.

It is important to pay attention to the issue of how religious influences impacted on changes in the purpose, mission and organisation of the agency. Family Care's changing relationship with the Church can be examined through factors such as changing mission statements, values, financial support and selection of agency personnel<sup>20</sup> (Sider and Unruh, 2004). These will now be examined further.

The work Family Care was carrying out until the 1970s came under the definition of moral welfare work. The work the agency was doing for a large part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was split into two further areas: preventative and remedial work. The preventative work being carried out by the agency was concerned with educational activities. For instance, by the 1950s the Diocese's objectives included promoting educational work relating to sex, marriage and the family on the basis of a Christian interpretation of life. The nature of Family Care's work for the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the arrangement of adoptions largely dealing with mothers of illegitimate children. This work was known as remedial work. The spiritual work concerned with adoption work was centred on the idea of providing support to the adoption workers and ensuring that approved adoptive parents were able to provide Christian homes for children. Evidence to be presented in chapter 7, examining the adoption agencies' religious affiliations and changing priorities, will demonstrate the way in which the agency's priorities changed from the placement of illegitimate babies to the

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<sup>19</sup> Based on interviews with adoption agency professionals in 2006, before the Equalities legislation was enforced.

<sup>20</sup> Based and adapted from Sider and Unruh (2004) typology of social service and educational organisations and programs.

recruitment of adoptive families for children from the care system, post-adoption support work and, more generally family support work.

The process by which Family Care distanced itself from the Church of England can be also evidenced in the organisation's mission statements. Sider and Unruh (2002) have argued that mission statements provide important insights into understanding agencies' changing relationships with the Churches to which they are affiliated. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations has defined a mission statement as "*a brief declaration of an organisation's purpose and values - the reason why it exists. The mission does not say much about what an organisation will do, or how or when it will do it. Rather, they are long-term statements of intent deriving from the vision that originally inspired the organisation*" (NCVO, 2008, p.1).

Mission statements are a more recent phenomenon and were only evidenced in Family Care's official documentation from the 1980s. Prior to this, the purpose and values of the organisation can be traced through the '*Objects of the Board*'<sup>21</sup>. As can be seen from Figure 2.9, the objects of the Board were typical of moral welfare agencies.

**FIGURE 2.9: Objects of the Southwell Diocesan Board of Moral Welfare (1944 – 1946)**

*The objects of the Board shall be:-*

- 1. To foster the moral and spiritual health of individuals and the community.*
- 2. To promote throughout the Diocese, educational work in relation to the place of sex, marriage and the family in the Christian interpretation of life.*
- 3. To organise and direct work of preventative and remedial character by workers specially trained for the purpose.*
- 4. To encourage and assist work carried on in the various Diocesan Training Homes and Shelters.*
- 5. To co-operate with existing agencies engaged in similar work in the Diocese.*
- 6. To receive funds for promoting the work.*

Source: The Report of Bishop's Commission on the Work of Moral Welfare in the Diocese of Southwell (Watson, 1962, p.113)

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<sup>21</sup> Objects of the Moral Welfare Board's work were detailed at the beginning of the annual report. The 'objects' of the board can be traced back to 1944.



Figure 2.10 relates to Family Care's<sup>22</sup> constitution from 1947 which remained until the 1990s. It is evident from the language used in the constitution documents that religious values were inherent in the organisation's core values. For example, point (c) '*To set before them the ideals of a Christian life*' relates to providing clients with a religious value system. It is interesting to note that this constitution was still in operation in 1991 (APMM, 1991), indicating that Christian values were still informing the work being carried out by the agency. Nevertheless, as analysis detailed in chapter 7 will go on to show, by the 1990s the Church was having less of an influence on the day-to-day running of the agency, even though it was still linked to the Diocese. For instance, the Bishop is still the Patron of the agency today, although he is not involved in policy-making as he was for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**FIGURE 2.10: Nottingham (Southwell House) Committee for Moral Welfare  
New Constitution – May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1947**

*The name of the charity shall be "Nottingham (Southwell House) Committee for Moral Welfare".*

*The objects of the Charity shall include the following:*

- (a) To promote general interest in moral welfare work.*
- (b) To provide Homes or Hostels for the care and training of women and girls and for temporary accommodation.*
- (c) To set before them the ideals of a Christian life.*
- (d) To provide aftercare where needed.*
- (e) To assist the unmarried mothers, including assistance in arranging adoptions where advisable.*
- (f) To accept and provide training for girls committed by the Courts under the Probation Acts or sent voluntarily by parents or social workers.*
- (g) Generally to promote and aid any enterprise or work of a similar nature, including co-operation with local or other Authorities, Organisations and others.*

Source: The Report of Bishop's Commission on the Work of Moral Welfare in the Diocese of Southwell (Watson, 1962, p.119)

By 2007, the values informing the work Family Care differed considerably from earlier times (see Figure 2.11). The only reference to religion is in acknowledging that Family Care's foundations are in the Christian faith, although the current values of the organisation still allude to Christian values. Nevertheless, this has been a major

<sup>22</sup> Family Care was formerly named 'Southwell House'.

change from the original mission and purpose, which included rescue and preventative work and promoting Christianity.

**FIGURE 2.11: Family Care's Values**

- *Everyone should be treated with equal respect.*
- *Children's welfare is our first paramount consideration.*
- *Parents have important roles and responsibilities in their children's lives.*
- *The experience of a family life is crucial to the wellbeing of children and their positive development.*
- *Family care's foundations are in the Christian faith and we work with people of any faith or no faith.*

Source: Family Care Annual Report (2007)

The process by which Family Care distanced itself from the Church of England can also be evidenced by examining the organisation's changes in personnel. Previous research into American faith-based organisations has found that organisations' affiliation with a faith community affects the influence of religious authority on organisations' actions (Smith & Sosin, 2001). Sider and Unruh (2002) have argued that an examination of agencies' personnel can provide useful insights into the role of religious identity in the selection of board members and staff, in particular whether religious orientation is a requirement for staff at different levels in the hierarchy.

As noted earlier, until the mid-1970s the Southwell Diocesan priorities included rescue and preventative work with young females (Annual Report, 1944) and the organisation's main priorities were the arrangement of adoptions and work with unmarried mothers (Annual Reports, 1946, 1952, 1965, 1968). Therefore, the work being carried out was the 'work of the Church', 'moral welfare' work, and a certain level of Church involvement with the running of the agency was expected. An examination of Family Care's Case Committee minutes and annual reports revealed that from the mid-1940s to the early 1960s the Case Committee was made up of a broad section of people from the community, such as head mistresses, businessmen, and members of the Church and Clergy (Annual Report, 1944). From the early 1960s, the Case Committee was comprised of a probation officer, health professionals and a legal representative (APMM, May 1963). By the late 1980s, there were statutory

requirements concerning how an adoption panel should be comprised<sup>23</sup>, so the composition of adoption panels became less reliant on the viewpoints of the Church. For example, the APMM show that the Chair of the Case Committee was a member of the clergy until the 1980s, after which, clerical members ceased to be involved in adoption panels.

From the 1940s, Church representation was also evident in Family Care's 'General Committee'<sup>24</sup> and 'Executive Committee'<sup>25</sup> (Watson, 1962). For the organisation today, the Chair of the Trustees is still appointed by the Bishop, but other trustees are not. Additionally, faith is no longer an expectation of the Chair of the Adoption Panel, nor of Panel members. The Director of the agency is still expected to have a Christian faith, but no-one else. It is important to note that the Bishop remains the Patron of the agency.

The discussion in this section has concentrated on the values which drove Family Care's work and the extent to which religious affiliation was important in the appointment of agency personnel. It is evident that the organisation has undergone some significant changes over the years. Nevertheless, it still remains understood how religious affiliation has impacted on adoption agency policy and practice, how this has changed over time, and how it has affected birth mothers' experiences of adoption. Adoption agencies have been at the forefront of dealing with birth mothers and have borne witness to their changing circumstances, motives for relinquishment and experiences of adoption. Exploring the religious context of adoption is important in generating a holistic understanding of birth mothers' experiences of adoption.

## **2.7 Birth mothers' options: a critical discussion**

This thesis aims to examine changes in birth mothers' options and motives for adoption throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first half of this chapter has reviewed literature relating to the changing policy context in which women have relinquished

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<sup>23</sup> Under the 1976 Adoption Act adoption agencies were required to set up Adoption Panels, who in Family Care's case would carry out the functions that the Case Committee previously had.

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix 1 for further details of the functions and composition of the General Committee.

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix 2 for further details of the functions and composition of the Executive Committee

their children to adoption. This section will go on to present a critical discussion relating to how far changes in welfare reforms were likely to have dealt with the real-life issues birth mothers would have faced at different points throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Currently, there is a lack of evidence relating to understanding the implications of welfare policies on birth mothers' options and lived experiences of adoption, suggesting a gap in the literature. This PhD will make an important contribution to knowledge in this area. Studies carried out in the 1950s, 60s and 70s which examine the impact of welfare reforms on lone mothers are important in progressing our understanding of the reality of birth mothers' choices. This literature will be used to develop a critical discussion which aims to understand how realistic the option of self-support was for birth mothers. Evidence of changes in cultural and social contexts, reflected in changing attitudes towards divorce, marriage and single parenthood, and its relevance to the theorising of birth mothers' options will also be examined along with the advent of alternatives to adoption e.g. abortion.

Based on a review of the policy developments presented earlier, it is fair to say that being able to support the child was un-realistic in practice as levels of welfare support were restrictive for single parents for the large part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, welfare support for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was limited to provisions enacted under the Poor Law or from private charity. And within the wider context of Britain's post-war welfare reforms, the benefits that might be needed to support mothers and children without a male breadwinner were largely left unacknowledged. For instance, single women who did not have sufficient insurance contributions were only liable for support under the National Assistance Act (1948) and then purely at subsistence rates. As a result only minimal benefits were available and these took little account of the responsibilities that single women might have for family dependents (Fink and Lundqvist, 2010). In her study of unmarried mothers and their children during the 1950s, when unmarried mothers would have been entitled to some form of assistance through the enactment of the National Assistance Act (1948), Wimperis (1960) found that mothers who lived alone, with the responsibility for rent and household necessities as well as support of their children had to manage on the barest of welfare benefits, which often amounted to less than a third of the average weekly wage for men. Wimperis (1960) found that those women who did not go out to work faced living on bare subsistence income, often in extreme loneliness. The mothers who

worked often had to take poorly paid jobs, where the conditions of employment roughly approximated to the availability of child-minding services. In addition, Wimperis found that self-support as an unmarried mother was unrealistic even for those who were already living independently, as she was at risk of losing her job and her place of residence. Wimperis noted that,

*“there are girls and women who in easier circumstances might have made good mothers, but because of their low earning power and housing difficulties and the need to be out most of the day earning their living, could not be the good mothers they longed to be.”* (Wimperis, 1960, p.118)

Marsden (1969) in a survey of fatherless families living on National Assistance found that within this group (included those who were separated, divorced and widowed), unmarried mothers were particularly disadvantaged. In-depth interviews carried out by Marsden (1969) with 116 single mothers dependent on state support in the late 1960s found that the system of state support was insufficient. Like Wimperis, Marsden found that unmarried mothers had incomes below the average for the whole group of single mothers, an inability to work due to young children and, in some cases, a reduction in assistance because of suspected cohabitation. Further, important findings from Marsden’s study show that below-average income levels of unmarried mothers also stemmed from a lack of help from relatives. This point is important in contextualising birth mothers’ options, suggesting that parental/family support and assistance may have been another hindrance for birth mothers wishing to keep their children. Housing was also found to be a problem for his sample group of single mothers. Marsden (1969) found that of the 116 lone mothers he interviewed, the unmarried were in the worst accommodation and where it was excessively bad, the mothers were likely to be paying more because they were not statutory tenants. Two-thirds of the 116 surveyed lived in poor quality rented housing for which they paid higher rents; and three quarters were over-crowded compared with one in ten of all households in England and Wales. Some of the families *“had been homeless or suffered other severe hardships before strong backing from social workers or doctors had acquired them a house; even so, the families tended to be rehoused in the roughest areas on the worst estates”* (Marsden, 1969, p.212).

Marsden's research is important in contextualising the various obstacles and harsh realities birth mothers' would have faced should they have kept their children. It is clear from research at the time that the provisions under the National Assistance Act (1948) would have not been sufficient to make the option of self-support a realistic one for those birth mothers who were without the support of the birth father; in fact many would have faced the prospect of living in poverty.

The availability of Supplementary Benefits would have, to some degree, impacted on the option of self-support for birth mothers as it provided a means-tested, a non-contributory benefit. However, research suggests that the introduction of Supplementary Benefits may have been limited in its impact on making the option of self-support a realistic one. Research carried out shortly after the implementation of Supplementary Benefits by Holman (1970) on single mothers with stresses on their families' financial situation, the quality of their housing, and the care of their children found that nearly a third of his sample of single mothers had incomes below the minimum set by the Supplementary Benefits commission. Holman found this to usually be the case because those who preferred to work than live on social security could only command extremely low wages. Like Wimperis (1960) and Marsden (1969), Holman found that the poorest women were the unmarried with young babies. All the unmarried mothers, regardless of class, had similar difficulties in finding accommodation and it was the largest single item in most families' budgets. More significantly, Holman found that despite a number of educated and capable women in his sample group, these attainments did not protect them from poverty and other numerous hardships.

Changes in state support for birth mothers would have been further brought about by the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, which made housing provisions for those judged to be unintentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness, with a local connection, and in priority need. In theory, these provisions would have assisted those mothers who were threatened with homelessness by their families, if they chose to keep the child. It is important to note that although mothers and children were categorised as a 'priority', local authorities had a lot of scope for discretion in terms of the way they interpreted their duties and local authorities received no additional

resources (Pascall, 1997). As a result provisions under this statute may have varied by local authority.

Undoubtedly the levels of welfare support available to birth mothers today are more comprehensive than the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, making the option of self-support more realistic. This has been made possible by welfare provisions, such as provisions for housing and also financial assistance through measures such as Income Support and Child Benefit. Measures such as these would have provided some support for those birth mothers who chose to keep their children. It is important to note that from the 1990s the amount of support provided for single parents has changed, which may have implications for mothers who relinquish today. For instance, a right to permanent housing was restored by the Homelessness Act (2002) having been withdrawn by the 1996 Act. However, more recently the Coalition Government has announced that in future, new council tenants will no longer have the security of a 'home for life' as all local authority tenants will be restricted to fixed-term tenancies with a tenancy review at the end of the fixed term.

As well as changes in welfare policy contexts, changes in social and cultural contexts are also relevant in understanding the changing nature of birth mothers' options. Historically, illegitimacy had always attracted high levels of stigmatization (Macfarlane, 2003; Levene et al., 2005). Levene et al., (2005) have argued that illegitimacy has long been constructed as a moral transgression and that there has been implicit relationship between illegitimacy, deviancy, stigma, and social control (see Levene et al., 2005, pp.10-14 for further details). There have been several definitions of stigma. For example, Goffman (1963, p.3) defines it as "*an attribute that is deeply discrediting, that reduces the individual from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one.*" Stigma is also "*a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context*" (Link and Phelan, 2001, p.365). Literature has shown that this was certainly true of unmarried women. For example, mothers pregnant out of wedlock were seen to be 'fallen women' or 'loose women' - women who had let their morality go (Smart, 1995). The social acceptance and dissipation of the stigma surrounding unmarried motherhood has opened up other options for birth mothers.

Changes in attitudes towards marriage, motherhood and more generally changes in the social spaces occupied by women (Skeggs, 1997)<sup>26</sup>, has meant that today lone mothers keeping their babies are no longer a morally condoned; being married is no longer perceived as being a pre-requisite for parenthood.

There have been marked changes in peoples' attitudes regarding marriage in recent years (Flouri and Buchanan, 2001) and the choices available to individuals and couples have become more extensive. This is evidenced in a decline in the numbers of marriages and rising levels of cohabitation, reflecting changes in wider social and cultural contexts. As can be seen from Figure 2.12, the numbers of first marriages have continued to decline since 1971. Figure 2.12 also shows that the numbers of first marriages has almost halved since 1961. National Statistics (ONS, 1998; 2010) show that the average age of marriage has also increased over time. For instance, in 1961, the mean age at first marriage was 25.6 for men and 23.1 for women. By 1998, it had risen to 29.1 for men and 27.0 for women (ONS, 1998), and in 2008, the provisional mean age at first marriage was 32.1 for men and 29.9 for women (ONS, 2010).

1961	312 257
1971	347 391
1981	263 368
1991	224 812
2001	177 506
2008	147 130

Sources: 1961 – 2001: ONS, 2008b. *Marriages in England and Wales: Historic Marriage Tables*; 2008: ONS, 2010. *Statistical Bulletin: Marriages in England and Wales 2008*.

This later-marriage trend has gone hand-in-hand with higher rates of cohabitation<sup>27</sup>, as couples choose to live together as a prelude to marriage and in some cases as an

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<sup>26</sup> These themes are important in understanding the wider theoretical context in which birth mothers relinquished their children; therefore require a more detailed examination. These themes will be examined in more detail in chapter 4.

<sup>27</sup> It is difficult to make direct comparisons of cohabitation data as different measures have been used over time. Rates of cohabitation have only been collated by the General Households survey since 1986 and the British Social Attitudes survey since the early 1990s. Statistics for previous years have been derived from various sources, as indicated in the text. In addition, estimates have been used to project



alternative altogether (Hayward and Brandon, 2010). In the UK, the last four decades have seen a four-fold increase in the numbers of people cohabitating (Buck and Scott, 1994). Almost 50% of women born in 1960 have cohabitated compared to 14% born in 1940s and 4% born in the 1920s (Central Statistical office, 1995 *cited in* Wilkinson, 1997). More recent trends show there has been a significant growth in the number of people cohabiting outside marriage in the past thirty years in Great Britain. Between 1976 and 1998, the proportion of women aged under 50 who were not married and who were currently cohabiting, more than trebled from 9 per cent to 29 per cent. In 1979, only one single woman in 13 (8 per cent) was cohabiting: by 1998, this figure had quadrupled to almost one in three (31 per cent). The proportion of divorced women cohabiting, formerly much higher than that of single women, is now the same, at 31 per cent. The figures for men are broadly similar – rising from one in eight single men cohabiting in 1986, to one in four in 1998, a doubling in 12 years (figures cited in Haskey, 2001). Analysis of cohabitation trends generated for the Office for National Statistics (2009) shows over the last fifteen years there has been a rise in the number of cohabiting adults in England and Wales. Previous estimates indicate that there were 2.7 million cohabiting adults in 1992 (6 per cent of the population over 16-years-old). In 2007 it is estimated that the number of cohabiting adults had increased to 4.5 million (10 per cent of the population over 16-years-old). Cohabitation trends provide evidence to suggest that cohabitation will continue to rise for never married adults (Wilson, 2009).

In analysing various sources of information on attitudes towards cohabitation, Haskey (2001, p.6) argues “*undoubtedly, with regard to cohabitation, as with many issues of personal decision and morality, attitudes and behaviour are inextricably linked*”. Results from the British General Households Survey shows that over half of respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement ‘living together outside marriage is always wrong’ (1992 – 53.3%, 1994 – 56.4%, 1996 – 57.4%). Further findings from the BHPS (1998 – 2004) show that over three-fifths of respondents agreed with the statement ‘it is alright for people to live together even if they have no interest in considering marriage’ (British Panel Household Survey, 1992 – 2004;

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the levels of cohabitation practice in the UK. See Haskey (2001) and Stillwell (2009) for a fuller discussion of the problems in comparing cohabitation trends.

*figures cited in* Stillwell, 2009, p. 108). The reasons men and women cohabit undoubtedly vary according to age, partnership history and the wish to retain a degree of independence. For young single men and women, living together may be a 'trial marriage', a 'trial relationship', a definite alternative to marriage – or none of these (Haskey, 2001, p.8). Similarly, there is a marked change in attitudes to pre-marital relations. For instance, based on findings from the British Social Attitudes survey, the proportion of respondents saying that pre-marital relations are always or mostly wrong has slowly declined from 28 per cent in 1983 to 15 per cent in 1998 (Jowell et al., 1995). This is important evidence, suggesting that pre-marital relations have become less stigmatised over time.

The key point to be drawn out of discussions about patterns of marriage and cohabitation are that the wider social and cultural contexts under which women have relinquished their children to adoption have changed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In doing so, the options available to birth mothers have also changed. This suggests that changes in wider discourses and ideologies have also shifted throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A fuller theoretical discussion is presented in chapter 4 where changes in wider ideologies and discourses relating to appropriate family structures and motherhood, along with standards of respectability are examined.

Abortion would have also provided an alternative option. Before the 1967 Abortion Act was passed, most women who wanted to end their pregnancies would have had to resort to self-induced or backstreet abortions, both illegal. Accurate figures for women injured by illegal abortion before 1967 are not available, as many women would not admit that their injuries resulted from abortion for fear of incriminating themselves and the illegal abortionist (Brooks, 1988). Herring (2008, pp.60-70) in documenting the history of abortion legislation shows how the conditions under which abortion was legal changed over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1929 the *Infant Life Preservation Act* amended the law stating it would no longer be regarded as a felony if abortion was carried out in good faith for the sole purpose of preserving the life of the mother. The Act made it illegal to kill a child 'capable of being born live'. It also allowed a doctor to perform an abortion legally if he/she were 'satisfied that the continuance of the pregnancy was liable to endanger the health of the expectant mother'. In 1938 the Bourne case set the scene for a change of policy on abortion. A

young woman was gang raped by a group of soldiers and became pregnant. The subsequent termination set a legal precedent for performing an abortion to preserve a woman's mental health. Even so, prior to 1967 legal abortion would have only been an option if it could be proved that the birth mother's mental health was at risk or to preserve the life of the mother. Under the Abortion Act (1967), the rules changed again, with termination now being permissible under the following conditions.

- a) The continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk to the life of the pregnant woman greater than if the pregnancy were terminated.
- b) The termination is necessary to prevent grave permanent injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman.
- c) The continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated, of injury to the physical or mental health of any existing children of the family of the pregnant woman.
- d) There is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped, or in emergency, certified by the operating practitioners as immediately necessary-
- e) To save the life of the pregnant woman

(Source: Herring, 2008, pp.62 - 70)

In 1990, the law was amended by the *Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act*: abortion became legal only up to 24 weeks gestation, except in cases where it was necessary to save the life of the woman, there was evidence of extreme abnormality, or there was a grave risk of physical or mental injury to the woman. Official Statistics show that since abortion was legalised in 1968, there has been a steady rise in the numbers of abortions being requested by single women. As can be seen from Figure 2.13, in the past 40 years the percentage of single women requesting abortion has almost doubled.

<b>Figure 2.13: Number of abortions and percentage of women having abortions who were single 1971 - 2010</b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Abortions</b>	<b>Percentage of women having abortions who were single</b>
1971	94 570	46.8
1976	101 912	49.9
1981	128 582	54.5
1986	147 619	63.0
1991	160 501	65.8
1996	167 916	67.9
2001	186 274	76
2006	201 173	80
2010	196 109	81

Sources: 1976 – 1996: ONS (1997) Abortion Statistics: legal abortions carried out under the 1967 Abortion Act in England and Wales, 1997. 2001 – 2006: DoH, 2011. Abortion Statistics, England and Wales: 2010. (ONS, 1997; DoH, 2011)

Evidence cited in this section suggests that the option of self-support may not have been a realistic one at least until the late 1970s, even with provisions made under the National Assistance Act 1948 and with Supplementary Benefits in 1966. It is clear from research that birth mothers would have faced several obstacles in trying to keep their children. The assistance available for birth mothers to support themselves and their children were limited, as welfare provisions did not fully account for all the issues birth mothers would have faced. Literature has also suggested that even if birth mothers were able to access welfare provisions to help support themselves and their children, they would have been likely to have been living in poverty. Nevertheless, discussions in this section have shown that theoretical options for birth mothers seem to have increased, but it remains to be seen whether these alone explain (a) the massive decline in baby adoptions, and (b) changing attitudes towards adoption among birth mothers. However, in examining the evolution of birth mothers' options throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it still remains to be understood how changes in the welfare policy context were translated in to options for birth mothers. Therefore, in terms of further analysis, it will be important to firstly examine if birth mothers were counselled with details of welfare assistance they could access; and secondly to evaluate whether self-support was in fact a realistic option for birth mothers. Data

collected from adoption records, social worker case notes and adoption panel meeting minutes (APPM) will provide further insights into this area.

This chapter has been important in setting the religious, moral, social and policy context in which adoption has evolved. However, it remains to be seen how these contextual changes were translated in to the options, lives and lived experiences of birth mothers. One possibility is that the adoption agency was the mediator of these changes, since the adoption agency was on the front-line in dealing with women who were relinquishing their children to adoption. Thus, it is important to examine how the changing missions, religious and institutional affiliations of adoption agencies were translated in to practice with birth mothers. Additionally, it will be important to examine how the adoption agency mediated changes in religious, moral, social and policy contexts in to the lives, choices and experiences of birth. Further, society has witnessed cultural changes in attitudes towards divorce, marriage and cohabitation. It is undeniable that these changes have contributed to dissipating the stigma of unmarried motherhood. However, the deeper ideological shifts underlying these contextual changes remain to be understood and will be explored further in chapter 4.

# 3

## Review of Research

### 3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explore how birth mothers' experiences of adoption and motives for relinquishment may have changed over time. The first half of this chapter presents empirical evidence and literature to better understand, and identify gaps in knowledge relating to changes in birth mothers' characteristics, options, motives and experiences of adoption. It is important to study how birth mothers' social circumstances may have changed and how these may have limited, or indeed opened up alternative options to adoption. Additionally, by examining birth mothers' social circumstances it is possible to contextualise birth mothers' motives for adoption, which is the focus of the subsequent section. The final section of chapter will review literature relating to birth mothers' changing experiences of adoption based on the two different models of adoption practice (closed and open adoptions).

In conducting a review of the literature, the overarching aim was to critically evaluate how far previous studies have answered the research questions (see p.4) and to identify gaps in understanding changes in birth mothers' social circumstances, motives and experiences of adoption. More specifically, literature was reviewed in order to:

- understand how birth mothers identities have changed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century;
- understand how birth mothers understood their options and how these were conveyed to birth mothers;
- understand how birth mothers experiences have changed over the 20<sup>th</sup> century;

- understand the factors that have influenced birth mothers' decisions to relinquish their children to adoption and how these have varied historically.

Since the 1970s, several studies have contributed to understanding birth mothers' experiences of adoption and motives for relinquishment (Triseliotis and Hall, 1971; Bouchier, Lambert and Triseliotis, 1991; Raynor, 1971; Elliot, 2005; Wells, 1993; Hughes and Logan, 1993). Empirical research has often focused on the long-term impact of relinquishment on birth mothers (Logan, 1996; Pannor, Baran and Sorosky 1978; Rynearson, 1982; Winker and Keppel, 1984). These and other studies have been crucial in understanding how birth mothers' experiences of adoption have changed (Howe, Sawbridge and Hinings, 1992; Elliot, 2005; Wells, 1993; Powell and Warren, 1997).

Although these studies have contributed to a deeper understanding of birth mothers' experiences and motives for relinquishment, it was clear from the outset that gaps in the state of knowledge relating to changes in birth mothers options, motives and experiences still remain. It is important to note that the majority of studies contributing to understanding birth mothers' experiences and motives for adoption are drawn from samples of birth mothers who relinquished their children to adoption in the late 1960s, 70s and 80s. Despite covering a limited time period, these studies and others have been crucial in advancing our understanding of how birth mothers' motives and experiences of adoption have changed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **3.2 Birth mothers' changing characteristics**

By examining birth mothers' demographic characteristics, it is possible to understand the extent to which their motives for relinquishment and options to keep the child were affected by their social circumstances. Additionally, it is possible to build up a picture of barriers or constraints they may have faced in accessing different options available to them at the time. Birth mothers' social demographic profiles at time of relinquishment have scarcely been documented in literature. However, it has been possible to understand some aspects of birth mothers' social circumstances at time of pregnancy from the studies detailed in Figure 3.1.

### Figure 3.1: Birth Mother Studies

*Raynor's (1971)* study was based on interviews with a sample of 124 mothers from hospitals in London (68) and Manchester (56) who relinquished their children during 1969 and 1970. Interviews were carried out with birth mothers once the baby was no more than a fortnight old and all mothers who were interviewed had told their medical social worker that they had decided on adoption and had begun to make arrangements to have the baby adopted.

*Bouchier, Lambert and Triseliotis (1991)* examined the characteristics, personal and social circumstances, motivations, attitudes and current psychological adjustment of 49 Scottish birth mothers who relinquished their children to adoption. The sample was derived from birth mothers who mostly relinquished in the 1960s and 1970s.

*Triseliotis and Hall (1971)* studied birth mothers who relinquished soon after the birth of the child in 1970. The sample for this study was drawn from four Edinburgh maternity hospitals (which served the whole of Edinburgh). Triseliotis and Hall (1971) carried out interviews with 77 birth mothers soon after birth with a follow-up interview with 40 of these birth mothers six months later. Very few details of birth mothers' social circumstances were detailed in this study.

Previous studies suggest that the birth mothers were more than likely to have been single. For example, in Raynor's (1971) sample of birth mothers, 90% of the mothers were single; in Bouchier et al.'s study (1991), the majority of birth mothers were also single (87%) and similar patterns were identified in Triseliotis and Hall's (1971) study (85%). These studies showed that the majority of birth mothers relinquishing a child to adoption would have been under the age of 25. Raynor's (1971) sample included mothers between the ages of 14-34, although over half of those from the London sample and a third of those from the Manchester sample were between the ages of 20-24. Bouchier et al. (1992) and Hall and Triseliotis (1971) reported similar findings, although a smaller number of birth mothers in the under 20 group were found in the Bouchier et al. study (36% compared with 56%).



By examining birth mothers' educational qualifications, where they were living and their occupational status, it is possible to understand the practical constraints they may have faced if they were to have kept the child. In examining birth mothers' housing tenure status, it has been difficult to make direct comparisons between data from different studies, largely due to the fact that different measures have been used by different academics. For example, Bouchier et al. (1991) asked women about where they were living at the time of their baby's birth and Raynor (1971) asked women where they were living when the pregnancy occurred. Bouchier et al. found that at the time of birth a third of birth mothers were living in the parental home (33%), a further third were residing in a Mother and Baby home (30%), and a further third were living with relatives or independently (34%). Over half of Raynor's sample lived at home with one or more of their parents when the pregnancy occurred. One fifth of the girls, who had been living at home, lived away from home during the pregnancy. This raises the question of why these birth mothers lived away from the parental home during their pregnancies. The most obvious explanation is that they went to Mother and Baby homes (as some birth mothers did in the other studies stated above). It is also important to note that a birth mother who had been residing in the parental home would have had to secure parental support if she was to have kept the child and continue to reside in the parental home. Analysis of birth mothers' tenure information and motives for adoption derived from documentary analysis of adoption files will be used to understand whether residing in the parental home provided alternative options to birth mothers.

Evidence regarding the educational attainments and social class of birth mothers were scarce in these studies. In Raynor's sample, 52% had left school at the age of 15 with no qualifications and only one fifth of the total sample had taken any kind of further education after leaving school. For example, only one had a degree, four were taking or had completed teacher training and three were qualified nurses. This suggests that very few relinquishing birth mothers were in higher socio-economic groups. This is reinforced by the fact that the majority of Raynor's sample was normally employed in clerical work. Triseliotis and Hall (1971) also found the biggest occupational group of mothers surrendering their children for adoption were clerical and secretarial workers. Findings from these studies suggest that many were likely to have been employed in occupations that attracted low levels of income. These factors are crucial to analysis

on birth mothers' economic identity and in understanding their financial capabilities to keep their children. It is important to note that in the above samples, the majority of women did have jobs, giving them a form of income. However, they still relinquished their children to adoption. There may be several explanations for this. Other factors may have been influencing their decision to relinquish, such as avoidance of the stigma associated with illegitimate pregnancies' or parental pressure. Alternatively, the income generated by their employment may have not been sufficient enough to make the option of self-support a realistic one.

Based on the evidence presented so far, the following assertions can be made about birth mothers' who relinquished their children during the period of 1960s - 1980s: the majority of birth mothers were single, under the age of 25, largely unqualified, still living at home with their parents and were more likely to have been in lower social class occupations. In terms of data collected for this project it will be important to examine if these assertions were true of the socio-demographic profiles recorded on Family Care's adoption records. It will also be important to further scrutinise evidence relating to birth mothers' social circumstances at the time of pregnancy, in order to comprehend the options available to birth mothers and the extent to which they were realistic. Empirical evidence relating to birth mothers' motives for adoption will now be explored further.

### **3.3 Birth mothers' changing motives for adoption**

An initial review of the literature showed that very little has been documented concerning birth mothers' motives for adoption, especially in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, studies carried out largely in the late 1960s and since then provide useful insights into the circumstances surrounding birth mothers' decisions to relinquish. Evidence relating to birth mothers' changing motives will now be used to understand how realistic different options were at different points throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Studies carried out in the early 1970s reported that birth mothers often felt their decision for relinquishment was a final one. For example, studies carried out by Raynor (1971) and Triseliotis and Hall (1971) stated that most mothers didn't want to

reconsider the choices they had made and once they had signed the consent form they wished it to be final. However, later studies reported that birth mothers felt the decision had not been theirs. Field (1991) documented birth mothers' experiences and found that over half (60%) felt they had little or no choice about giving their children up for adoption. These findings have also been replicated by other studies. For example, Pannor et al. (1978) found almost three quarters of birth mothers felt adoption was not the outcome they had wanted and Hughes and Logan (1993) reported that for the majority the choice had not been theirs (85%).

A common theme emerging from studies of birth mothers' who relinquished under a closed model of adoption has been the lack of choices and support available to them at the time. One option may have been for the unmarried mother to keep the child and stay at home with her parents. However, evidence suggests it would have been increasingly hard for the birth mother to keep the child without the support of her parents (Pannor et al., 1974). It is fair to say, if birth mothers were not supported by their parents, it would have been difficult for her to continue residing in the parental home had she decided to keep the child.

Findings from some small-scale studies have shown that parental pressure was often a stated motive for relinquishment by birth mothers. In a study comparing secrecy in closed adoption with the openness of adoptions practiced in New Zealand, Wells (1994) found a total of 86% of the 262 British birth mothers who responded to questionnaires said they were pressurised by parents and social workers to go ahead with the adoption. Additionally, Hughes and Logan (1993) found over half of the birth mothers in their sample had relinquished because of parental pressure (51%). In another study, Field (1991) administered a survey to 444 New Zealand birth mothers, comparing the emotional wellbeing of women with and without reunion experiences. He found that most women (70%) recalled getting little or no emotional support from family and friends at the time they became pregnant. This seems to have been a contributing factor to higher levels of grief that were associated with the birth mother's perception that she was coerced into relinquishment by others (Simone, 1996).

An informal adoption arrangement may have been an option available to some birth mothers, where the child may have been adopted by a relative, or even passed off as a natural child of the grandparents. Through personal accounts of women who had been adopted informally, Elliot has demonstrated that these adoptions were evident throughout the 1930s and 1940s (2003, pp.97-103). However, Elliot rightly states that “*one of the difficulties of tracking the history of adoption is the unreliability of official figures*” (2003, p.100). Available statistics for adoptions prior to the 1950s did not record whether the child had been adopted by a member of the family or by strangers. Although it is not possible to understand the true extent of informal adoptions during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, evidence presented by Elliot does suggest having the child adopted by a member of the family was an option for birth mothers, both before and after adoption was legalised. However, as noted earlier the availability of this option would rely on the support of the birth mother’s parents.

The unmarried mother could have also married the putative father, but he may not have wanted to marry the birth mother or vice versa or the father’s identity may simply have been unknown. Howe et al. (1992) have reported that in many cases it had been the first time birth mothers had sexual relations and had been caught ‘unlucky’. Abortion was illegal in most cases until 1967 “*although amateur and ‘back street’ abortions were common, with the miserable consequences of infection, infertility and sometimes death that followed*” (Elliot, 2003, p.103). Moreover, some women may have been the victims of rape or incest, which would have a considerable bearing on the feasibility of both marrying the unmarried father and also staying with the family. However, evidence of this would be hard to come by due to the stigma of such relationships. Nevertheless, Hughes and Logan (1993, p.16) did report a small minority of birth mothers wanting to relinquish because of these reasons (2%).

Options available for birth mothers to keep their children by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be demonstrated by a pamphlet produced for the National Council for Unmarried Mothers (Cooper, 1955, pp.3-4). It was evident from this pamphlet that although there were several options available to the unmarried mother, it was still not easy for her to keep the child. Cooper (1955) has stated that the child could have been cared for by its mother and father in an unofficial family group. In cases like this, the parents might have married. Alternatively, one of the parents might have been married

but may not have held sufficient funds to obtain a divorce. In cases like these, couples may have co-habited. Secondly, the child may have been absorbed into the mother's own family. In such circumstances, the child may have grown up thinking that it was the natural child of the grandparents or as a child of another member of the family. Alternatively, the mother may have married another man who was willing to accept the child, who was thus cared for in the family, maybe with younger legitimate children. As demonstrated in chapter 2, welfare support for birth mothers' was minimal for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century access to welfare provisions such as National Assistance was available, but not realistically accessible by birth mothers. If the mother decided to keep the child, it may have been cared for in changing circumstances, being moved around to different lodgings by the mother; the child may have been in and out of foster care and may have been removed by the local authority from the mother's care permanently. Cooper (1955) has argued that another option available to the birth mother was adoption. Apart from these five options, the other option available to birth mothers would have been abortion, either a back street abortion or one undertaken legally<sup>28</sup>. Although these options were outlined by Cooper (1955) in a leaflet designed for moral welfare workers, it remains to be shown if birth mothers themselves were aware of these different options. After all, adoption agencies would have had a vested interest in promoting adoption due to their interest in maintaining traditional family values. There were no other formal support mechanisms which would have advocated other options.

Increasingly, from the 1980s, literature and empirical research has begun to focus on birth mothers who have relinquished under a model of open/semi open conditions. On the whole, research and literature has focused on practice issues and the benefits of open adoption to the three parties in the adoption triangle. As discussed in the previous chapter, voluntary adoption agencies have witnessed smaller numbers of infants being relinquished for adoption and a rise in the number of older children placed for adoption from the care system (Lowe, 2000). As a result, very little research has focused on birth mothers who relinquish children for adoption today. However, some evidence, albeit based on small sample sizes, has begun to emerge over the last two decades. For example, Wells has documented five case studies of

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<sup>28</sup> Legal abortion would have only been available from 1967, so this option would have only been available for the last 7 years of this period.

New Zealand women and women from England who have relinquished under an open model of adoption from the 1980s (1994, pp.147-203). Case studies detailed in this study provide illustrations of reasons why birth mothers relinquished after the 1970s. Additionally, empirical research carried out by Neil (2000) which examined the reasons why young children are placed for adoption from a sample of children relinquished during the period of July 1996 to June 1997 also provide insights into understanding why birth mothers were relinquishing their children to adoption in more recent decades. Further, longitudinal research carried out by the American scholars Grotevant and McRoy (The Minnesota/Texas Adoption Research Project), launched in the mid-1980s, provides some understanding of the motives of a sample of 168 birth mothers who relinquished in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Henney et al., 2004). It is important to note that adoptions in New Zealand and the US took place in quite different cultural and political contexts, which would have profoundly affected birth mothers' options and motives. Nevertheless, these studies provide important insights into birth mothers' motives for adoption in more recent decades.

A wide range of motives for relinquishment emerge from these studies, all rather different from the ones previously stated. Neil (2000, p.303) identified three groups according to the reason for adoption: relinquished infants (14%) (Group 1), those whose parents had requested adoption in complex circumstances (24%) (Group 2), and those children subject to a court order (62%)<sup>29</sup> (Group 3). The two relinquishing groups (Groups 1 and 2) were characterised by different and distinct circumstances. For example, parents who relinquished infants (Group 1) did so before or around the time of the birth. The parent/s did not wish to look after any child at the time "*but there is nothing to indicate that they would not be capable of doing so in different circumstances*" (p.306). Unlike the group who had a "*complex request for adoption* (Group 2)," parent/s from group 1 did not care for the child at home, nor had the mother cared for any other children at home. The age and maturity of the younger birth mothers of this sample group was found to have influenced their decision of adoption. For example, Two-fifths of birth mothers in group I were teenagers (44%), "*who felt emotionally, socially or financially unable to parent a child*" (p.312).

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<sup>29</sup> This later group is not relevant to the study of relinquishing birth mothers.

However, Wells (1994) identified the inability to provide emotional and financial support to the child amongst birth mothers more generally, irrespective of age.

The second relinquishing group in Neil's study (2000), which was requesting adoption of children older than babies, relinquished under complex situations such as those detailed below (p.307):

- Baby is cared for at home for a while and adoption is requested at a later date when parent/s feel unable to cope.
- The child in particular is not wanted perhaps because the mother was raped or has negative feeling about the father or because the child has disabilities.
- Parent/s had one or more children at home but do not want a further child.
- Parent/s ask for adoption but they have many personal difficulties that mean that they would probably have problems looking after the child anyway.

These reasons were also evident in Wells' (1994) findings. She recorded motives such as protecting the child from an abusive father, wanting the child to have two parents and mental incapacity to look after the child, sometimes a child with special needs. Henney et al. (2004) report from a sample of 127 birth mothers who relinquished in the late-1970s and 1980s, that the majority of birth mothers (76%) did not believe they were ready to be parents. They also report that the most typical reason for placement was that the birth mother sought a better life for her child than she believed she could provide. For instance, 63% of birth mothers relinquished because they felt that adoption would provide more financial security for their children. These motives along with others, such as a desire for the child to grow up in a two-parent home (75%) are rather more positive reasons than those previously stated by birth mothers, centred on the needs of the child. Other motives for relinquishments reported by Henney et al. include marital status (55%), age and lack of emotional maturity (55%), problems with the birth father (44%) or their own family (34%), and a desire to complete their studies (34%).

Scholars such as Selwyn et al. (2008) and Neil (2000) have identified important differences in the motives for relinquishment stated by Black Minority Ethnic (BME) birth mothers. They report that Asian children were likely to be given up for adoption

to preserve family *Izzat* (family honour) (Ballard, 1994; Dale et al., 2002). In the case of BME birth mothers from Neil's sample (2000, p.312), "*these birth mothers planned adoption because within their culture extra-marital births are not sanctioned*". Neil cites evidence from a case where one BME mother requested the adoption of her child "*because of the shame that keeping him would bring on her family*" (p.312). Thus, cultural norms and values were seen to have influenced BME birth mothers' decision to relinquish. Selwyn et al. (2008, p.5) argues that "*in some ways, their family histories bore a resemblance to the case histories one might have read in the 1960s: a young single mother with a child born out of wedlock, which brought shame on the family and led to the infant being relinquished for adoption. However, for some Asian mothers the disrepute felt by the family by having such a child was so great that the mothers feared for their lives*". These are important findings in understanding the social and cultural contexts in which BME birth mothers have offered their children to adoption.

These reasons give us some insights into why birth mothers' relinquished from the 1970s onwards, but it is impossible to make generalisations, largely due to evidence derived from small sample sizes. In many earlier studies examining birth mothers who relinquished prior to the 1980s, coercion and a lack of support from family and friends were identified as influencing birth mothers' decision to relinquish. These findings are important in advancing our knowledge about birth mothers options. For instance, birth mothers who were residing in the parental home may have felt pressured to relinquish their children. However, empirical evidence doesn't indicate if birth mothers were aware of other options, such as accessing state benefits to support themselves. This is an important point for further analysis of birth mothers' experiences of the adoption process, to see if they were *counselled* through their options. Studies based on small samples have suggested that birth mothers now relinquish for very different reasons, such as wanting the child to have two parents, emotional and financial security, or because they themselves could not cope with having a child. Interesting findings are emerging from research on BME birth mothers where the social and cultural contexts in which these birth mothers are relinquishing mirrors the contexts in which White birth mothers had previously relinquished their children in. It will be important to validate the findings reported in this section with evidence collated for this PhD.



### **3.4 Birth mothers' changing experiences of adoption**

This section will report on empirical research detailing information about birth mothers' experiences of adoption. In doing so, it is hoped to build up a picture of how birth mothers' experienced the adoption process at different points throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Generally speaking, a review of the literature shows that birth mothers' experiences are documented in relation to the social attitudes towards them and/or details of how they experienced the process of adoption under closed and open models of adoption practice. Literature and research on adoption has often concentrated on single unmarried birth mothers, since this was the main relinquishing group (Howe et al., 1992). This section shall go on to critically examine these studies to understand the extent to which existing evidence answers to the research questions for this study (see p.4) and also to identify gaps in knowledge.

As noted in chapter 2, the practices of adoptions have changed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There has been a shift from practice based on secrecy and a permanent severance of the mother child bond to a model which embraces openness and post adoption contact. Under a closed model of adoption, Howe et al. (1992) have argued *“it was assumed that the birth mother would not want to have any form of contact with her child or learn of its progress and there was certainly no mechanism to facilitate it; the break was meant to be clean and absolute”* (1992, p.11). This is further evidenced in a study carried out of New Zealand birth mothers by Field (1991). Field reports that a quarter of birth mothers did not get to see their son or daughter at all after the birth. Furthermore, two thirds of birth mothers reported they had no help with all the emotional effects of relinquishment at the time it happened.

Research has indicated that the closed model of adoption has had serious consequences for relinquishing birth mothers' mental health (Winker and Van Keppel, 1984). A permanent severance of the mother-child bond has been found to be a painful and on-going process for the birth mother (Powell and Warren, 1997). Parting with a child involves a loss which has similarities to grief in response to events such as paternal death, loss of a loved one and separation (Winkler and Keppel, 1984; Hughes and Logan, 1993). These studies tell us that some of the lasting feelings carried by the birth parents who relinquished their children include continued guilt, anger and feelings of loss and grief (Bouchier, Lambert, and Triseliotis, 1991).

Furthermore, a large scale study of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in relinquishing birth mothers found 207 out of 262 (79%) birth mothers indicated that depression and anxiety, as well as difficulties with relationships and trust, were prolonged and profound consequences of surrendering a child to adoption (Wells, 1993).

A striking feature of birth mothers' experiences of adoption under a closed model of practice was the long-term, adverse impact of relinquishment as a result of the lack of opportunity to acknowledge and mourn the lost child (Deykin et al., 1984; Rynearson, 1982; Pannor, Baran, and Sorosky, 1978). Winker and Van Keppel (1984) have attributed the negative effects of adoptions to feelings of silence, shame, secrecy and a lack of support.

Lewis and Welshman (1997) have argued that unmarried mothers have been persistently singled out and labelled a social problem in all but a brief period during the late 1960s and 1970s. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, controlling the sexual activities of young women was seen as paramount to the proper conduct of a decent society and to respectability (Elliott, 2005). The social conditions of today are considerably different from those of one hundred years ago, when illegitimate pregnancy was greatly frowned upon, and was deeply rooted in feelings of shame and stigma, unmarried women being "*condemned morally and spiritually*" (Howe et al., 1992, p.8). Howe, Sawbridge and Hinings (1992) have argued that by the 1950s ethical and moral explanations of birth mothers' deviant behaviour began to be replaced by scientific explanations. For example, by the 1950s the problem of illegitimacy was being attributed to the mother's "*neurotic character resulting from disturbances from her own family background*" (Cooper, 1955, p.8). It is unclear from a review of the literature how changes in explanations for birth mothers' deviant behaviour shaped birth mothers' experiences of the adoption process. Thus, it will be important to examine data collected for this study for the impact of these changes on birth mothers' experiences of adoption.

According to Powell and Warren (1997) condemnation of the unmarried mother was still prevalent until the mid-1970s. Powell and Warren (1997) and Wells (1994),

themselves relinquishing birth mothers, have spoken of their own experiences of social condemnation in the extracts below:

*Birth mothers, who like me, lost their babies to adoption decades ago found their society's code of sexual morality harsh and unyielding. The then derogatory term 'unmarried mother' which was in general use until the early 1970s carried connotations of shame and disgrace as well as evoking images of the 'scarlet woman' (Powell and Warren, 1997, p.12).*

*The stigma attached to having an illegitimate child automatically made us unfit mothers; the families we had to offer were not proper families and therefore we were undeserving of our children (Wells, 1994, p.1).*

These extracts provide important insights in understanding the root of the shame and stigma associated with illegitimacy. It is clear from the extract above that the shame and stigma of illegitimacy was associated with what was deemed to be appropriate in terms of family structures. The deeper ideological roots of these moral and social connotations will be examined in more detail in the subsequent chapter.

Mother and Baby homes were often a vehicle in enshrining the secrecy surrounding adoptions until the 1970s (Wells, 1993; Elliot, 2005). Triseliotis et al. (1997) has argued that the birth and surrender of the child was then surrounded by a conspiracy of silence, both in the hospital ward and in the home environment. The non-acknowledgement of the event discouraged the expression of feelings as everybody wanted the birth mother to forget about it and start focusing on the future. Yet this was happening at a time when the mother needed to feel cared for and her feelings recognised about the loss of the child. Howe et al. (1992) has stated that birth mothers were sent away from home, often for “*the sake of appearances*” whereby “*the unmarried mother and her parents would be saved from the shame and embarrassment*” (1992, p.50). Mother and Baby homes became prominent at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; many were set up by philanthropists and moral welfare agencies (Hall and Howes, 1965). In the extract below, Elliot (2005) illustrates how Mother and Baby homes formed part of the birth mothers' experience, until the 1970s.

*These homes were an essential component of the system for dealing with unmarried mothers; they usually took mothers in six weeks before the birth until six weeks after the child had been born. Often mothers went to homes far away from where they lived. (Elliot, 2005, p.140)*

Other studies have also indicated that being ‘sent away’ either to stay with relatives or to a mother and baby home was an important aspect of preserving the secrecy surrounding birth mothers’ experiences of adoption (Ingles, 1984; Rockel and Ryburn, 1988; Wells, 1993; Elliot, 2005).

A lack of information about the child has also contributed to birth mothers’ experiences of adoption, especially feelings of guilt and low self-esteem. For example, Bouchier et al. (1991) found that 85% of their birth mother sample thought about their child weekly or even daily, and a third felt they had adjusted poorly or not at all to the relinquishment experience. They also found most of the birth mothers were eager to contact their adult child and felt that information about his or her circumstances would help them with their persistent feelings of guilt and low self-esteem. These findings are further reinforced by Harris and Whyte’s (1999) paper, discussing support for birth mothers in a group setting. Harris and Whyte found that feelings common to the birth mother included: shame at having become pregnant in the first place; guilt at having given away their child; anger at those who had encouraged them to make a decision and at themselves; powerlessness in the past and now; regret that they had not been able to withstand the pressure; feelings of isolation over the years because they could not discuss their situation with anyone; and an overwhelming need to find their child and explain what happened. Vulnerability at the time of relinquishment was also a common feeling identified by birth mothers who attended the support group.

From the mid-1970s, birth mothers’ experiences of adoption changed. Literature has identified 1970s – 2000 as a period of “changing times, changing need” (Elliot, 2005). Access to birth records for adopted adults has played an important part in changing birth mothers’ experience of adoption (as discussed in chapter 2). Access to birth records for adopted adults meant that birth mothers were faced with the reality that they could be re-traced by their adopted child at some point in the future.

Although the potential disruption to birth mothers' lives was considered and debated prior to the Adoption of Children Act 1976 (resulting in the compulsory need for adopted adults to receive counselling prior to receiving access to their birth records), it was not legally recognised until an amendment was made to the Adoption Act 1976 in the Children Act 1989, with the establishment of the Adoption Contact Register. The Adoption Contact Register was a beneficial development for birth mothers as registration gave them a right and a voice to consider their current circumstances and whether they did or did not want to re-establish contact with a child they had relinquished for adoption. It is worth noting that although birth mothers can register their wish not to be contacted, they have no power to veto the adopted person having access to their birth records and subsequently contacting the birth mother in spite of her stated wishes. In which case, much disruption would have been caused to the birth mother if the adoptive child turned up unannounced.

Changes in the practice of adoptions have also had important implications for birth mothers' experiences of adoption. The move towards openness in adoptions (see chapter 2 for more details), as opposed to those practiced under a closed model of adoption has meant that if appropriate, birth mothers and families are able to retain some contact with the child. These are significant changes in birth mothers' experiences of adoption. As noted earlier, openness in adoptions not only relates to pre-placement and post-placement contact, but also the sharing of information. For example, Berry (1993) found that pre-placement information sharing and post-placement contact were 'fairly common' in her sample of adoptive parents.

Research examining the outcomes of contact for birth relatives is sparse. Much of the work studying the impact of adoption has been carried out in the USA and concentrates on the degree of comfort and satisfaction with contact arrangements expressed by adoptive parents and birth relatives, most frequently parents (Smith and Logan, 2004). For example, Siegal (1993) who studies the experiences of 21 adoptive couples who had open adoption arrangements found that much of the contact was evidently between birth mothers and adopters. It is unclear from Siegal's work how far contact arrangements included children or how long it continued. However, some studies have shown that contact with other birth relatives is also common. For example, in Barth and Berry's (1988) study of 120 families, 97% of children had

contact with former caregivers or birth relatives. Of this number, 27% had contact with birth parents, 32% with birth siblings, 27% with other relatives and 42% with foster carers. Neilson (1985) reports fewer cases of contact with birth relatives (other than birth parents) in his study of 120 older-child adoptions (20%).

Scholars such as Seigel (1993) and Berry (1993) note the degree of openness varied in practice. Seigel found a wide-range of contact arrangements, from an exchange of letters between birth parents and adoptive parents to on-going meetings. Berry (1993), from 1,268 questionnaire responses found a wider variety of arrangements including limited meetings between birth and prospective adoptive parents, post-placement and post-adoption contact of different types between adults, and on-going direct and indirect contact involving adopted children. Other authors have noted these variations in openness over time. Henney et al. (2004), in a longitudinal study<sup>30</sup> of birth mothers' perceptions and experiences with openness in adoption, reports that birth mothers experienced significant changes in openness over time. They document changes both in terms of the type of openness and the amount of contact. Based on interviews and questionnaire returns from 127 birth mothers, 39% experienced a change in openness arrangements. These changes were primarily identified in the group of birth mothers who were in on-going mediated adoptions in wave 1. For example, *"of the 44 birth mothers involved in an on-going mediated<sup>31</sup> adoption at wave 1, 52% had experienced an increase to fully disclosed<sup>32</sup> (contact) or a decrease to mediated stopped<sup>33</sup>"*(Henney, 2004, p.31).

Although some studies have reported birth parents do not always want contact because they are sensitive to children's needs for stability and security in their adoptive families (Sachdev, 1991; Hughes, 1995), some have shown post-placement

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<sup>30</sup> Wave one of the research process was carried out 1987 – 1992. Wave two was carried out 1995 – 2000.

<sup>31</sup> Mediated on-going contact is defined as "contact is occurring through the agency. Contact should be reciprocal or one-way only. The party sending believes the information is being received, and the party receiving believes it was transmitted with the other party's knowledge and approval" (Henney, 2004, p.30).

<sup>32</sup> Fully disclosed openness arrangements are defined as "the parties are or have shared identifying information and/or contact directly, without agency mediation" (Henney, 2004, p.30).

<sup>33</sup> Mediated stopped contact is defined as "any contact has stopped for at least 1 year past the point when it normally should occur. Before the stop, all contact was arranged through the agency or agency personnel and occurred beyond six months after placement. Information shared was intended for the other party and was perceived as received" (Henney, 2004, p.30).

contact to be useful. For example, there is evidence that suggests that the adjustment of relinquishing birth mothers can be promoted if the mother retains some contact with her child (Chapman et al., 1986; Iwanek, 1987; Fratter, 1996; Cushman et al., 1997, Neil, 2003). Evidence also shows that over time some birth mothers do not keep up planned contact due to a lack of help and support in managing the painful feelings that such contact can arouse (e.g. Etter, 1993; Berry et al., 1998; Logan, 1999). Other studies have reported that contact had ceased once birth mothers were satisfied that the child was all right (Christian et al., 1997).

Findings from various studies have shown that birth parents and adoptive parents are largely satisfied with contact arrangements. Etter (1993) reports responses from ninety-three adoptive and thirty-six birth parents to questions about their satisfaction and compliance with contact arrangements. The children had been adopted four and half years before and in 87% of cases contact involved direct meetings between adoptive families and birth parents. The majority of birth parents (94%) said they were satisfied with how open adoption was working. Based on a much smaller sample size of interviews with 5 birth parents, Fratter et al. (1996) found that all of them expressed a positive attitude to post-placement contact and said they found it helpful. Neil (2003) interviewed 19 birth relatives' experiences of face-to-face contact. She reports that in most cases birth relatives stated how face-to-face contact had helped them to accept their child's adoption, largely because contact reassured them of the child's welfare and emphasised the position of the adopters as the psychological parents. These findings are reminiscent of those presented by Smith and Logan (2004). Smith and Logan (2004) interviewed a sample of birth relatives who had direct contact with thirty-two children in twenty-one families. Smith and Logan found that birth mothers felt continuing contact and the passage of time has helped them to believe that adoption was best for their children. These mothers were recorded as having good relations with the adoptive parents and were able to relax and enjoy their contact visits without the deliberating effects of grief and guilt.

Interestingly, Neil (2000) notes important differences in arrangements for post-placement contact between mothers who relinquished infants, those who relinquished

under complex circumstances and those whose children were adopted from the public care system<sup>34</sup>. Neil (2000, p.303) found that when compared with children from the care system and children who had relinquished under complex circumstances, children relinquished as infants were found to have the lowest rates of face to face contact. *“Their birth relatives were least likely to have met the adoptive parents and they were more likely to have no plans for any type of contact after adoption”* (2000, p. 312). These are important differences in levels of contact between these three groups of birth parents. Neil found that the adoption agency played an important role in developing post-placement plans with birth parents, as *“the kinds of contact arrangements made for children varied widely between agencies. For example, some agencies arranged face to face contact with adult birth relatives for as many as one in three children, whilst other agencies did not use this type of contact at all”* (Neil, 2000, p.310). Subsequent empirical research by Neil (2002) assessed contact in adoption and the role of agencies in making supportive plans. She found *“...that while most children were planned to have some form of contact, adoption agencies differed in the extent to which this was promoted, especially face-to-face”* (2002, p.25). These findings suggest that adoption agencies play an important role in developing plans for post-adoption contact with birth families and adopted children. Evidence suggests that post-adoption contact has become an important element of birth mothers’ experiences of adoption. Neil’s study raises some important questions about how far birth parents were aware of arrangements for post-adoption contact at the time of relinquishment, and what impact this knowledge (or ignorance) had on their experience of the adoption process, and their decision to relinquish. It is hoped that data collected from adoption records will provide further insights into this issue.

Since adoption agency professionals were on the frontline in dealing with birth mothers, it is necessary to examine the impact of their role in conditioning the choices available to birth mothers and whether they influenced the adoption process. There is some evidence to suggest that some birth mothers felt pressurised by their social workers to have their children adopted. In a Canadian study by social worker Michael DeSimone (1996), 46.1% of mothers surveyed stated that the surrender of their child was “not at all” their decision, and 17.5% stated it was “a little.” Only 23.7% stated

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<sup>34</sup> See p.73 for more detail on the characteristics of these three groups.



that it was “considerably” or “completely” what they had wanted (p. 79), leaving a coercion rate of 76.3%. These findings would need to be validated in the context of UK adoptions. Nevertheless, they do suggest that role of the social worker in shaping birth mothers’ motives and experiences of adoption is an important one.

Triseliotis (1989, p.22) has argued that in the past “*adoption practices have relied on fashion, prejudice or ignorance, rather than empirical knowledge and ethical considerations*”. Triseliotis adds that “*adoption workers’ values, like those of other social workers, are equally influenced by society’s beliefs, misconceptions which are eventually built into adoption practice*” (1989, p.21). These sentiments suggest that independent factors would have been internalised by workers’ own values, such as the greater acceptance of contraception, pre-marital sexual relations, abortion and single parenthood. This would have been important for the way in which different choices were conveyed to birth mothers over time. Essentially, the changing practice of social workers is as much a sub-conscious reflection of changes in the wider moral environment as of the deliberate application of developments in the social work profession.

In understanding the influence of social workers as a mediating and conditioning influence on birth mothers’ options and experiences of adoption, it is important to consider how the social work profession has changed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Social work as a profession has changed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as have the definitions, principles and values which have informed its work (International Federation for Social Workers, 2005). Cree (2000) has argued that the expansion of social work has gone hand in hand with the increasing involvement of the state in surveying and controlling the lives of citizens. Hugman (1996, p.131) has argued that the “*development of social work has been marked by crises of identity, as it springs from the social circumstances in which it is practiced, being formed by and in response to social policy*”.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, social work changed in character as it gradually moved away from the voluntary agencies (Lymbery, 2001). For the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the training of Family Care’s adoption workers would have been provided under the auspices of the Church of England Moral Welfare Council, which supervised and

trained Anglican Moral Welfare Workers (Hall and Howes, 1965). Watson (1962) reporting on the work being undertaken in the Diocese of Southwell states that “*only those who were involved in the work of the agency on a full time basis had received training carried out at the Josephine Butler house in Liverpool*”. Wootton (1959) stated that these courses provided a two-year residential course for young candidates and women over 40 took a shorter non-residential London course, lasting six months. In addition, Wootton reports that the Professional Association of Moral Welfare Workers was established in 1945, which provided training courses for those involved in moral welfare work and was responsible for raising the status and improving the standards of training of adoption workers.

The period 1944 - 48 saw the introduction of several major pieces of legislation as the basis for substantial changes in health, education, and income maintenance and in child care (Lyons, 2003). After 1948, three departments were responsible for personal social services (health departments, welfare departments and children's departments). In the 1960s, they were unified into Social Work Departments in Scotland, and Social Services Departments in England and Wales. This gave the impetus for establishing social work as a generic profession. Although social work *training* was generic, and it was managed through administratively generic Social Services Departments, it may not have often been practiced generically in the sense of social workers carrying generic caseloads.

From the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Eileen Younghusband played an instrumental role in the development of professional practice in social work. Lyons (2003) has argued that, aside from her particular role as a social work educator and consultant, it was through her committee work that Younghusband's impact was felt in social work services and social work education. For instance, in her Reports of 1947 and 1950 she advocated 'generic' training - a set of core skills common to all social workers (Starkey, 2000). In 1954, she pioneered the teaching of a generic course that was to become the prototype of professional social work training in other universities (Hall, 2003). In 1955, she chaired a Ministry of Health working party on the provision of training for social workers (Starkey, 2000). The subsequent Younghusband Report (1959) led to the establishment of a Council for Training in Social Work and a social work certificate (*ibid*). This report was important in highlighting the fact that many

workers were untrained and staff development was rare, with poor supervision, case reviews and case records (Lyons, 2003). Importantly, Jane Rowe, speaking at a conference organised by the Church of England Committee for Diocesan Moral and Welfare Councils, addressing the issue of *Participation: New Dimensions of Social Work* in 1970 argued that “*at the time of the 1958 Adoption Act – one finds that adoption work was not really considered part of the professional social work service*” (Rowe, 1970, p.1). This is important as it suggests that adoption workers practicing in the 1950s and 60s may not have conformed to generic social work values, however this remains an issue which data collected for this PhD will provide further insights.

In the 1960s Younghusband advocated an individualised case approach to social work, recognising that clients’ needs differ based on their circumstances. Retrospectively, Wootton (1959) (cited in Wilson et al., 2008, p.53) at the time argued that the “*remedy for social work practice was that it should develop a more modest focus on helping people by acting as what she termed a ‘middleman’, mobilising, organising and coordinating the services of other professional colleagues, and by guiding people through the mass of legislation and policy that could affect them*”. Lewis (1995) has argued that in the 1950s and 1960s, the service people received was closer to the approach advocated by Wootton than the approach advocated by Younghusband.

Cochrane (1993) has argued that the growth in the number of qualified social workers in the 1960s and 70s was the product of state initiatives, which interacted with attempts to move towards professional status by those working as social workers. Social work as a profession since the 1970s has developed in a changing political context (*ibid*). Cree (2002), in mapping the development of social work as a profession, argues that “*as society ‘modernised’, social work shifted from the informal to the formal sphere, from voluntary to statutory agencies*” (p.285) and that “*the professionalisation of social work in the UK meant that social work (statutory and voluntary) increasingly looked to the state to provide its ‘clients’ and regulate its activities*” (p.287). Since the 1970s, practice has centred on the requirement to respond to new legislation and policy (Lymbery, 2001). It is clear that social work as a profession has evolved throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The extent to which adoption practitioners influenced the adoption process is an important issue for further analysis

as empirical evidence examining the impact of social work practice on birth mothers' experiences of the adoption process is scarce. A further point of clarity is needed on the extent to which adoption practitioners were qualified social workers and were 'professionalised'.

In summary, a review of the literature shows that birth mothers' experiences of adoption have changed over the decades. Literature reviewed in this chapter suggests this is largely due to the way adoptions have been carried out in practice. Key elements of the two models of adoption practice are summarised in Figure 3.2 below.

<b>Figure 3.2: Characteristics of Open and Closed Adoptions</b>	
Closed Adoptions	Open Adoptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>^ Permanent severance of mother child bond</li> <li>^ Secrecy of adopters and birth parents identities</li> <li>^ Clean break view – fresh start</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>^ Some contact may be retained</li> <li>^ Adopters/ birth parents identities may be known</li> <li>^ Adoption as a life-long process</li> </ul>

Generally speaking, birth mothers who relinquished children prior to the 1970s had experiences of a permanent severance of the mother-child bond. Adoptions were normally carried out under a veil of secrecy, which was perpetuated by the stigma of unmarried motherhood, with mothers often being 'banished' to save themselves and their families from the shame. By the 1970s, birth mothers' experiences of adoption begin to change, both for those who had relinquished their children to adoption before the mid-1970s, and for those who were relinquishing after this date. For instance, access to adoption records would have meant that those who relinquished before the mid-1970s were faced with the prospect that their adopted child may trace them. In addition, for this group of birth mothers, their experiences began to be recognised as the long-term effects of relinquishing under a closed model of adoption began to be documented. The experiences of birth mothers relinquishing after the 1970s would have differed considerably from the experiences of birth mothers relinquishing prior to this date because of developments in post-adoption contact.

Although this review of the literature is insightful in understanding how birth mothers' experiences of adoption have changed over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, gaps in knowledge still remain. For instance, as noted earlier the influence social workers had in shaping birth mothers' options and experiences of the adoption remains to be understood. Additionally, from the empirical evidence and literature discussed in this chapter it is evident that several gaps in knowledge relating to birth mothers' changing options and motives for adoption also remain. Although details about birth mothers' social circumstances at time of pregnancy can be gleaned from some studies, little research has directly examined how birth mothers' social circumstances may have shaped their options and motives for adoption. This PhD will make an important contribution to knowledge by documenting these. Furthermore, a review of the literature shows that knowledge relating to birth mothers' motives for adoption is often based on small-scale studies, and information collected from birth mothers motives for relinquishment, especially relating to the time period pre-1960s, is often collected years after the act of relinquishment. This PhD will be important in validating these findings with motives for relinquishment recorded on adoption case files. More importantly, questions remain, ones relating to what has caused birth mothers' options, motives and experiences to change, This PhD, as well as making an important contribution to mapping changes in birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption, will examine the factors which have caused these changes, Based on what is known so far we know that attitudes towards unmarried motherhood have changed; adoption policy contexts have evolved, shaping the way in which birth mothers have experienced the adoption process; state assistance for single parents has changed, suggesting that the option of self-support has become a more realistic one over time. However, the underlying theoretical shifts, which give a deeper context to understanding changes in birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption remain to be examined. The following chapter will go on explore the relevance of identity in shaping birth mothers' choices and experiences of adoption and will examine shifts in wider ideologies and discourses relating to the family, motherhood and respectability, as a theoretical basis for understanding these changes.

# 4

## Theoretical Context

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter develops a theoretical discussion to contextualise changes in birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Central to these changes are discussions about the changing boundaries of women's structural, gendered and ethnic identities. The concept of 'identity' is layered with cultural, structural and socio-economic assumptions. This chapter begins by discussing how we have come to understand concepts such as 'identity' 'gender', 'social class' and 'culture' as a basis for theoretically contextualising birth mothers' choices, motives and experiences of adoption. I then go on to examine familial discourses and discourses of respectability and motherhood, as idealised notions of womanhood and discuss how these are both relevant and central to contextualising the experiences and options which have been available to birth mothers throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The final section, based on the literature reviewed in this and subsequent chapters, is dedicated to the development of a theoretical framework to understand the underlying reasons for changes in the reasons birth mothers have offered for the adoption of their children and changes in how they have experienced the adoption process.

### 4.2 Gendered, class and ethnic identities

Identity is layered with cultural norms and values, specific to particular social groupings (Jenkins, 1996). Whilst each individual has an identity that is personal to them, these are shaped through membership of social groups which are both specific to a time, place and context (Hall, 1992). The concept of identity has been understood by academics and scholars in various ways. Snow (2001) distinguishes between

personal, social and collective identities. Personal identities are the attributes and meanings assigned to and by oneself as the actor; they are self-designations and self-attributions regarded as personally distinctive (Snow and Anderson 1987). The essence of collective identities “*resides in a shared sense of “one-ness” or “we-ness” anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences among those who comprise the collectivity and in relation or contrast to one or more actual or imagined sets of “others”*” (Snow, 2001, p.3). In the case of relinquishing birth mothers, a collective identity is shared by the act of and through the experience of relinquishing a child to adoption. Essentially, a collective identity is also shared by birth mothers before they gave up their babies, which has to do with being a young working class woman<sup>35</sup>, with all the typical longings and frustrations that accompany this identity, who then finds herself pregnant. This is the identity that conditions her choices. Birth mothers collective identities are also framed by the fact that they are all mothers, but have relinquished their responsibilities of parenthood. It is important to note that this conceptualisation of collective identity is not generic to all birth mothers who have had their children adopted. For example, although mothers who have had their children removed from the family unit by the local authority share the experience of parting with a child with relinquishing mothers, they have done so under very different conditions and circumstances, meaning that experiences are no longer collective.

Social identities are attributed or imputed to others in an attempt to situate them in social space (Snow, 2001). They are grounded typically in established social roles, such as “teacher” and “mother,” or in broader and more inclusive social categories, such as gender categories or ethnic and national categories. Social identities are often referred to as “role identities” (Stryker 1980) and “categorical identities” (Calhoun 1997). Gendered, class and ethnic identities are central elements of one’s identity and by examining these aspects of birth mothers’ identities it is possible to locate their experiences and motives for adoption in the context of wider ideological discourses. Further, by examining the social identities of women it is possible to map changes in

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<sup>35</sup> This assertion is based on evidence derived from studies presented in the previous chapter. See pp. 66 – 69.

wider social-cultural norms and values which ultimately framed birth mothers' options, choices and experiences.

Gendered identities have shaped women's experiences throughout history. The essence of gender roles is that they define what an individual should do with his/her life in order to be successful as a man or a woman (Worell, 2001). They mandate different primary activities for men and women. In Western societies, gendered roles have changed profoundly over time. Historically, gendered roles dictated a male's role as the 'breadwinner' and the female as a 'homemaker'. Traditionally as the wife and mother, women are to support their husbands' careers and raise their children. These gendered assumptions have implications for the ideals of womanhood.

There is a well-documented debate about the how gendered roles are imposed on individuals. On one hand, structural-functionalists have argued that gendered roles are imposed by biological factors. For example, Parsons (1955) argues the family is biologically determined, as so are gendered roles. Ultimately, Parsons draws upon the biological element of childbearing and nursing of children as the basis for distinction between gendered roles. He argues that "*the fundamental explanation of the allocation of the roles between the biological sexes lies in the fact that the bearing and early nursing of children establish a strong presumptive primacy of the mother to the small child and this in turn establishes a presumption that the man, who is exempt from these biological functions, should specialise in the alternative instrumental direction*" (1955, p.23). Thus, for Parsons gendered roles are prescribed on the basis of biology and biology is seen as the primary factor in locating females in the private sphere and males in the public sphere.

Alternatively, feminist analysis reflects substantial disagreement concerning the impact of biology on gender (for an overview of aspects of the debate, see Rossi, 1977; Cheal, 1991; Leira, 1992). For instance, Oakley (1974) critiques Parsons' (1955) conceptualisation of biologically determined gendered roles. She argues that his analysis is based on the myths of male superiority and the expressive housewife-mother role is not necessary for the functioning of the family unit; it merely exists for the convenience of men. Oakley argues that gendered roles are culturally rather than biologically determined. In support of this, she presents evidence from a number of



different societies which shows that there are no tasks (apart from childbearing) which are performed exclusively by females.

Role theory has also been important in explaining how gendered roles are imposed on society. Role theory is often seen as a form of social determinism, stressing the way individuals are trapped in stereotypes (Yockey, 1978). Connell (1987) argues that these stereotyped interpersonal expectations are indeed social facts. They are made effective by the idea that other people reward conformity to them and punish departures from them. Feminists such as Franzway and Lowe (1978) critique role theory by arguing that it focuses on attitudes and dismisses the realities that the attitudes are about. They argue that role theory highlights the pressures that create an artificially rigid distinction between women and men, and play down the economic, domestic and political power that men exercise over women. Beechey (1986) suggests that assumptions derived from role theory, such as the male and female roles in the family is part of our taken for granted assumptions. These assumptions are invisible and are accepted as the norm. Butler (1990) concludes that our gender is not a core aspect of our identity but rather a performance, how we behave at different times. Our gender (masculinity and femininity) is an achievement rather than a biological factor. Thus, Butler suggests that we should think of gender as free-floating and fluid rather than fixed (*ibid*). Despite these critiques, applying role theory to an examination of birth mothers' experiences and motives of adoption allows for a deeper understanding of how illegitimacy came to be stigmatised. A review of the literature in the previous chapter demonstrated that for the large part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century some birth mothers relinquished their children to adoption because of their single status. It was their status as an unmarried mother that departed from these ideals. Thus, these actions were punishable by the stigmatisation of unmarried motherhood where unmarried mothers are perceived as *immoral* and labelled as 'fallen women'.

Apart from the housewife-mother role, idealised notions of womanhood are also linked to a certain type of femininity (McDowell, 1999). Femininity has an inherent relationship with appropriate sexual and moral standards (Chodorow, 1989, 1990; Glenn, 1994) and is legitimised through institutions such as the family and practices such as motherhood (McMahon, 1995; Skeggs, 1997). These aspects of femininity are important in furthering our understanding of the deeper ideological influences on the

reasons birth mothers offered for the adoption of their children and their influence on birth mothers' experiences of adoption. In order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of these aspects of femininity and their implications for birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption, they will be examined in more detail later in this chapter.

Social class also plays an important role in shaping the identities, choices and experiences of women. The work of Bourdieu (1986), a major contributor to theorising about class within the Marxian tradition, has been important in understanding the reproduction of class identities. Bourdieu perceives class as constructed within a spatial model of society comprising many intersecting dimensions such as class, gender, sexuality, age and race (Hook, 2009). He proposes an understanding of society based on the movement of 'capital' through social spaces as it is accumulated or lost by individuals (Skeggs 1996). In *The Forms of Capital* (1986) Bourdieu distinguishes between three types of capital. These are detailed below:

**Economic capital** relates to command over economic resources, such as, cash, assets.

**Social capital** relates to resources based on group membership, relationships, networks of influence and support.

**Cultural capital** relates to forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person has, which give them a higher status in society.

Bourdieu's conceptualisation of 'capitals' allows for a deeper understanding of how realistic different options may have been to birth mothers at different points in history. For example, the option of self-support would have been realistic for birth mothers who possessed economic capital which would have allowed birth mothers to support themselves and their children. If the birth mother did not possess the relevant economic resources and the option of self-support was not realistic, social capital, such as parental support would have been important in providing birth mothers with alternative options, such as keeping the baby at the parental home.

Perhaps the most significant of the three capitals is cultural capital. Like the other forms of capitals, cultural capital differs on the basis of race, class and gender.

'Embodied cultural capital' consists of both the consciously acquired and the passively "inherited" properties of one's self, usually from the family through socialization, of culture and traditions (Bennett et al., 2009). Socialisation practices are important in understanding class based cultures and traditions. Bourdieu argues that cultural capital is not transmissible instantaneously; rather, it is acquired over time as it impresses itself upon one's habitus (character and way of thinking). The habitus is the system of durable and transposable dispositions through which we perceive, judge and act in the world (Butler and Watt, 2007). The system of dispositions people acquire, their habitus, depends on the positions they occupy in society. It is these dispositions which become collective on the basis of class. Thus, by developing an understanding of classed dispositions relating to respectability, motherhood and appropriate family structures, it is possible to develop a more coherent understanding of the wider ideologies and discourses may have shaped the way a birth mother viewed her world and her options. For instance, in understanding how a young woman sought to maintain a sense of respectability allows for comprehension of how wider discourses of respectability influenced her choices and how she perceived the adoption process. Analysis of documentary sources will be particularly important here, especially data relating to birth mothers wanting to relinquish their children because of the stigma associated with unmarried motherhood. Further, data relating to the strategies birth mothers engaged in to avoid friends, relatives and the community finding out about her pregnancy will also provide insights into how the fear of being stigmatised shaped their experiences of adoption, i.e. being sent away to stay with relatives, or a mother and baby home.

Feminist scholars argue that by adopting Bourdieu's model of cultural capital, it opens up the possibility of a space for women within class analysis (Reay, 1998b) by theorising social class as an integral component of gendered identity (Hook, 2009). The interaction between class and gendered identities has been widely documented in amongst feminist scholars (Rose, 1996; Rose, 1988; McClelland, 1996; Seccombe, 1986). Fernandes (1997) examines the work and home experiences of Calcuttan women working in a jute mill. In this case study, she examines the gendered and classed segregation of the shop-floor for clues about the ways in which gender and class relations are reproduced. She reports that the identities of women workers were produced through the unique cultural location they occupied in relation to hegemonic

representations of class, community and gender, as well as through the meanings they gave to their particular location and experiences. The interconnections between class and gender were found to play a fundamental role in shaping both the political actions of workers and the representation of their interests. Thus, Fernandes argues that "*gender and community are integral to class 'structure'*" (1997, p.57).

Central to discussions of class and gendered identities are the processes by which knowledge is constructed, legitimised and institutionalised (Reay, 1998a, 1998b; Skeggs, 1997). Bourdieu uses the term 'symbolic capitalism' to describe this process; it is "*the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognised as legitimate*" (1987, p.4). Symbolic capitalism represents an additional resource boost, granted to possession of economic, social, and cultural capitals once they are legitimised as *not* being based around interests; their interest basis is thus hidden (Butler and Watt, 2007). This capital is crucially about power: legitimisation is, as Skeggs (1997, p.226) observes "*the key mechanism in the conversion of power*". The tactic and normalising effect in knowledge operates by taking one group's experiences and assuming these to be paradigmatic of all (Wearing, 1984). Game (1991) describes the process of knowledge construction whereby designations of 'oppressed groups', in this case working class women, are constituted as objects of knowledge. The process of legitimisation is an important one as it is only once knowledge has been legitimised does it become powerful (Skeggs, 1997). It is when different audiences are introduced and respond that challenges over the legitimacy of knowledge are produced (Wearing, 1984). This analysis is important in advancing our understanding about how changes in discourses relating to the family, motherhood and respectability may have been legitimised through the changing ethos, mission, policies and practices of adoption agencies. Thus, in terms of this PhD, it will be important to examine evidence of how gendered assumptions relating to women's role in society, i.e assumptions about appropriate family structures and standards of respectability were legitimised through the policies and practices of adoption agencies.

There is also an inherent relationship between gender, class and race (Sacks, 1990; Skeggs, 1997). Feminist scholars such as Butler (1990) and Mohanty (1991) argue that explanations of women's practices and attitudes must be contextualised in

relation to difference based on race, class, and national origin. Butler (1990) in examining the problems of defining the concept of 'woman' argues that we cannot define women as a unified homogenous group since every woman is a unique individual. Women are not a united group since there are a great many divisive differences between them (West and Fenstermajer, 1997). Gender, class and race transmit different cultures. A White middle class woman will occupy different social spaces, be offered different opportunities and subscribe to different norms and values from those of an Afro-Caribbean working class woman. Hooks (1981, p.18) illustrates this point further

*Women in lower class and poor groups, particularly those who are non-white, would not have defined women's liberation as women gaining social equality with men since they are continually reminded in their everyday lives that all women do not share a common social status.*

Literature and discussions presented in this section demonstrate the importance of not categorising birth mothers' motives and experiences of adoption as a collective experience or as being generic to a particular point in time. Motives and experiences of adoption will indeed differ on the basis of race and class, as will the extent to which different options were realistic for different groups of birth mothers at different points in time. An examination of birth mothers' identities is central to contextualising the reasons they offered for the adoption of their children, and in particular understanding the ways in which birth mothers' choices were constrained by their social class status or assumptions made about their gendered roles. In terms of this thesis the key question is how birth mothers negotiated their identity as working class women through the adoption process differently over time. Therefore, in the subsequent analysis chapters, in order to fully contextualise birth mothers' changing options and motives for adoption it will be important to build a rich picture of birth mothers identities. This will be possible by examining data relating to birth mothers' socio-demographic profiles collected from adoption case records.

Additionally, by understanding the extent to which birth mothers were equipped with the relevant social, economic and cultural capitals provides a basis for examining how realistic different choices were at different points in history. For instance, if it is

argued that birth mothers were largely from working class backgrounds, then the levels of economic and cultural capitals available to them would have been limited. This would have made the option of self-support unrealistic. Thus birth mothers' social class status would have constrained their choices. Data relating to birth mothers' occupational and housing tenure status will be particularly useful in understanding how realistic the option of self-support was at different points throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, it will be important to examine if birth mothers were in possession of social capital, such as parental support. Social capital is important in understanding the extent to which birth mothers could draw upon wider social support networks which would have allowed them to keep their children, if the option of self-support was not available. The key point here is that by examining birth mothers identities it is possible to understand the constraints imposed on birth mothers' options and how these constraints changed over time. Thus, an important point for analysis of the data will be to understand what difference access to different kinds of capital made to the exercise of choice.

As noted earlier in the chapter femininity has an inherent relationship with appropriate sexual and moral standards (Chodorow, 1989, 1990; Glenn, 1994) and is legitimised through institutions such as the family and practices such as motherhood (McMahon, 1995; Skeggs, 1997). These aspects of femininity are important in furthering our understanding of the influence of deeper ideologies and discourses on the reasons birth mothers offered for the adoption of their children and their influence on birth mothers' experiences of adoption. In examining changes in these discourses it is possible to offer hypothetical explanations for changes in birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption. This discussion is presented in the final section of this chapter. The subsequent two sections will go on to examine changes in these ideological discourses in more detail. The first of these sections will examine how discourses relating to respectability, a central aspect of the gendered identity, are shaped by classed dispositions. And the second section will examine shifts in ideological shifts in discourses related to the family and motherhood.

### 4.3 Respectability, class and femininity

A review of the literature shows that birth mothers relinquished their children to adoption under social and moral conditions where single motherhood was stigmatised. Central to the societal condemnation of unmarried mothers are discourses of femininity and respectability. Respectability is linked to immoral behaviours and acquired prestige amongst peers and in society more generally. Several interpretations of respectability have offered by academics. It has been seen as a force of consensus which smoothed social tensions and created trans-class identities, and it has been described as class (Cordery, 1995) and gender specific (Smart, 1980). Respectability is a gendered language usually deployed and defended by women, through the concept of femininity (Wolcott, 2001). Femininity requires the display of classed dispositions, of forms of conduct or behaviour and different forms of cultural capital (Skeggs, 1997).

A review of the literature shows that the concepts of femininity and respectability have changed throughout history. What it means to be a 'female' and 'respectable' has changed over time. Thus, it is important to pay attention to the historical construct of respectability and how it may have differed between working class and middle class women.

In the late Victorian period, masculinist political, corporate, educational, and religious institutions produced hegemonic versions of upper and middle class womanhood that rested on an ideology of women as gifted with superior moral character (Morin, 2008). Some argue that respectability during this period was concerned with values of ease, restraint and calm and displays of luxurious decoration (Skeggs, 1997). Others argue that respectability was concerned with the values of "*hard work, thrift, piety and sexual restraint – values that were, theoretically, accessible to all classes and races and therefore routes of social mobility*" (Walcott, 2001, p.5). This definition was often used to differentiate the rough working class in the 18th and 19th centuries in the United States and Great Britain.

With the rise of the bourgeoisie in the 19th century, respectability was denoted by class and attributed as a privilege through dress and demeanour and organisational affiliation (Wolcott, 2001; Best, 1982). Respectability became a means by which to

judge strangers on the basis of their appearance and behaviour. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century respectable femininity had become established as a middle class sign, a sign of a particular form of womanhood. It was seen to be “*the property of middle class women who could prove themselves to be respectable through their appearance and conduct*” (Skeggs, 1997, p.99). As a result, “*women....embodied respectability or the lack of it, in their dress, public conduct, language, housekeeping, childbearing methods, spending habits, and sexual behaviour*” (Ross, 1985, p.39). Thus, ideals of respectability were formulated and legitimised by the middle classes.

Women were also responsible for “*prescribed standards of proper maternal care which demanded adequate nourishing food, good quality clothing, water, fuel, soap, and other resources*” (Tabaili, 1996, p.175), most which would have been beyond the reach of most poor women. Observers denounced women unable to meet these unrealistic demands as ignorant and responsible for their families’ poverty; deficiencies in their maternal qualities were blamed for the deterioration of the British racial stock, imperilling the empire (Rose, 1985). Tabaili (1996) argues that the class based ideal of a breadwinning husband and dependant wife and children was simply economically unfeasible for most working class people because many working men earned less than an adequate wage, the conditions of working class women’s lives demanded work outside the home and other public-sphere activities, which were incompatible with middle class definitions of respectability.

Working class women’s relationship to femininity has always been produced through recourse to vulgarity. Rowe (1995, p.57) argues that “*working class women have often been associated with the lower unruly order of bodily functions such as that of expulsion and leakage and reproduction which signified a lack of discipline and vulgarity*”. Working class women have also been constructed to be distanced from having ‘taste’ (Bourdieu, 1986). It was this desire to avoid vulgarity that working class women invested in femininity, which resulted in a movement away from the sexual, thus offering routes into respectability (Skeggs, 1997).

Investments in ideals of femininity enabled middle class women to gain access to limited status and moral superiority. Consequently, femininity and respectability became associated with different levels of power (Ware, 1992). Those who could achieve femininity were able to judge those women who could not. Women were



significantly involved in charitable work during this period, many of those from the middle classes (Prochaska, 1980). Women who engaged in pre-marital sexual relations lacked morals and did not display behaviours associated with femininity. By rejecting ideals of femininity, these women are labelled as 'fallen women' - women who lacked respectability. Sexual restraint and traditional sex roles are important components of respectability and are areas in which women were more harshly judged than men (Wolcott, 2001). For example, a woman who is promiscuous in her sexuality is inevitably unrespectable while a man who behaves in a similar manner does not lose his respectability (Smart, 1980). This is due to the different ways in which sexuality has been constructed for males and females. Promiscuity has frequently been associated with lapsed morals for women yet for men it is a signifier of their strong masculine sexuality.

Skeggs (1997) argues that it is against the middle class ideals that working class women continue to be judged. Skeggs identifies the ways in which working class women attempted to dis-identify from being identified as working class. Skeggs in conducting empirical work shows how working class women were limited to displaying those forms of cultural capital with the least generalised legitimacy and power - their femininity, bodily appearance and respectability. In their studies, Skeggs (1997) and Ortner (1991) found that value judgements were made on the basis of appearance. Appearance became the means by which women felt they could know and place others. It is against the constant marking and positioning that women made investments in respectability. Appearance also became a signifier of conduct; it became the marker of respectability. But too much concentration in appearance was seen to be a sign of deviancy (Lury, 1993).

Interpretations of femininity and respectability are also ethnically and culturally specific. This is evidenced by Ware (1992) and Davis (1995). These studies show that working class Black and White women were coded as the 'sexual' and 'deviant other' against which femininity was defined. Ware (1992), in examining the role of White women in the history of racism shows how the categories' of White middle-class womanhood were constructed against those of potentially dangerous Black women. She subsequently argues that there is a need to perceive White femininity as a historically constructed category. Davis (1995) found African-American women

historically forged models of womanhood that challenged prevailing notions of femininity. What it means to be respectable also differs between different cultures. For example, within Western cultures sexual relations outside marriage have become more socially and morally accepted, but within some Eastern cultures sexual restraint before marriage is still a marker of respectability (Seidman, Fischer and Meeks, 2006). Empirical research on South Asian females has widely documented the importance of *izzat* (family honour) in maintaining respectability (Ballard, 1994; Dale et al., 2002).

Discourses of respectability and femininity are important in contextualising birth mothers' motives and experiences of adoption. It can be argued that what it means to be a 'woman' and 'respectable' has shaped the wider context in which birth mothers have relinquished their children in. It will be important to question analyses to understand if birth mothers internalised and sought to achieve a respectable status. It also remains to be understood how the adoption agency, and indeed social workers, mediated the standards against which respectability was judged, in to the lives and experiences of birth mothers. It is also important to note that discourses of respectability during this period may have limited the options available to the birth mother. For instance, the birth mother's family may have insisted on adoption to avoid the disgrace of illegitimacy. Thus, a key point for the analysis of data on birth mothers' motives and experiences of adoption is how far were birth mothers pressured by the defence of 'respectability' - their own or other people's - at different points in time.

#### **4.4 Ideologies of the family and motherhood**

What is seen to be appropriate in terms of family structures and how motherhood is best practiced has changed over time. A review of the literature shows that the majority of birth mothers relinquishing children to adoption were single and that it was not uncommon for them to relinquish because of their unmarried status. Conceptualisations of the family and motherhood are important in examining the social spaces women occupy within the family provide a clearer understanding of how gendered assumptions about the family and motherhood may have shaped birth mothers' experiences of adoption and constrained the choices available to them.

Sociologists have tended to assume that a Western middle-class idea of the family and family life is the norm (Abbott and Wallace, 1997). The ‘cereal packet norm’ family (Leach, 1967) – consisting of husband as head of household and children being cared for by a ‘smiling wife’ (Abbott and Wallace, 1997) has also been described as a universally traditional nuclear family (Murdock, 1949). There are, in Murdock’s (1949) argument, four universal functions of the nuclear family: sexual, reproductive, educational and economic. However, the nuclear family does not account for the diversity of ways in which co-residency, economic relations, sexuality and reproduction can be organised<sup>36</sup>. Feminists such as Abbott and Wallace (1997) argue that the nuclear family, a patriarchal family form, is reproduced by social and legal institutions in Western Society because it is assumed this is both how people *do* live their lives and how they *should* live their lives. The force of these assumptions is three-fold: to set up the role of housewife and mother as an available lifestyle for women, to declare it a lifestyle which is inherently satisfying for women and one with which they ought to be satisfied, and to place on women as individuals any blame for the lifestyle’s failure to satisfy them. Abbott and Wallace (1997) go on to argue that

*..the familial ideology has the effect of converting the interests of a dominant group into the self-perceived interests of a subordinated one and making the dominated group responsible for any consequent failures – in this case by individualising a set of discontents which might otherwise be thought to have their base collectively experiences structural pressures rather than individualised failures” (1997, p.147).*

The prime measure of family efficiency has remained the degree to which the family demonstrates its capacity to care for its members and to socialise its children (Storry and Childs, 2007). The overriding concern during the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been to ensure family stability according to particular assumptions as to what the family consists of and what its members should do (Lewis, 1992, p.12). Sociologists have contended that the 20<sup>th</sup> century family focused on increasing the desire for warmth and personal fulfilment (Burger and Kellner, 1964). The 20<sup>th</sup> century family has also had to carry

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<sup>36</sup> Although the nuclear family has stayed the predominant type of family unit over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there has been a marked rise in the numbers of co-habiting couples and single parent families. The changing structure of the family unit and the anxieties caused by these changes will be examined in more detail later in this section.

the burden of official expectations regarding the welfare of its members (Lewis, 1992), in particular the care and successful socialisation of children necessary for maintenance of social order as well as family stability (Parsons and Bales, 1955).

Familial ideology is important in understanding the differing roles of men and women. For Beechey (1986), two assumptions underlie familial ideology. Firstly, the “*co-resident nuclear family is universally and normatively desirable*”. Thus, any deviation from this is undesirable, as in the case of single motherhood. Secondly, Beechey argues that “*the form of sexual division of labour in which the woman is the housewife and the mother and primarily located in the private world of the family, and the man is the wage-earner and bread-winner and primarily located in the ‘public’ world of paid work, is universal and normatively desirable*” (1986, p.99). Thus, the female’s role is only legitimised through the role of housewife and mother.

One of the prescribed roles for women within the family is the role of motherhood. Motherhood is a dynamic social interaction, located in a societal context organised by gender and in accordance with the prevailing gender belief system (Arendell, 2000). Eisenstein (1981) advocates a distinction between biological and ‘political motherhood’. Biological motherhood refers to those aspects of motherhood that, although culturally and socially circumscribed, are determined by the special capacities of women’s biology with respect to pregnancy, giving birth and lactation. What else women do, with or for their children is not ‘natural’ or inherent to women, but is an expression of patriarchal power structures in society, hence termed as ‘political motherhood’.

It is important to unpick the term ‘motherhood’ in order to grasp the cultural and social connotations of the term, examine how these may have changed throughout history, and may have influenced birth mothers motives and shaped their experiences of adoption. Motherhood, as a concept, “developed among the middle classes during the industrial revolution as part of the new ideology of domesticity and womanhood” (Abbott and Wallace, 1997; Skeggs 1997). Motherhood ideology is entwined with idealised notions of the family, resuming the institution and image of the idealised White, middle-class, heterosexual couple with its children in a self-contained family unit (Thorne, 1993). This has largely been the case for the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century; however, motherhood ideology has had diverse purposes and has sought various outcomes over time.

Motherhood in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain was concerned with issues of imperialism and the nation (Malone, 2003). Social imperialist discourses were influenced by the beliefs and values of the social hygiene movement who were concerned with the breakdown of the family. Davin (1971) and Lewis (1980) have explored the implications of this preoccupation with population for women of the period. Davin argues that by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a powerful new idea of motherhood had begun to emerge in which it was the “*duty and destiny of women to be mothers of the race*” (1971, p.13). This was seen to have “*persuaded married women that their role in the home was of national importance and that motherhood was their primary duty*” (Lewis, 1980, p.244). Concerned medical men, civil servants and politicians ascribed the problem of infant mortality to mothers who were ignorant about childcare (Malone, 2003). In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century women were blamed for the high infant mortality rates and the poor health of children (Abbott and Wallace, 1997). This was highlighted by the poor physical condition of Boer War volunteers from the working class, one third of who were rejected as physically unfit to fight (Searle, 1971). Healthy mothers and children were needed to breed an imperial race capable of competing in the new era of imperialist rivalries. And this was the rationale behind the ‘national efficiency’ campaigns launched at the time (Davin, 1971; Lewis, 1980; Weeks 2005). It is in this context that mothers were blamed, seen inadequate and negligent in cases of infant mortality. Further, motherhood was concerned with providing a fit population – in terms of food, water, warmth. Thus, women’s work outside the home was condemned as there was a clear emphasis on the role of ‘mothering’. This would have had important implications for birth mothers relinquishing their children to adoption in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, it would have been necessary for a single mother to support herself and the child through employment, or alternatively turn to the Poor Law for assistance.

During the post-war period the role of the mother was given priority because attention was focused on social dislocation as the primary cause of family failure (Lewis, 1992). In the 1950s concerns over family failure took the form of an elaboration of warning of the ‘emotional deprivation’ (contrasted with the concern of physical

deprivation in earlier years) which the children of working mothers could suffer (Williams, 1989). By the 1950s concerns with the condition of motherhood consolidated around the issue of maternal deprivation. Influential psychologists saw the mother-child relationship as the key to the healthy development of the child and the 'adequacy' of the mother as the most important variable (Riley, 1983). The view that maternal care in infancy was crucial for the physical development of the child had long roots stretching back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Finch and Summerfield, 1999). The popular interpretation of psychoanalysis from Winnicott (1957) and Bowlby (1951) led to an emphasis on the need for mothers to care for their pre-school children full-time. Motherhood during this period meant full-time motherhood (Winnicott, 1957). Winnicott depicted the marital home as a private emotional world in which the mother and child were bound to each other and in which the mother had control and found freedom to fulfil herself. In Winnicott's view it was natural and inevitable that she would want such an existence, to the exclusion of any alternatives.

The importance of continuous mothering received its most influential support from the work of Bowlby (1951); drawing on evidence from the experience of war-time evacuation, he made a direct connection between affectionlessness, maternal deprivation, and delinquency. Mothers who did not look after their children full-time were in danger of raising delinquents and badly adjusted children. Thus, women's work outside the home stood condemned as it was likely to produce juvenile delinquents.

A review of the literature (see ch.2) shows that one of the options available to birth mothers was 'self-support'. However, in face of little state assistance, many would have been compelled to work to support themselves and the child. Thus, in the context of motherhood ideology of the 1950s, if mothers chose to keep their children, support themselves financially through working, they would have been condemned for providing an inadequate level of care for the child and responsible for producing a 'delinquent'. Therefore, it is entirely plausible that adoption was seen in the best interests of the child. Bowlby's (1951) theory of early maternal deprivation was instrumental in bringing into adoption policy the current mental health theories, with an emphasis on early placement (Pavao, 2005). Interestingly, the work of Bowlby did not prompt further state assistance for single mothers. The work of Bowlby and

Winnicott also caused a shift in heredity and genetic determinism to environmental and psychodynamic concerns. For instance, unmarried mothers' were by the early 1960s depicted as 'pathologically disturbed' (Riley, 1983, p.196).

Since the 1960s, more emphasis has been given to individual freedom and autonomy for mothers, also to personal development and equality between partners. The order in which sex, marriage, cohabitation and childbirth occur can no longer be assumed, nor can the pattern of contributions that men and women make to the household (Lewis, 2001). This on-going process of emancipation and individualisation created increasing room for individual decisions (Lewis, 2001; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Raley et al., 2006). However, empirical research carried out by Arnot et al. (2000) shows that despite changing gender relations, the primary context for female citizenship is still predominantly the family. After investigating young professionals' understanding of citizenship and the role of men and women in public and private life in four European countries, Arnot found women still struggle, albeit in different ways, over gender relations in family life and in everyday social contexts.

The wealth of feminist literature which flowed from the women's movement of the late 1970s in the United Kingdom, USA and Australia, suggested that a power-conflict approach to women's position in society would provide a more useful framework for the analysis of motherhood (Mitchell, 1971; Rowbotham, 1973; Firestone, 1970; Millet, 1971). Since the 1980s women are expected to consciously and independently choose whether they want to become mothers or not, and if they are mothers, how they shape their own motherhood (Dorne-Huiskes and Doorten, 2010). There has been a marked change in work patterns for women where working outside the home is increasingly accepted for a mother (*ibid*). Technological developments such as contraception and abortion are prime examples of helping women control these decisions. Today, not one form of motherhood is 'natural' or 'normal'. For instance, in more recent years we have seen technological advances in fertility treatments assisting women who cannot conceive naturally to start families.

There has been a marked shift in the ideology of motherhood throughout the 20th century. The definition of motherhood has changed over time, as has what is expected of women as mothers. The literature reviewed in this section has been important in

understanding of how prevailing ideologies of family and motherhood may have shaped the wider contexts in which birth mothers relinquished their children to adoption. For instance, motherhood in early 20th century Britain was concerned with issues of imperialism and the nation. The core beliefs which drove motherhood ideology during this period were concerned with ensuring the production of a healthy imperial race. It is in this context that full-time motherhood in a two-parent family setting was felt to be the best means to achieve this. Concerns over family failure continued to shape ideologies of motherhood. During the post-war period discourses of emotional and maternal deprivation preoccupied motherhood ideology (contrasted with the concern of physical deprivation in earlier years). This led to an emphasis on the need for mothers to care for their children full-time. However, from the 1970s motherhood ideology changed to place an emphasis on individual freedom and autonomy for mothers. The emphasis on women being more independent and being able to control when they start a family may be one of many factors that explain why so few women voluntarily relinquish their children to adoption today. Of course, the change in contraceptive practices and the option of abortion also gives women alternatives. Thus, if it is argued that shifts in motherhood ideology has been one of the underlying factors in shaping birth mothers' choices and experiences of adoption, it will be important to examine if birth mothers conformed to the core beliefs of these changing ideologies. It also remains to be understood how changes in motherhood ideologies were mediated in to the lives and experiences of birth mothers. One possibility is that birth mothers internalised these discourses through primary socialisation practices. Another explanation is that motherhood ideology influenced the policies and practices of adoption agencies; and changes in motherhood ideology were responsible for changes in birth mothers' experiences of adoption. Theoretically understanding how familial and mothering ideologies were mediated in to the lives and experiences of birth mothers' is a complex one. Changes in familial and motherhood ideologies is just one of the underlying factors being attributed to the changing reasons birth mothers have offered for adoption and for the way they experienced the adoption process.



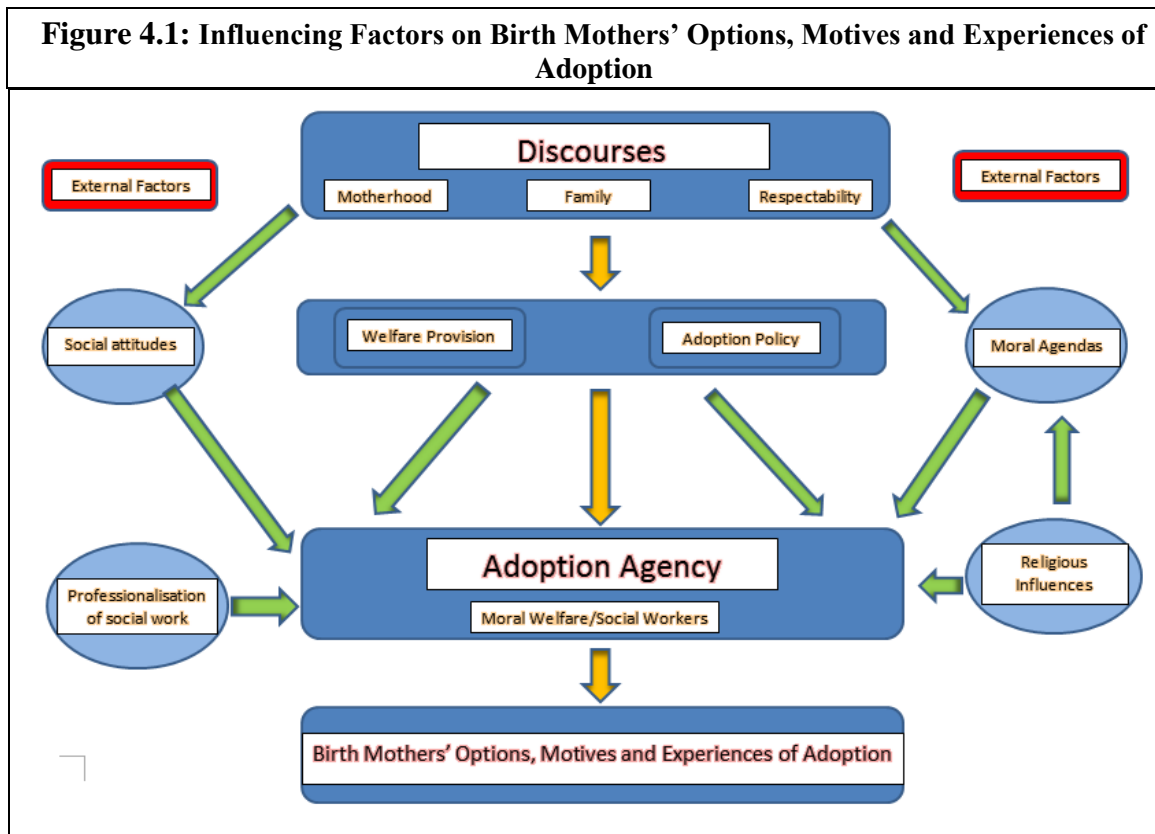
## 4.5 Discussion

Literature reviewed in chapter 2 set the context for understanding changes in adoption agency policy and practice. Additionally, a review of the literature in chapter 3 showed that birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption have changed over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This chapter has aimed to develop a deeper theoretical context under which birth mothers' motives, options and experiences of adoption can be scrutinised. The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to the development of a theoretical framework to understand changes in the reasons birth mothers have offered for the adoption of their children and changes in how they have experienced the adoption process.

Central to understanding birth mothers' changing options, motives and experiences of adoption are the changing gendered, social and cultural identities of women. Earlier in this chapter I demonstrated that by examining the social, economic and cultural capitals available to birth mothers, it is possible to understand how realistic different options were. An important question to ask of the data to be presented in chapter 6 will be to understand what difference access to different kinds of capital made to the exercise of choice. Based on the evidence available from literature it is safe to say that birth mothers were largely from working class backgrounds. If analysis of socio-demographic data also reveals that birth mothers were generally in lower class occupations, still residing in the parental home and were being pressured to relinquish, then levels of economic capital available to birth mothers would have been limited, making the option of self-support unrealistic, especially during the period when state support for single parents was limited. Examining the extent to which birth mothers were supported by family and friends will also be important (social capital) as these support networks would have provided an alternative option to self-support. Discourses relating to the family, motherhood and respectability are central to theoretically understanding how birth mothers negotiated their identities in these changing cultural and moral contexts and have conditioned the options available to them over time.

In order to provide explanations for changes in birth mothers' choices, motives and experiences of adoption, a heuristic device representing the influence of various religious, political, social, legal and moral factors has been developed (see Figure

4.1). The heuristic device is developed based on the premise that discourses relating to the themes of the family, motherhood and respectability have been key influences in shaping birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption. Other factors are also theorised to have influenced changes in birth mothers options and experiences of adoption. These include changes in political and religious authorities' agendas, the provision of welfare, changes in social and moral attitudes, and the professionalisation of social work. In developing this theoretical framework (see Figure 4.1), it seeks to understand how the typical birth mother would have viewed the world at different points in history and understand the factors that may have influenced her decision to relinquish and how she may have experienced the adoption process.



It is theorised in Figure 4.1 that there are a number of complex relationships between the different factors exerting an influence on birth mothers' experiences, options, and motives of adoption. For instance, it is theorised that discourses of respectability, the family and motherhood are central to explaining birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption. It is also theorised that the ideals of motherhood, family and respectability have influenced moral agendas (e.g. social hygiene and eugenics

movements, and religious authorities' agenda) and more widely social attitudes. Other influencing factors such as changes in welfare provision and adoption policy are theorised to be directly mediated in to birth mothers' choices, motives and experiences of adoption through the adoption agency and through the practice of moral welfare/social workers. It is theorised that other factors are more explicit in their relationship to birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption. For instance, the religious affiliations of adoption agencies are theorised to have influenced policy and practice and explicitly shaped birth mothers' experiences of adoption.

The heuristic framework proposed in Figure 4.1 will be used to understand the extent to which different factors may have exerted an influence on birth mothers' choices, motives and experiences of adoption, and will subsequently pose important questions for the data presented in subsequent chapters. It is important to note that the relationship between the factors outlined in Figure 4.1 and changes in birth mothers' choices, motives and experiences are not simple and straightforward. It is worth noting that Figure 4.1 carries theoretical implications for the relationship between each contributory factor. For example, each factors should not be seen as influential in isolation, but rather that the more immediately influential factors (birth mothers' changing choices, experiences and motives for adoption) are contextualised by the more general influences (changes in wider social, moral and policy contexts). Different factors have exerted their influence on birth mothers choices, experiences and motives for adoption at different points in time. For instance, religious, social and moral factors are theorised to be significantly influential on birth mothers choices and experiences of adoption pre-1970s. However, changes in welfare and adoption policies and social and moral attitudes are theorised to have influenced changes in birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption throughout post-1970s. The discussion will now focus on examining the influence of these factors at different points in history.

Figure 4.2 shows the particular variations in ideological discourses, religious influences, moral standards, social attitudes and state ideologies throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is based on the changes within these variables which explanations for changes in birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption are sought. It

is worth noting that the legal aspect appears to generate three historic periods; the other dimensions distinguish only two, with a division sometime in the 1970s. It is noted that the beginning and end dates of each of the periods have been dictated by changes in legislation which are seen to have been landmarks in the evolution of adoption policy. Therefore at this point in time, it is assumed that key pieces of adoption legislation form the beginning and end points of each period. In order to understand changes over time, data collected for this PhD will be analysed in respect to the three time periods reflected in Figure 4.2.

**Figure 4.2: Factors influencing birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption**

	<b>Period I (1926 – 1947)</b>	<b>Period II (1948 – 1974)</b>	<b>Period III (1975 – present)</b>
<b>Ideological Discourses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motherhood ensures strength of empire and nation</li> <li>• Dominance of the male breadwinner family.</li> <li>• Influence of Eugenics and Social Imperialism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full time motherhood essential for emotional stability of children.</li> <li>• Dominance of the male breadwinner family.</li> <li>• Illegitimacy related to theories of neuroticism</li> <li>• Maternal deprivation (Bowlby, 1951)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motherhood characterised by individual freedom and autonomy</li> <li>• Emphasis on parental responsibility, regardless of family form</li> <li>• More varied family forms</li> </ul>
<b>Professional Discourses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training of adoption agency professionals provided under the auspices of the Church of England Moral Welfare Council</li> <li>• Professional Association of Moral Welfare Workers was established in 1945</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice of generic caseloads</li> <li>• Younghusband advocated an individualised case approach to social work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State regulation of h the professionalization of social work.</li> </ul>
<b>Religious</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church's interest in moral welfare work and moral standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuation of Moral welfare work: namely adoption work, rescue and preventative work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moral welfare work declines as the states interest in family issues increases</li> </ul>
<b>Social</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unmarried motherhood viewed as a social problem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unmarried motherhood attributed to birth mothers neurotic character</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unmarried motherhood becomes more socially accepted.</li> <li>• Impact of more readily available contraception and abortion.</li> </ul>
<b>Adoption Policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent severance of mother child bond</li> <li>• Inheritance rights of child remained with birth family</li> <li>• Regulation of adoption agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent severance of mother child bond</li> <li>• Secrecy in adoption enshrined</li> <li>• Child welfare discourses begin to emerge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child welfare discourses become prominent</li> <li>• Access to birth records</li> <li>• Joined up working between voluntary adoption agencies and statutory services</li> <li>• Lifelong implications of adoption for birth mothers recognised in policy</li> </ul>
<b>Welfare Provision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor Law provision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abolition of Poor Law 1948</li> <li>• National Assistance 1948</li> <li>• Supplementary Benefits 1966</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing levels of state support for lone parents.</li> </ul>

It is theorised that throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century different ideological discourses have implicitly influenced birth mothers' options, experiences and motives of adoption. Discourses of family, motherhood and respectability have themselves been subject to ideological shifts throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The impact of these changes provides important insights into the changing conditions under which birth mothers' have relinquished their children to adoption.

Based on the proposed framework depicted in Figure 4.2 the theme of moral standards and illegitimacy dominates in Period I (PI). Rooted in eugenics and social imperialist ideologies, during PI motherhood had a specific purpose – to ensure the strength of the empire and nation through the dominant model of the male breadwinner family. Religious authorities had their own ideological agenda during this period, to help maintain moral standards. Their interest in moral standards resulted in 'rescue' and 'preventative' work and the arrangement of adoptions. Therefore discourses of appropriate family structures, and respectability and motherhood are central to understanding the work of adoption agencies during this period. In terms of further analysis it will be important to examine if the core values of these discourses shaped adoption agency policy and practice. Documentary analysis of agency policy records will shed further light on the influence of these discourses in shaping practice with birth mothers. It will also be important to examine if birth mothers themselves subscribed to the core values of these discourses and were contributing factors to reasons for adoption. Data derived from adoption case files and interviews with former agency personnel will provide important insights in to this issue.

PII is characterised with the continuing influence of the moral welfare agenda. Therefore it will be important to examine how the moral welfare agenda may have influenced the choices available to birth mothers and their experiences of adoption. It will also be important to examine the influence of maternal deprivation theories on adoption policy and practice to see how this theory may have influenced birth mothers' experiences of adoption. Documentary analysis of agency policy records will shed further light on this issue. PIII, characterised by discourses of parental responsibility, individual choice and freedom, all of which are theorised to have impacted on changes to birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption. It remains to be seen how these changes affected the lives and choices of birth

mothers relinquishing their children to adoption during this period. Social worker case notes will be an important source of data here.

In Figure 4.2 it is theorised that adoption and welfare policies have also been important in shaping birth mothers' choices and experiences of adoption throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As noted in earlier chapters, prior to the 1950s very little state assistance for lone parents was available, the only provisions being available through the Poor Law. From the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century much policy and provision, particularly housing and childcare, was based on the assumed predominance of the nuclear family form. In this context, birth mothers may well have been able to secure employment; however, they would have faced other constraints, such as access to housing and childcare provision. The most significant changes in assistance for single parents came with the introduction of Supplementary Benefits in 1966 and through the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. These pieces of legislation provided alternative options for birth mothers, options which made the option of self-support more realistic. It remains to be seen how policy changes were mediated by the adoption agency in to birth mothers' choices and experiences of adoption. Direct evidence of the impact of policy changes on birth mothers' choices will be hard to come by since the sample group is comprised of birth mothers' who relinquished their children to adoption and does not include cases where birth mothers' were considering adoption. However, the exploration of options with birth mothers (from social worker case notes) will provide some evidence of the mediating role of the adoption agency and social workers. Further, Family Care's documentary sources will be surveyed for evidence of welfare policy changes on practice with birth mothers.

Adoption policy reforms are also theorised to have shaped changes in birth mothers' experiences of adoption. For instance, The Adoption Act 1949 and adoption legislation preceding this Act was fundamental, as it enforced secrecy within adoption by making provision to keep adopters' identities secret and further reinforced the permanent severance of the mother-child bond by granting adopted children the same inheritance rights of any natural children of the family. Adoption legislation from the 1970s is theorised as being particularly significant in overhauling adoption policy and practice and subsequently changing birth mothers experiences of adoption. For example, the Children Act 1975 and the Adoption Act 1976 gave adopted adults

access to their birth records and placed a duty on adoption agencies to provide birth records counselling. These changes would have had important ramifications for birth mothers, both who had previously relinquished their children to adoption under the conditions of secrecy, and those who were relinquishing from this point forward. Additionally, those relinquishing after 1975 were doing so under a very different policy regime – i.e. the move towards openness. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 is also theorised to have had a profound impact on birth mothers' experiences of adoption. For example in addition to introducing the right to access intermediary services, the Act gave birth parents more rights to post-adoption support. Further, the guidance accompanying the Act (DOH, 2001a, p.23) clearly states that the lifelong impact of adoption on the birth mother should be considered and the birth parents and other relatives have the right to be treated fairly, openly and with respect. These are important changes, as for the first time in adoption law birth mothers' rights and needs are recognised. Analyses presented in chapter 6 will evidence these changes in practice with birth mothers and analyses presented in chapter 7 will evidence the impact of post-adoption work on adoption agencies themselves.

It is important to note that the influence of welfare and adoption legislation on birth mothers' experiences of adoption comes through its implementation. Thus, it is theorised that the adoption agency acted as a mediating influence on the choices and experiences of birth mothers. Figure 4.1 suggests that the adoption agency served as a mediating and conditioning influence on birth mothers' experiences of adoption, channelling changes in familial discourses, and discourses of respectability and motherhood; changes in welfare provisions and adoption policy; changes in the professionalisation of social work and changes in religious and moral agendas.

Understanding the mediating influence of the adoption agency is made possible by examining changes in adoption agencies' policies and practices. Thus, it will be important to question the evidence about the extent to which changes in adoption agencies' policies and practices reflected shifts in the proposed contributing factors. Therefore, it is important to examine the extent to which key legislative changes shaped the policies and practices of adoption agencies. These will be examined in more detail in chapter 7. The adoption agency is also theorised to be the mediator of religious factors. Religious factors, namely the 'moral welfare agenda' are argued to



have explicitly influenced the policy and practice of adoption agencies, at least until the 1970s, after which the context in which adoption agencies continued to operate began to change (e.g. after the 1970s adoption agencies became more regulated by the state and the focus of adoption agencies' work changed due to the decline in the number of voluntarily relinquished children). It remains to be seen if adoption agencies consciously chose to embrace policy developments and subsequently began to lose their religious character and values or were forced into secularisation by the State. The process of the disaffiliation of adoption agencies and the implications for practice will be examined in more detail in chapter 7.

Further, religious and moral influences may have been implicit or explicit in shaping internal policies and practices. What remains unclear is how religious and moral factors may have influenced day-to-day policies of adoption agencies, and consequently shaped birth mothers' experiences of adoption. Findings derived from documentary analysis detailed in chapter 7 will demonstrate the impact of religious and moral factors in shaping adoption agency policy and practice. In doing so, I will show how these factors were instrumental in shaping birth mothers' experiences of adoption at least until the 1970s.

Similarly, it is argued that moral welfare/social workers are the agents of mediating changes to birth mothers' motives, options and experiences of adoption. Moral welfare/adoption/social workers have played an important role in channelling choices in to the lives and experiences of birth mothers. These professionals represented the human face of adoption to birth mothers. Their influence on birth mothers' experiences of adoption would have been significant. As noted in chapter 3, independent factors would have been internalised by workers' own values, such as the greater acceptance of contraception, pre-marital sexual relations, abortion and single parenthood, channelling ideals of appropriate family structures, standards of respectability and motherhood. These values would have been important for the way in which different choices were conveyed to birth mothers throughout history. However, direct evidence of evolving social worker values will be difficult to find in adoption case records since the notes that social workers left on applicants' files were pretty scant prior to the 1960s. Thus, interviews with former adoption agency

professionals will be important in understanding changes in practice with birth mothers, the values informing their practice and how these changed over time.

The theoretical framework developed in this chapter will be used to explain changes in the reasons birth mothers' offered for adoption and changes in the way they experienced the adoption process. At this point it is important to propose the processes and mechanisms by which different factors might have exercised their influence on birth mothers' motives and choices. It is theorised that changes in adoption agencies' mission, policy and practice have directly impacted on birth mothers' experiences of adoption. After all, they were at the forefront in dealing with birth mothers and the adoption of their children. It is important to examine the extent to which changing religious affiliations may have impacted on the mission, policy and practice of adoption agencies. Discussions in chapter 2 indicated that religious and moral factors were mediated through the institutional affiliation of adoption agencies and the value systems to which they subscribed. It remains to be understood the ways in which these factors may have impacted on the policy and practice of adoption agencies and consequently shaped birth mothers' choices and experiences of adoption. Changing legal and policy contexts also influenced agency policy and practice. Again, it is important to understand the processes by which changes in wider childcare and adoption policy affected practice, and the implications for birth mothers' choices and experiences of adoption. Changes in welfare entitlement to housing and benefits, along with changes in other aspects of the external welfare environment would have impacted on the options available to birth mothers. Developments in the welfare state may explain changes in birth mothers' options and motives for adoption. It is important to understand the way in which social workers interpreted policy changes in the advice they gave to birth mothers. Changes in wider social and moral contexts will also be explored in their impact on birth mothers' motives, options and experiences of adoption. The relationship between independent factors such as contraceptive use and attitudes towards unmarried motherhood, and birth mothers' changing options, choices and experiences will also be examined.

The subsequent chapter will go on to discuss the methodological design of this study, including the research design, its implementation and any methodological issues arising during the research process. The chapter will also detail ethical considerations.

# 5

## Methodological Considerations

### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapters explored existing literature and empirical research relevant to the current study and set a theoretical context for understanding changes in birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption. This chapter will go on to discuss the methodological approach employed to study birth mothers' changing motives for relinquishment and experiences of adoption. The following section will go on to present the research questions guiding this study after which, I will discuss the data sourced from Family Care's archives. The fourth section will go on to discuss methodological issues concerning the four planned phases for this research. Each subsection will detail methods of investigation, sampling considerations and methods of analysis. The fifth section is dedicated to a discussion of data limitations and considers the reliability and validity of data sources. The final section is devoted to a discussion on ethical considerations.

This PhD is based on a historical research design where changes in relationships between different variables and changes in variables themselves can be examined over time. A historical research design was fundamental to the design of this project. It was also essential to the methodological approach utilised in this PhD as historical research allows the researcher to be able to situate the study within historical, socio-economic, political, religious and moral contexts (Lauden et al., 1986). Additionally, it allows the researcher to think seriously about processes, timing and historical trajectories, and enables the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the cases under examination (Amenta, 2003). Historical research has helped to build up theoretical knowledge and has contributed to the main theories about social policy and

the welfare state. Amenta (2003) has argued that historical research in social policy asks some significant questions and as a result identifies empirical puzzles to solve and deepen our understanding of social policy. In the case of this PhD, based on discussions so far, empirical puzzles are firstly based around understanding how birth mothers' experiences of adoption were shaped by wider ideological discourses, religious, moral and social contexts, and adoption and welfare reforms; and the extent to which adoption agencies and adoption professionals were the mediator of these changes.

## **5.2 Research questions**

This study is of an exploratory nature. At the end of the previous chapter, I proposed that changes in birth mothers' choices, motives and experiences of adoption could be understood by examining the mechanisms by which policies and practices of adoption agencies channelled contextual factors into the lives, experiences and above all *options* of birth mothers. Marshall and Rossman (2006, p.34) have argued that the purpose of exploratory research is, firstly, to investigate little understood phenomena. In the case of this study, 'little understood phenomena' relates to a current lack of understanding of the ways in which adoption agency policy and practice shaped birth mothers' choices and experiences of adoption, and how these have changed historically. Secondly Marshall and Rossman (2006) have argued that the purpose of exploratory research is to discover important categories of meaning. In the case of this study, the 'categories of meaning' would refer to the considerations that made birth mothers' choices meaningful, such as the desire to maintain respectability within the prevailing moral environment, or a consideration of the realities of self-support.

As noted in the previous chapter, it remains to be understood how changes in wider ideologies and discourses relating to family, motherhood and respectability, and changes in moral, social and policy contexts were channelled through agency policy and practice or whether they acted independently in shaping birth mothers' experiences of adoption. The mechanism by which adoption agencies channelled these contextual factors into the management of choice by birth mothers also remains to be examined. In light of this, the following research questions guided this PhD:

- How and why have birth mothers characteristics, motives for relinquishment and their role in the adoption process changed over time?
- How have changing religious, moral, social and policy environments impacted on adoption policy and practice? And how has changing adoption policy and practice shaped birth mothers' experiences of adoption?
- How have attitudes towards initiating or maintaining contact between birth parents and their natural children evolved and what are the implications for birth records counselling today?

### **5.3 Epistemological considerations**

This study took a qualitative approach to investigation and analysis as opposed to a quantitative approach. For qualitative researchers, they “*start with open research questions rather than having a hypothesis to test. Qualitative research aims to investigate and understand the social world rather than to predict, explain and control behaviour. The focus is on the ‘how’ and ‘what’ rather than ‘why’ and ‘whether’.*”

Adopting a qualitative approach was fundamental to the methodological design of this project for two reasons. Firstly the nature of the research questions lend more towards understanding changes in birth mothers' choices, motives and experiences of adoption rather than identifying causal connections. Secondly, in order to explain changes in birth mothers' choices, motives and experiences of adoption it was necessary to examine the extent to which the adoption agency was a mechanism for mediating changes in wider social, moral and policy environments into the lives, choices and experiences of birth mothers. This could only be achieved by an in-depth analysis of agency documentation. Qualitative methodologies allow for a richer in-depth understanding and exploration of the phenomenon under investigation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

In terms of this PhD, it is the meanings and motives that are questioned and scrutinised in the contexts of belief systems, values and cultures. This empirical study

drew on the hermeneutic epistemological position. Hermeneutics is concerned with the theory and practice of interpretation. It is the interpretation of the meaning of the products of human conduct or action (Seebohm, 2004). Hermeneutics differs from other interpretative schools of sociology in that it emphasizes the importance of the context (Willis and Jost, 2007) as well as the form of any given social behaviour. The central principle of hermeneutics is that it is only possible to grasp the meaning of an action or statement by relating it to the whole discourse or world-view from which it originates. For instance, putting a piece of paper in a box might be considered a meaningless action unless put in the context of democratic elections. One can frequently find reference to the 'hermeneutic circle', that is, relating the whole to the part and the part to the whole (Gadamer, 1960). In terms of this PhD, it is important to examine birth mothers' choices, motives and experiences of adoption in the wider context of adoption agencies' policies and practices.

Max Weber (1978), Ludwig Wittgenstein (1995) and Peter Winch (2002) have all contributed to the theory and practice of interpretation. The works of these three theorists were central to interpreting interview and documentary data. The method of investigation that Weber advocates for explaining human conduct is 'understanding' (1978, p.8). For Weber, there are two forms of understanding: the first is empathetic understanding, which occurs when one knows immediately why someone acts the way that they do; and the second is explanatory understanding, where one is able to explore the motives for those actions in question. Hollis (2002) illustrates this point further:

*By empathy we know that a man swinging an axe is cutting wood, there is a basic process of social observation in which the data and actions are observed... when there is explanatory understanding; we come to know that the cutter of wood is earning a living. Explanatory understanding is a matter of assigning an action to a complex of meanings (Hollis, 2000, p.150).*

What is meant here by Hollis (2002) is that in order to explain why the individual was chopping wood, the researcher must discover the person's motive for doing so – whether they were doing it to earn money, to make a fire, to work off anger or some other motive. In the same way, this piece of work examines birth mothers' motives for

adoption: did they request the adoption of their children because of parental pressure, because of their practical or financial constraints or because of social condemnation. It is this explanatory understanding of birth mothers' motives for relinquishment with which this PhD is concerned. In order to understand how birth mothers' motives for relinquishment have changed over time, it is important to understand the choices available to them at the time. By doing so, it is possible to achieve an empathetic understanding of birth mothers' motives for adoption.

Additionally, in order to explain changes in birth mothers' experiences of adoption it is important to understand and explore the contexts in which adoptions were carried out. Winch (2002) sees actions as meaningful, because actions are based on individuals following rules in different social contexts. In order to understand human conduct we need to study human actions and behaviours. To understand human actions and behaviours, we must establish the meaning it has for the individual who engages in it. Thus, it was of great importance to examine the circumstances under which birth mothers relinquished, and the context in which birth mothers' experiences of adoption were constructed. As such, by examining the impact of changes in wider moral, social and policy environments, it is possible to understand the extent to which the policies and practices of adoption agencies channelled contextual factors into the lives, experiences and above all choices of birth mothers.

Understanding language is also important in understanding norms, customs and contexts in which birth mothers relinquished their children. A Wittgensteinian (1995) philosophy requires the researcher to understand all the prevailing norms and customs and the contexts in which these are used. Wittgensteinian philosophy is based mainly around the discourses of language as the key to investigating social phenomena. As Wittgenstein (1995, p.8) explains "*to understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to be a master of technique.*" Adopting this philosophy was central to understanding the wider context in which evidence collated from documentary sources was produced.

Differing social contexts require meanings to be constructed in different ways. To illustrate this, the word 'wicked' can be taken as evil or good; the word depends on the context in which it is used. Additionally, language is not only culturally specific

but also locally specific. For Wittgenstein (1995), when individuals learn a language they learn ways to act, social skills or the rules of the language game. This therefore allows the researcher to observe language in relation to actions. The work of Wittgenstein was especially important when understanding the language used by adoption/social workers on birth mothers' case files. By adopting a hermeneutic epistemology, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of how birth mothers' experiences of adoption and motives for relinquishment have changed over time and how changing religious, moral, social and policy environments impacted on adoption policy and practice.

#### **5.4 Family Care's Archive Materials**

This PhD draws upon documentary sources from Family Care's archives. Lee and Stanko (2003, p.53) have argued that documentary sources can '*shed light on private lives, past events, official perspectives. They are invaluable for historians and in many cases provide the only source of information about past eras*'. Documentary material has been defined in several different ways by different authors (Bradley, 1999; Plummer, 1983), but can comprise letters, diaries, photos memos, film, video (Featherstone, 2000) or personal diaries, account books, meeting minutes or annual reports (Milner, 1999).

Documentary sources derived from Family Care's archives were important for the following reasons: firstly, evidence and data collected from documentary sources allowed for data to be collected in reference to a historical context; secondly, official agency documentation such as annual reports provided contextual details regarding the influence of religious, moral and legal factors in shaping adoption policy and practice; and finally adoption records provided details of how birth mothers' circumstances, options and motives for relinquishment changed over time.

Several types of document from Family Care's archives were examined. These included Family Care's adoption records, Adoption Panel Meeting Minutes (APMM), annual reports and other agency documents. All these sources of data play a vital role in social inquiry. To be able to study history and map changes over time it is necessary and vital to study documentary sources. Langlois and Seignobus (1908,



p.17) argue that “*documents are the traces which have been left by the thoughts and actions of men of former times...for there is no substitute for documents: no documents, no history* (quoted in Scott, 1990, p.10). McCulloch (2004) has applied typologies of ‘public’ and ‘private’ to explaining the use of different types of documents. McCulloch’s typology has been based on the work of Mills (1959). Mills has argued that the study of individual lives has often been developed in isolation from broader considerations of historical and social dimensions. Conversely, historical and social enquiries have been prone to ignore the personal and the individual in their emphasis on the bigger picture. Thus, according to Mills, a key issue both for historians and for social scientists is to develop the capacity ‘*to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self – and to see the relations between the two*’ (Mills, 1959, p.7 cited in McCulloch, 2004, p.5). The interaction between ‘personal troubles’ and ‘public issues’ is here at its most explicit (*ibid*). It is exactly this, the interaction between the ‘personal’ and the ‘public’ which is investigated in this PhD.

Based on the work of Mills (1959), McCulloch makes important distinctions between official documents, institutional resources and personal archives, categorising them as ‘public’ and ‘private’. These are summarised in Figure 5.1.

### **Figure 5.1: Archival materials**

**Official documents** contain a great deal of material directly related to the administration and policy, involving general maintenance of affairs as well as the day-to-day discussion of issues and problems (Public).

**Institutional records** may be retained by the institution itself. Such records may include evidence of public dealings and the attentions of the State, but they may also reveal much about the inner workings of the organisation itself, or about its employees and clients (Public and Private).

**Personal documents** reveal aspects of the personal life of the individual and perhaps about their family and work, but in many cases they can also illuminate issues relating to the local community or to broader social or political concerns (Private).

Adapted from: McColluch (2004, p.9)

This PhD utilised both public and private documents from Family Care's archives. Official documents included the organisation's annual reports and institutional records such as APMM and adoption records; and personal documents, including personal letters written by birth mothers (found on individual case files) and also letters from moral welfare workers/social workers written either to the birth mother or other professionals (often relating to the organisation of the adoption).

By examining Family Care's documentary sources, data were collected on all three research questions, as outlined previously. Analysis of adoption records allowed changes in birth parents' changing circumstances to be mapped over time. These records also yielded data on why birth mothers wanted to relinquish their children to adoption and how these had varied over time. Agency documents such as adoption panel meeting minutes (APMM) provided data on changes in agency policy and practice and the factors which may have influenced these changes. Furthermore, by examining adoption files I was able to examine the support and assistance Family Care gave to birth parents before, during and after the adoption of their children, and

how this may have varied over time. The functions of these documents and how they were used in this PhD will now be examined further.

### **Adoption Records**

Adoption records were an important data source for this PhD. Family Care holds approximately 10,000 adoption records spanning almost seventy years of practice (from 1943). The most probable reason for lack of adoption case material pre-1944 was because Family Care did not formally establish an adoption panel until this year which required cases to be documented.

Adoption records were a rich source of data providing details on birth mothers' circumstances, motives and experiences of adoption. Nevertheless, the amount of detail held on adoption records has changed over the decades. Case files prior to the 1970s held basic descriptive information in a generic form which was filled out when the client applied to either adopt or request relinquishment. This included details such as the birth mothers' age, religious affiliation, living arrangements, educational background, marital status, occupation and ethnicity. As adoption policy and practice developed, more stringent ways of recording information were employed. Moreover, with earlier records, the information recorded on them was just for the purposes of the social workers; it was never perceived that these records would ever be open to adopted adults for the purposes of tracing their birth parents or relatives. This is an important limitation on the validity of this data. By the 1970s, case files became more detailed, including social worker notes for every time there was contact with the client. These notes were a valuable source in providing contextual data around the process of adoption. By the early 1980s, case files held a lot more information than earlier decades, including very detailed notes, adoption forms, and panel reports and recommendations.

The detail recorded on birth mothers' motives for adoption also changed over time. In earlier cases, these reasons were recorded in no more than a sentence; however, in later case files these reasons became more detailed. For example on case files in the 1940s no more than '*mother unmarried*' was recorded. However, by the late 1960s birth mothers' motives for relinquishment are recorded in much more detail, as is illustrated in the extracts below.

*This child is the second illegitimate child of Miss T. On \*\*/\*\*/\*\* she was taken by Miss T for temporary fostering, to Mrs S. On \*\*/\*\*/\*\*, Miss T took her to Mrs Attenborough, for a further term of fostering as Mrs S was going away. On \*\*/\*\*/\*\* the baby was placed for adoption. (PIII, Case 42, 1966)*

*She had an illegitimate son, born \*\*/\*\*/\*\*, placed for adoption because her parents would not let her bring the baby home. Her parents then lived in \*\*\*\*\*. When Miss T became pregnant the second time, she told her mother, but neither she or her mother dare tell her father and she came to Nottingham in order to keep her pregnancy secret. She asked for adoption mainly because her father still knows nothing of the birth of the second child, but partly cos there is no chance of marriage and she did not feel she could bring up the baby in isolation. She says that she has no intention of returning to her parent's home permanently. (PIII, Case 20, 1968)*

By the 1980s case notes often expanded on birth mothers' circumstances at the time of pregnancy. In addition to socio-demographic information, case notes and details on birth mothers' circumstances and motives for relinquishment, some files also included correspondence data which provided information on birth mothers' experiences of adoption. Correspondence on case files were of the following nature.

- letters from Doctors/Hospital staff
- letters from solicitors
- letters from birth mothers to moral welfare workers /social workers,
- letters from birth mothers relatives (such as parents),
- letters from staff at the mother and baby home
- copies of letters sent out by moral welfare workers/social workers
- letters to and from adoptive parents

### **Family Care ledgers**

Family Care held ledgers dating back to the 1940s. These were constructed by Family Care staff as a quick reference point for each of the cases the organisation dealt with.

Family Care's archives hold several different ledgers. For example, there was one which recorded details on unmarried mothers, while others related to so-called 'outdoor cases', another detailed adoption placements and one detailed cases referred to Mother and Baby homes. The ledger most useful to this PhD provided basic information on matched adoptive placements and included the following details.

- Birth mothers name, address, date of birth,
- Name of child, date of birth for the child
- Name and address of corresponding adoptive parents
- Date of placement and date of adoption order

As the ledger detailed cases from year to year, it was possible to examine how many cases the organisation dealt with in any one month or even year. This ledger was especially useful in examining complete cases files (adoptive parent and birth mother). Prior to the 1970s, the birth parent and the adoptive parent case files were held in one file. However, after the 1970s, Family Care began to keep the two files separately. The problem this posed was as follows: if a birth mother case file from after the 1970s had been selected, the matching adoptive parent case file had to be found. It was very rare that there would have been some mention of the birth parents in the adoptive parent's file or vice versa due to confidentiality and data protection procedures. In order to overcome his problem, the corresponding case file name was looked up in the ledger, enabling me to find the corresponding files.

### **Adoption Panel Meeting Minutes (APMM)**

Family Care's archives stored an extensive set of APMM from 1958 to the present day. No documentation of APMM was found prior to 1958 even though the Adoption Panel had been set up in 1944. Probable reasons for the lack of documentation prior to 1944 were explored with former and current members of Family Care's team. Reasons offered included records being destroyed when Family Care moved premises in the 1960s and flood damage to records in the old premises. The main objectives of the Adoption Panel were to discuss cases of babies for relinquishment, consider adoptive parent applications, make decisions on which child was to be placed with which set of adoptive parents and to consider general internal policy and practice

changes. The adoption panel was comprised of various professionals over the years and the minutes represent several different viewpoints and opinions. Some of these included medical, religious, educational, welfare, judicial, adoptive parent and local authority viewpoints and opinions. The APMM were recorded at monthly intervals and on any other occasion the committee met (e.g., in instances of emergency cases).

As years have passed, changes in social work practice have meant that more relevant information was recorded in these documents. Like the adoption records, there was a lack of detail in earlier documentation of the committee's meetings. Unfortunately, the APMM were not especially useful when examining how placement decisions were made. Much of the detail recorded in the APMM detailed socio-demographic information about the birth parents or the adoptive parents, along with details regarding the circumstances under which they had approached Family Care. I have included the following extract to illustrate this point.

**Adoptive Parents:** *Mr and Mrs X aged 41 and 27 married in 1962. The wife is a member of the Baptist Church and the husband is Church of England. Investigations had been done by Mrs Marrow. Nothing abnormal had been found but conception had taken place. This couple had been known to this society for some time as foster parents. Child A had been adopted by this couple as a direct placement. The Husband had been educated at a secondary modern school and is a motor mechanic. The wife was educated at a secondary modern school and has worked as a clerk. References and Medicals satisfactory. Accepted to adopt. (APMM, February 1971).*

**Birth Parent:** *Child B born in Kingsmill Hospital. First illegitimate child of a single Irish Girl aged 17. She is nominally Church of England. She was educated at a secondary modern school, and works as an elasticator. The PF is 18, single, English and is possibly a garage mechanic. He does not know of the pregnancy. The natural mother cannot take the baby home and although very reluctant, feels it is in the best interests of the child to seek adoption. Accepted subject to medical. (APMM, May 1971)*

*Child B placed with Mr and Mrs X (APMM, June 1971)*

As you can see from the extract above, this information which can be collated from APMM is basic. There was no indication about how the decision was reached to place *Child B* with *Mr and Mrs X*.

Nevertheless, general information in the minutes did give indications of issues pertinent at a particular point in time and the principles on which Family Care's policy and practice was based. For example, the APMM recorded conversations regarding agency policy and practice under the 'any other business' section. Here 'out of the norm cases' were clarified in relation to Family Care's policy. This section was especially useful as it gave insight into types of issues prevalent at a particular point in time and what the outcomes of those discussions were. For example, as can be seen from the extract below, we can see that in the late 1950s the issue regarding babies of American servicemen was raised.

*Babies of American Servicemen: The organising secretary asked the committee to consider the possibility of refusing the babies of American servicemen for adoption because of the difficulty of placing them. One or two couples had refused to take the child of American parentage, and there was also the possibility of coloured blood, of course this was only slight. After some discussion, it was agreed that we should continue to accept such children. (APMM, September 1956)*

The extract above shows that Family Care had accepted children who may have been fathered by American servicemen prior to 1956. The extract also shows that Family Care did experience some problems in placing children of American parentage. Furthermore, the extract also shows that after the committee had discussed the issue, it was agreed that Family Care would continue to accept such children for adoption.

Other issues which cropped up in the 'other section' included discussions surrounding the rejection of legitimate babies (February 1956, March 1956), the acceptance of mixed heritage babies (March 1956), the rejection of children who were morally

abandoned<sup>37</sup> (April, 1957), the issue of accepting blind adopters (January, 1967), the acceptance of a child whose birth mother was a Roman Catholic (February, 1973), the request of police reports for prospective adopters (October, 1966), placements of older children (1956) and the problem of birth mothers' claiming their children were illegitimate, when they were in fact legitimate (1959). Issues such as these give indications of how social, religious and moral assumptions informed Family Care's policy and practice and how they may have changed over time.

### **Annual Reports**

Family Care's annual reports were also a valuable source of data. Family Care holds an extensive set of annual reports, going back to 1944. Annual reports were constructs of the governing body of Family Care. For example, reports were written by the Southwell Diocesan Board for Moral Welfare, when it became The Southwell Diocesan Council for Family Care in the late 1970s. These annual reports often included a foreword from the Bishop, a report by the organising secretary and reports on each of the sub-organisations, i.e. the Redford adoption agency, the Newark branch, and the Mansfield branch, as well as the Nottingham branch. Mother and Baby homes, shelters and training homes under the auspices of the board were also reported. Annual reports were particularly useful as they provided data about how Family Care as an organisation has evolved, the extent to which the agency's religious affiliation has changed and the ways in which the work of the agency has changed. In addition, annual reports detailed a section on statements and accounts for the year, which provided further data on the extent to which Family Care was financially supported by the Diocese and how this changed over time. The Bishop's foreword was also important in providing information regarding changing religious, social and moral contexts.

Documents derived from Family Care's archives provided valuable sources of data in studying the research questions outlined in the second section of this chapter. Nevertheless, deriving a data set from archival materials has obvious implications for the reliability and validity of the data, all symptomatic of working with archival

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<sup>37</sup> Morally abandoned was defined as being where married birth mothers had left the marriage and any children of the marriage had stayed with the birth father.



materials. These limitations will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter (see Ch.5.6, p.148 ).

The following section will go on to examine and detail the four phases of data collection, methods of sampling and analysis.

## **5.5 Data collection**

Four phases of data collection were planned, distinguished by four different data sources. Stage one was dedicated to the documentary analysis of Family Care's adoption records, APMM, annual reports and other archival materials. The second stage was based on interviews with Adoption Agency staff; the third stage was dedicated to the Family Care staff interviews and the fourth stage to life story interviews with birth mothers<sup>38</sup>. Each of these phases' complemented data collected from the other phases. The methodological reasoning and approaches in each of these stages are detailed in the subsequent sub-sections.

### **Phase 1: Documentary Analysis**

To be able to study history and map changes over time it is necessary and vital to study documentary sources (Scott, 1990). Documentary analysis involves the collection and analysis of data from public/private documents, primary/secondary documents, solicited and unsolicited documents, diaries, letters, autobiographies and visual documents (Henn, 2006, pp.97- 99). All these sources of data play a vital role in social inquiry. In the case of this project, the documentary analysis was derived from Family Care's archives which consisted of confidential adoption case files, APMM, annual reports and ledgers.

Four objectives guided the documentary analysis. These included:

- Understanding how Family Care's adoption policy and practice changed.
- Understanding and examining how Family Care's adoption panel came to decisions about which child to place with which set of adoptive parents.

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<sup>38</sup> Due to lack of response from birth mothers to participate in the study this stage was not carried out, but will be detailed in the chapter for methodological reasons.

- Exploring birth mothers changing circumstances and also their role in and experience of the adoption process.
- Assessment of the help given by Family Care to birth parents before, during and after the adoption of their children.

Phase I consisted of both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The quantitative data collected in the documentary analysis was based on the socio-demographic information which was extracted from case files (see Figure 5.2 below). These data helped build a picture of birth mothers' socio-demographic profiles, their circumstances and how they may have changed over time.

<b><u>Figure 5.2: Quantitative Variables</u></b>	
<u>Birth Parents</u>	<u>Adoptive Parents</u>
BM and BF age	AM and AF age
BM and BF address	AM and AF address
BM and BF marital status	AM and AF ethnicity
BM and BF ethnicity	AM and AF occupation
BM and BF type of school attended	AM and AF religious affiliation
BM and BF religious affiliation	AM and AF tenure
BM and BF age left school	AM and AF type of school attended
BM and BF occupation	AM and AF age left school
BM and BF highest held qualification	AM and AF highest held qualification
BM and BF tenure	Number of children adopted
BM and BF – other children	Number of birth children
BM and BF – Number of other children	Type of child wanted (age, sex,)
Date applied for adoption	Number of references
Date accepted by panel	Who provided references?
Date adoption completed	Date applied for adoption
Child DOB	Date accepted by panel
Child Ethnicity	Date adoption completed
Child Sex	
Has adopted adult retraced?	
BF – Birth Father	AF- Adoptive Father
BM – Birth Mother	AM – Adoptive Mother

Qualitative data on birth mothers' motives for relinquishment and experiences of adoption were collected from case file cover notes, case notes and correspondence. In addition, the APMM were surveyed for indications of moral, social, religious and legal influences on agency policy and practice. Furthermore, qualitative data were

also collected on the help and support Family Care gave to birth parents before, during and after the adoption of their children, and how this may have varied over time.

In order to devise appropriate sampling techniques, a systematic method of collecting data and an appropriate means of analysis, a pilot study was carried out. The objectives of the pilot were to test the effectiveness of data gathering tools and to assess the quality of data recorded on documentary sources. Other objectives of the pilot study included to collect and analyse data relating to socio-demographic information on birth parents and adoptive parents (based on variables outlined in Figure 5.2). It was envisaged that this type of information would provide insights into the changing characteristics and circumstances of birth parents and adoptive parents. These preliminary results were useful in developing schedules for interviews with staff at Family Care and other adoption agencies. The second objective of the pilot study was to collect and analyse data relating to Family Care's adoption procedure. It was envisaged that this type of information would give some preliminary indications of how adoptions were carried out by Family Care, and how this may have varied over time.

A stratified random sampling procedure was used to select cases for the pilot (Hoinville and Jowell, 1985, p.61). This sampling method was seen to be appropriate, largely because it is implied that each case selected from the sampling frame was as valid as any other. Within this method, the first sample case is selected from a list by a random number and subsequent cases are selected according to a fixed sampling interval (*ibid*). For the purposes of a small pilot study, case files were chosen from surnames of four letters of the alphabet: A, B, M and W and fifteen cases were chosen from each. The records for each of the four letters were counted and numbered. Then the total for each letter was divided by 15 to generate a sampling interval; this gave me the cases to be included in the pilot. Based on these calculations, 15 cases from each letter of the alphabet would be selected, with a total of 60 cases for the pilot study.

In actual fact a total 101 case files were selected. The selection of a larger number than the proposed 60 cases for the pilot study was due to the way that the agency had stored the adoption records. As the objectives of the pilot study included

understanding how Family Care's adoption policy and practice changed and Family Care's adoption panel came to decisions about which child to place with which set of adoptive parents, it was important to examine both the birth parent and the corresponding adoptive parent case files (i.e. a complete case). However, prior to the 1970s Family Care had kept the birth mother and the adoptive parent case files combined as one; after this date they were kept separately (with no identifying information about the other party<sup>39</sup>). Therefore where a birth mother file was selected in the sample, if the case was dated after the 1970s, the corresponding adoptive parent case file was also included in the sample size. Only 33 matched cases were identified in the sample. Larger numbers of birth mother files (68) were selected because some did not have corresponding adoptive parent files. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, there were cases where Family Care was not the placing agency. This could have been because the birth mother approached Family Care to arrange the adoption, but, because she went to a Mother and Baby home in a different town or city, a local adoption agency would have organised the adoption. Alternatively, a birth mother could have approached an agency in another part of the country, which might then have arranged for the birth mother to come to a Mother and Baby home in Nottingham, but the placing agency remained the one the birth mother had initially consulted. In cases such as this, the placing agency would have kept records relating to the adoption. So in cases where another agency had arranged the adoption, Family Care would only have information on the birth parents, with very few details on the process of adoption and no information on who were the adoptive parents. An analysis of the first 200 birth mother case files selected from surnames beginning with A and B show for 33% (65/200) of cases, Family Care was not the placing agency. Private adoptions also posed a problem, as Family Care again would have only held details of the birth mother and not the adoptive parents. There were also case files where there was limited information in the case file, such as just the birth mothers' name. This problem was remedied in subsequent analysis by adopting an alternative sampling strategy. As will be shown later in this section, by using sampling cases from Family Care's ledgers, it was only possible to select complete case files (i.e. birth mother and adoptive parent case files).

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<sup>39</sup> Details of matched adoptive parents with children, and details of the birth mother were found in the ledgers.

Nevertheless, for the purpose of a pilot study a total of 101 case files (including 33 matching adoptive parent and birth parent files) were examined and data was collected on the variables outlined in Figure 5.2 (p.132). Additionally, in order to gather data on the agency's role in the adoption process, all 33 matching birth parent and adoptive parent cases were sought out in the APMM and examined.

An inductive approach was taken to data analysis where coding schemes were derived from an initial analysis of responses (Thomas, 2003). This involved examining the responses for each of the variables and generating lists of codes<sup>40</sup>. Once the database had been coded, queries were generated using Access software, which sorted the data for each variable in chronological order. For example, queries were run on two variables: date of adoption and age, or date of adoption and occupation etc. This allowed the data to be analysed with respect to three time periods (see Figure 4.2, p.111).

Overall, the pilot study was a valuable exercise in understanding the scope of data available from the archives and the way in which the archives were organised. Additionally, the pilot study aided the development of a systematic and organized way of collecting and analysing the data. The pilot study also allowed an assessment and evaluation of the methods used as well as understanding the limitations the data presented in answering the research questions. These issues will now be examined further.

Due to the concentration of cases within Period II<sup>41</sup>, it became apparent from the pilot that the random sampling procedure wasn't appropriate in providing a range of cases over the desired time period. Adoption statistics have shown that this period was the height of adoptions (see Figure 2.2, p.23), with very few cases representing Periods I<sup>42</sup> and III<sup>43</sup>. This had implications for the reliability of the quantitative data collected for these two periods, as analysis was based on a very small number of cases. To

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<sup>40</sup> See Appendix 3.1 for pilot study coding framework (quantitative data).

<sup>41</sup> 1950 –75: 20 out of 33 cases

<sup>42</sup> Pre 1950's: 7 out of 33 cases

<sup>43</sup> 1976 – present: 6 out of 33 cases

rectify these problems, cases for further documentary analysis were selected from the ledgers. By using the ledgers as a sampling frame I was able to select complete cases (both birth mother and adoptive parent files). This solved the sampling problems I encountered in the pilot study. However, as will be discussed later, there are some disadvantages in using the ledgers as a sampling frame.

Working with the limitations of the records Family Care held was challenging. One of the main problems I encountered was the way in which the agency kept the records, an issue which has been discussed earlier in the chapter. Additionally, case files were also kept of those mothers who came to Family Care for advice on adoption. Some of these mothers kept their child, others arranged the adoptions privately, and some of the adoptions were arranged by another agency. In all of these cases, it meant that Family Care would not hold any information on the adopters. Of the 68 birth mother case files examined in the pilot study, 35 had no corresponding adoptive parent case file. Examining complete case files was crucial to this project as it was through looking at the whole case that I was able to examine how decisions were made about which child to place with which set of adoptive parents.

Another limitation identified by the pilot study was that Family Care does not hold a fully complete set of APMM. The records are nearly complete from 1958; this had implications for the documentary analysis as earlier cases in the sample dated back to 1945. As years have passed, improvements in social work practice have meant that more relevant information is recorded on case files. With the earlier cases, I found that very little information was recorded. This had obvious implications for the quality and quantity of information collected from cases before the 1970s. Furthermore, the APMM were not useful when looking case by case for how decisions were made in relation to which child to accept for adoption, as discussed earlier in this section.

Having carried out the pilot study and armed with an appropriate sampling technique, a systematic method of collecting data and appropriate means of analysis, further documentary analysis was based on a much larger sample size than the pilot study.

Data were collected from a total of one hundred and fifty complete case files<sup>44</sup>, with fifty from each of the three periods. As noted earlier, these cases were selected from the placement ledger which detailed matched birth parents and adoptive parents. By using ledgers as a reference point, an equal number of cases from each of the three periods were selected. It was important to do this in order to test a hypothesis about pivotal points at which key changes in birth mothers' experiences took place.

It is important to note that there are some disadvantages to using ledgers as sampling frame. For example, the sample would not have included birth mothers who approached Family Care, went to a Mother and Baby home outside the county and subsequently had the adoption arranged by another adoption agency. Additionally, the sampling frame would not have included cases where the birth mother had approached the agency for adoption, subsequently deciding not to pursue it. Cases such as these are of general interest as they would have provided details of why the birth mother changed her mind, i.e. because of the availability of other options such as marrying the putative father, being allowed to bring the child home or because the birth mother was able to support herself and the child. However, for the purposes of answering the research questions outlined at the beginning of the chapter, and to achieve the objectives outlined for this phase of data collection (see pp.14 - 15), it was necessary to examine complete case files.

Collecting data from case files is an extremely time consuming process. Therefore, based on the time scales proposed for data collection, it was decided by the steering group committee that a total of 150 complete cases would be appropriate for documentary analysis of case files. In order to select the 50 cases for each of the three periods, a quota sampling method for further documentary analysis was adopted. Quota sampling has been described as the non-probability equivalent of stratified sampling (Richie and Lewis, 2003). The 33 complete case files in the pilot were included in the larger sample size (7 from PI, 20 for PII and 6 for PIII). Therefore additional data from 43 complete cases were collected for Period I, with 30 for Period II and 44 for Period III, making a total of 50 for each period. Thus, because fewer cases from PIII were selected in the sample for the pilot study, a larger number were included in the larger sample size.

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<sup>44</sup> This was comprised of 300 files - 150 birth mother files and 150 adoptive parent files.

Within the sample frame from each time period, simple random sampling was utilised (Hoinville and Jowell, 1985) to select the 150 complete case files. Whereas in the pilot study, case files were only selected from four letters of the alphabet, for further work, case files were selected from all cases held in the archive. As there were no ledgers which detailed cases before 1946, I went through each of Family Care's case files and identified cases prior to this date myself. Once the number of complete cases for each of the three periods had been counted, each case was assigned a number and then 50 cases were selected using an online random number generating machine.

The same quantitative variables were used as in the pilot study and Access was used to record the data (see Figure 5.2, p.132). Three separate Access databases were created, recording information for each of the three periods. This made the data collection and more importantly the analysis more manageable. Each database had two tables; one detailing birth parent variables and the second detailing adoptive parent variables. This made the data easier to manage, organise and analyse. Analysis of the quantitative data followed the same procedure as in the pilot study.

Qualitative data relating to birth mothers' experiences of adoption from correspondence and case notes were collected and recorded as verbatim in a Word document. Qualitative data were also collected from social worker case notes<sup>45</sup>. These data were especially useful in contextualising the circumstances surrounding birth mothers' reasons for relinquishment. These data was also recorded as verbatim in a Word document.

Each of the monthly APMM from 1957 – 2006 were surveyed for policy and practice changes. It was important to examine how changes in policy and practice affected the choices offered to birth mothers and above all impacted on their experiences of adoption. The pilot study showed the APMM were an important source of information, detailing minutes of discussions relating to policy changes. The monthly minutes were surveyed for evidence of changes in adoption policy and practice. In particular it was useful to look for cases which were rejected by the panel. For

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<sup>45</sup> Social Worker case notes were only recorded from 1960s.



example, legitimate children were rejected in the 1950s and accepted in the early 1970s. Examining cases such as these gave implicit indications of changing policy and practice over the three periods. Other changes in policy were more explicit in discussions, as in the case of the acceptance of children from ethnic minority groups.

The APMM corresponding to the 150 cases were also examined more closely to see if they revealed other details of birth mothers' experiences and motives for adoption, not found on files themselves. To make the data more manageable, these data were recorded as verbatim in three separate Word documents, for each of the three periods. Furthermore, data were also collected from the matching report prepared for the adoption panel<sup>46</sup>. This was relevant to the objective of exploring how Family Care made placement decisions. However, these details were not recorded for earlier cases.

A bottom up approach was taken to coding qualitative data from the sources outlined above<sup>47</sup>. The data were first coded, then divided up based on which time period they were relevant to, and then further broken down by which research question the data applied to. This was a very lengthy and time-consuming process. Analysis of qualitative data again used an interpretive approach. It was important to analyse the data in the social context in which it was written. Scott (1990) has argued "*it is necessary to place the document in the context of its conditions of production before an appraisal of its message could be made*" (1990, p.11). Only by doing this could an understanding of its meaning and significance be achieved. I felt that this approach to analysis was largely appropriate, especially since all the data collected represented times where social, economic, political, religious and moral factors differed.

## **Phase 2 – Other Adoption Agencies**

The primary objective of this phase was to gauge how far Family Care is typical of other adoption agencies which are or have been affiliated to various Christian denominations. This stage was also important in examining the extent to which Family Care's policy and practice differed from that of other agencies and if the characteristics and social circumstances of birth mothers differed between agencies.

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<sup>46</sup>This report was presented to the adoption panel detailing a recommendation to place a particular baby with a particular set of adoptive parents and the reasons why that child and AP's had been matched. This became common practice from the 1990s.

<sup>47</sup> See Appendix 3.2 for qualitative data coding framework

Furthermore it was useful to examine the impact of Church affiliation on agency policy and practice and how this may have differed between agencies.

A list of registered voluntary adoption agencies was collated from details provided by the Consortium for Voluntary Adoption Agencies. All 39 adoption agencies on the list were contacted via an introductory e-mail along with information about the project. Information regarding the date the agency was established and the religious affiliation of the agency was requested. The e-mail was followed up by a telephone call a week later. The response rate was excellent; I received feedback from all 39 agencies. Once all responses had been received, six agencies were selected on the basis of similar longevity to that of Family Care and on the basis of their religious affiliation. Figure 5.3 details further information regarding the six selected agencies. Letters were sent, requesting participation in the research, access to annual reports and interviews with either the Director or adoption services manager of the agency.

<b>Figure 5.3: Characteristics of Selected Adoption Agencies</b>						
	Religious Affiliation	Date established	Annual Reports			Faith Based Questionnaire
			1951	1971	1991	
Agency 1	Church of England	1947	×	×	×	√
Agency 2	Independent (1)	1913	√	√	√	×
Agency 3	Roman Catholic	1902	×	×	√	√
Agency 4	Church of England	1910	√	√	√	×
Agency 5	Independent (2)	1880	×	×	×	√
Agency 6	Roman Catholic	1879	√	√	√	√

Key: (1) Formally affiliated to the Church of England; (2) Formally affiliated to the Methodist Church

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with agency managers/adoption services managers. The primary objective of these interviews was to gauge how far Family Care is typical of other adoption agencies which are or have been affiliated to various Christian denominations. Semi-structured interviews allow for a certain amount of flexibility with the emphasis being on ‘*how the interviewee frames and understands issues and events*’ (Bryman, 2004, p.321). The emphasis is on what the interviewee views as important in understanding and explaining events. Henn et al. have argued

that for those operating in a positivist paradigm, the qualitative interview approach can ‘*lack scientific rigor*’ (Henn et al., 2006, p.161). However, Henn et al., (2006) have argued that researchers can employ procedures to increase scientific rigor and systematise their general approach such as recording the interview. Moreover, other factors can also contribute to the scientific rigor of qualitative research such as the questioning style used, the body language used and the researcher’s own behaviour and conduct throughout the interview. However, my belief is that it is not always possible to achieve full objectivity, as subjective values are what allow the researcher to achieve a full understanding of the data collected. An interview schedule was drawn up to guide the interviews. It was based on themes derived from findings of the pilot study and other general themes related to the research questions. The following themes were investigated in the interviews:

- Changing reasons for children being placed for adoption
- Changing attitudes towards birth parents and their role in the adoption process
- Impact of national child care policy and practice
- Continuing or dwindling importance of religious affiliation
- The type of clientele the agency dealt with
- The changing purpose of adoption generally.

Structuring the interviews in such a way allowed for data to be collected on all three research questions. The respondents were probed and prompted during the interview to the point that the respondents didn’t have anything else to add (Patton, 2002). Phrases such as ‘what else’ and ‘anything else’ were used. All respondents were sent a pack prior to the interview, which included: a letter, a copy of the interview questions, a pamphlet with details of the research and preliminary results<sup>48</sup> from the pilot study. The interviews were carried out over a two month period in 2007. All but one of the interviews were carried out on the Adoption Agencies’ premises. In one case, a room at the agency premises was not available, so the interview was conducted over lunch in a local restaurant. Interviews carried out in public places did have implications for the sound quality on the recording of the interview. The interviews averaged between one and one and half hours.

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<sup>48</sup> See Appendix 4 for further details of participant packs

Data were also gathered from annual reports of these six agencies. Financial data collected from annual reports were important in understanding the extent to which agencies were supported by their dioceses, and provided contextual data on changing social, moral and religious contexts and the implications for agency policy and practice. However, there were problems in accessing some agencies' annual reports. This was largely due to the agency not being able to locate them. Figure 5.3 (see p.140) provides further details of which agencies provided annual reports.

Additionally, an open ended questionnaire<sup>49</sup> was also developed and distributed amongst the selected adoption agencies. This questionnaire was based on Sider and Unruh's (2004) typology of faith-based organisations. Sider and Unruh applied this six fold typology to social service and educational organizations and is based on understanding organizations' religious characteristics. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather data on religious factors that might account for changes in how birth mothers experienced the adoption process. The questionnaire was left with respondents along with a SAE after the interview. Despite re-mailing out the questionnaire and follow-up telephone calls, only four were returned (see Fig 4.3, p.22). Shortly after the interviews, the director of Agency 4 had retired and Agency 2 had merged with another adoption agency. This may have accounted for the lack of response from these two agencies. With hindsight, sending out the questionnaire with a request to complete it prior to the interview would have allowed me to collect them when I visited to carry out the interview. The non-response from two of the agencies had implications for coding of the typology as essentially this data was missing. However, the interviews carried out with professionals of the agencies concerned and data collected from annual reports filled this data gap.

Interviews were recorded on to a dictaphone. By doing so, the researcher is able concentrate on the process of the interview and the interviewee (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2001). Notes were also taken but these were very basic as all interviews were transcribed. The notes provided data on the key points covered in the interview and were used as a guide for the transcriptions. There are several advantages of using

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<sup>49</sup> See Appendix 5 for the faith-based questionnaire distributed to adoption agencies.

tapes and transcripts. Firstly, by using a dictaphone the researcher is able to focus on the ‘*actual details*’ of aspects relevant to the research question (Silverman, 2005, pp.183-5). Secondly, the ‘*tapes can be replayed*’ and the ‘*transcriptions can be improved*’ (*ibid*).

A thematic approach to analysis was undertaken (Leininger, 1985; Aronson, J. 1994; Boyatzis, 1998). Once the interviews had been transcribed, the transcript was first looked at as a whole. This allowed for a good feel for the data. The raw data were then reduced and summarised into grids (Boyatzis, 1998). By doing so, Boyatzis argues that it will “*give the data a shortened outlined form, easier for comparison across units of analysis – in this case individuals*”. As a result, it was possible to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary of findings. This was a useful way of organising the data as it allowed the main themes relating to each of the research objectives to be examined as a whole. Once these themes had been identified it was possible to develop a coding framework for the transcripts. Therefore, the nature of the coding was inductive and was developed by directly examining the data (Boyatzis, 1998; Silverman, 2005). Thomas (2006, p.237) has argued that the purposes for using an inductive approach are to:

- condense raw textual data into a brief, summary format
- establish clear links between the evaluation or research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data, and
- develop a framework of the underlying structure of experiences or processes that are evident in the raw data.

Further analysis of agency interviews was based on correlations between variables (Miles and Huberman, 1985). A number of primary independent variables were identified, e.g. denomination, funding sources, locality and type of locality and date of origin. Relationships between these variables were sought with other variables identified in the coding, such as main reasons for relinquishment, characteristics of the birth mother and development of post-adoption support services. Analysis for the faith-based questionnaire was based on Sider and Unruh’s (2004) typology of religious characteristics of organisations and programs. In doing so, it was possible to understand how the religious characteristics of adoption agencies have changed and

the extent to which they are still affiliated to their parent Churches. Each of the answers was coded and analysed according to Sider and Unruh's organizational chart relating to the six different types of organisations: faith permeated, faith-centred, faith-affiliated, faith-background, faith-secular partnership and secular<sup>50</sup> (2004, pp.112–115).

### **Phase 3: Interviews with Family Care Staff**

The documentary analysis did not yield any information about how decisions were made about which child to place with a particular set of adoptive parents. Thus, interviews with the former and current staff of Family Care were important in collecting such data. Other objectives informed interviews with former and present Family Care staff, these included. The same issues were explored in interviews with other adoption agency professionals were also explored with Family Care staff. This allowed for direct comparability between the six other adoption agencies and Family Care.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with six former Family Care staff representing in total 40 years' service with the organisation. A list of former adoption agency staff was provided by Family Care's Adoption Services manager who herself has been with the agency for a considerable number of years and is still in touch with many retired members of staff. This was a positive aspect since, by accessing a sample through a gatekeeper, the respondents would be more likely to respond and agree to an interview.

An introductory letter from Family Care, a letter from me, along with a pamphlet with details of the research was sent to nine former staff members. Six of these were retired social workers, and of the remaining three, one of them had been head of Gwendoline Grove House<sup>51</sup>, another was a former Adoption Panel member and one was a former chair of the Adoption Panel. Responses were received back from three ex-social workers, the former head of Gwendoline Grove House, the adoption panel member and the adoption panel chair. As with the agency staff, semi-structured

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<sup>50</sup> See Appendix 6 for further details of characteristics of each of these.

<sup>51</sup> Gwendoline Grove was a Mother and Baby home which was affiliated to Family Care

interviews were used and the interview schedule was informed by the research questions and the objectives outlined above. Interviews were carried out over a 2-month period in 2007 with each interview lasting 1–1½ hours. All but two of the interviews were carried out in the homes of the respondents. The other two interviews were carried out on University premises. All interviews with Family Care staff were taped and transcribed.

Two focus groups were carried out with current Family Care staff. Focus groups were the desired method of data collection for these groups of respondents as they allow respondents to bounce their thoughts and answers off one another and for detailed in-depth discussions (Finch and Lewis, 2003). This data collection method also allows for the group to work together (Stewart and Shamdasi, 1990) and the group interaction is explicitly used to generate insights (Morgan, 1997). However, the latter was not a specific objective of the focus groups, but was useful in seeing whether there were consistencies or contradictions on particular issues discussed.

Respondents for the focus group were recruited through Family Care's adoption services manager. All seven members of Family Care's adoption team were invited to participate. All of the selected participants were social workers in the current adoption team. Four of the participants had been working within the agency for a number of years and had considerable knowledge of how the agency had evolved and experience of working with birth mothers. Although three of the most recent additions to the team had knowledge of working with relinquishing mothers in PIII, they had more experience of delivering intermediary services and supporting birth mothers after the adoption had been carried out. Invitation letters, information about the project and the interview schedule was sent out to participants prior to the focus group. Respondents were eager to participate as many of them had been with the agency for a number of years and had a personal interest in the project and the work being done with the archival materials.

A lot of time and effort went into preparing for the focus group<sup>52</sup> (Finch and Lewis, 2003, pp.176 – 80). Ground rules were established to ensure the focus groups ran

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<sup>52</sup> See Appendix 7 for focus group materials.

smoothly. Ground rules included speaking one at a time, out of respect for others and for the purposes of the tape recording. Respondents were informed of the aims of the focus groups prior to its commencement. They were also informed that the focus group was about uncovering views and perceptions. Respondents were encouraged to elaborate, to give examples, to support or contradict the views and thoughts of others and to recognise that there are no right or wrong answers but only differing points of view. In addition to recording the focus groups, notes on emerging themes were made by a volunteer assistant. The volunteer was briefed on the research prior to the focus group, which included details on the aims and objectives and details to their role on the day. Additionally, issues of confidentiality were discussed and a confidentiality agreement was signed.

Most of the questions were discussed as a group; however some questions required individual answers. For example, one of the questions required respondents to construct a typical birth mother from a particular decade in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This question is detailed in Figure 5.4 overleaf:

**Figure 5.4: Focus group question**

Question: *Construct a typical birth mother from the 1940s/1950s/1960s/1970s/1980s/1990s onwards? (Use the prompts below to help you.)*

*Prompts:*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Age</li><li>- Social background</li><li>- Married/ single</li><li>- affiliated to CoE</li><li>- support networks</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Education</li><li>- Any other children?</li><li>- Tenure</li><li>- Income</li></ul>
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Each of the seven respondents were assigned a decade and asked to construct a ‘typical birth mother’ for that period. Respondents were given 5-10 minutes to think of their answers, after which members of the group shared their ‘typical birth mother’ with others. This was a valuable exercise as it allowed time for thought and reflection. This method is very time-consuming; out of the 12 questions only two questions were structured in this way. Nevertheless this was a good method in allowing respondents to reflect on the question. The other 10 questions were asked verbally and discussions



were pursued based on the main themes emerging from discussions. The focus groups were recorded on to a dictaphone. Transcribing proved difficult mainly due to the poor quality of the recordings. Therefore notes taken by the volunteers were used to pick out main themes from the recordings. The main themes that emerged from the data were then correlated with the data from the documentary analysis, agency interviews and ex-Family Care staff interviews (Miles and Huberman, 1985).

#### **Phase 4: Interviews with birth mother service users**

The final phase was dedicated to life story interviews with birth mothers. The interviews with service users were planned to explore the following themes:

- reasons for entering the adoption process;
- experience of the adoption process;
- personal circumstances at the time of the adoption;
- significance of life style and beliefs;
- post-adoption experience and support;
- and current views on adoption.

The planned data collection from birth mothers would have allowed for the accounts collected from documentary data and interviews with adoption agency professionals to be checked for consistency. Interviews with birth mothers, who have been reported to have had sharp memories of the birth and the adoption (Pannor, Baran and Sorosky, 1978; Winkler and Van Keppel, 1984), would have provided an important first-hand account of their experiences of adoption. Furthermore, interviews with birth mothers would have allowed for data collection on their experiences and thoughts on any post-adoption support they have received from Family Care, providing feedback for the agency about the quality of the intermediary services they offer.

Unfortunately this phase in the methodological design was hindered largely by a lack of response from the chosen participants for this study. There may be several reasons for the lack of response by chosen participants. Some may have moved; others may have not been interested. It may also have been the case that some of the selected participants had bad experiences of a reunion, or associated their negative experiences to the agency and/or the workers.

Special consideration was given to the sensitivity issues in researching birth mothers as a group. Both the steering committee and I felt that it was important to provide birth mothers with support after the interview. The only way to guarantee this was to secure a sample through Family Care who would then be able to provide an outlet of support after the interviews had been conducted, should it be needed. Potential interviewees were sampled via a list of 28 clients compiled by the adoption services manager. The list consisted of those who had accessed Family Care's intermediary services during the period of 2000 - 2006. By selecting only those who had accessed Family Care's intermediary services introduced some element of bias into the sample as only those who had been re-traced were selected for interview. Additionally, the sample would not have been representative of birth mothers as a group as respondents were only selected from one agency.

All 28 cases were examined in closer detail and 12 birth mothers were selected as potential interviewees. Birth mothers were selected on the basis of their circumstances at the time of the pregnancy and on the basis of when they relinquished their children to adoption. The adoption services manager and I discussed different ways of making initial contact with the selected respondents and it was decided that we would send an introductory letter from Family Care, a letter introducing myself and the research along with a research information participant sheet<sup>53</sup>. Letters were sent to the 12 selected participants and then followed up by three attempts to a telephone conversation by the adoption services manager. Unfortunately, due to non-response by chosen participants it was decided not to send any more invitation letters.

In hindsight, advertising nationally and locally may have generated some interest in the project. This strategy may have also generated a representative sample of birth mothers. However, the issue of providing support after the interview would have remained, but, may have been accessed through agencies such as After Adoption. Alternatively, accessing a sample of birth mothers may have been more realistic by working with other agencies which may have been able to provide post-interview support.

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<sup>53</sup> See Appendix 8 for documents sent to birth mothers and proposed interview questions.

## **5.6 Data limitations**

This section will address how successful the research design was in answering the research questions, together with issues of reliability and validity. Overall, the research design worked well in answering the three research questions and the objectives concerned with each of the four stages of the research. However, methods adopted did present some limitations, especially in relation to the data collected for each of the three periods.

A wealth of data was collected for Periods II and III. However, there were several difficulties in collecting data for Period I. Firstly, the way in which agencies document and record information has changed considerably since the beginning of Period I; this is evident in Family Care's own archives. Family Care did not hold any case files before 1944. This meant that all 50 case files selected for Period I covered a three year period (1944 - 1947). This of course has important implications for the validity of the periodisation as outlined in Figure 3.5 (p.88).

Therefore, this piece of research lacks documentary evidence from before 1944. The only explanations which have been found for the lack of earlier documentary data are: firstly that adoption records were only formally kept from 1944 with the establishment of the Adoption Committee, which was a requirement of the 1939 Adoption Regulations Act. Alternatively, earlier files may have been destroyed at some point. This would also make sense as it was never thought that these records would ever be used or accessed.

This data gap was also identified in interviews with former Family Care staff. Unfortunately, many who practiced in Period I would have either been long retired or have passed on. However, I did collect data from practitioners who were employed during Periods II and III and because of the development of intermediary services, many retired and current practitioners possess working knowledge of agency policy and practice during Period I. Therefore although this project will talk of adoption in terms of three historical periods, Period I will only be supported by documentary

evidence which spans the last three years and narrative evidence collated from practitioners who have working knowledge of this period.

It is necessary to examine the reliability and validity of data collected from former and current Family Care professionals. Data derived from these sources represent oral accounts of history. Oral history is an important source of data for several reasons (Thompson, 1978). Firstly, it provides material on individuals from whom or for whom very little written documentary evidence exists, as in the case of retired adoption agency personnel, hold a wealth of knowledge about the history of adoption practice and have experience of dealing with birth mothers throughout history. Secondly, it is possible to obtain an account of participants' everyday life and work. This was important data as it allowed for an understanding of participants' role in adoption work and how it changed over time. Oral history accounts are also important in allowing participants to provide interpretations of their own lives. It provides the researcher with an opportunity to understand how respondents interpreted their experiences and the world around them (Gittens, 1979).

One way in which these data can be checked out is by comparing them with other sources. *Triangulation* is defined as “*the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon*” (Denzin, 1978, p.291). It allows the researcher to gain a second perspective using independent sources and by utilising triangulation, the findings were more likely to be an accurate reflection of reality (Harvey & MacDonald, 1993). In the case of this PhD, the accounts derived from former and current adoption agency professionals were validated by comparing them with other data sources.

Oral data can also be checked for their own internal consistency (Burgess, 1986), i.e. questions can be raised concerning the representativeness of individuals interviewed, their reliability as witness and the problem of the accuracy of their memories. The reliability of a respondent's memory is a concern is using oral history accounts. However, Thompson (1979) and Gittens (1979) have suggested that the greatest loss of memory is to be found with a short period recall and that later memory recall is negligible. Dunkerley (1988) argues that even though the facts may be recalled, the question of attitudes is more problematic; “*distortion of emotions and motives*

*invariably occurs as individuals attempt to harmonize issues”* (p.90). Essentially, Dunkerley argues that any account of the past involves factual events being interpreted through socially constructed values. Consequently it becomes the role of the researcher to examine and assign categories of meaning used by participants to interpret their experiences.

Undoubtedly, interviews with birth mothers themselves would have strengthened the validity of findings relating to the second research question. Because of the reasons outlined above (p.31) it was not possible to corroborate data collected from adoption case files and other documentary data sources with birth mother accounts. This corroboration would have been important in verifying themes emerging from documentary data and to and validate findings. This gap in data source has important implications for the validity of findings, as apart from correspondence documents, little data has directly been derived from birth mothers themselves. It is therefore of great importance to examine the veracity of statements recorded on documentary data, from which much of the data relating to birth mothers’ motives and experiences has been gathered.

I will now go on to discuss the implications of using archival materials as a data source, and will pay particular attention to the trustworthiness of documentary sources. Issues of validity in qualitative studies should be linked not to ‘truth’ or ‘value’ as they are for the positivists, but rather to ‘trustworthiness’, which “*becomes a matter of persuasion whereby the scientist is viewed as having made those practices visible and, therefore, auditable*” (Sandelowski, 1993, p.2). Trustworthiness is an important concept as the data collected by the research method needs to provide a true picture of what is being studied. A valid statement gives a true measurement or description of what it claims to measure or describe. It is an accurate reflection of social reality. In working with archival materials it is important to examine the authenticity and genuineness of the document and appraise the accuracy, worth and credibility of the data contained therein (Cohen et al., 2007, p.195).

Documents are highly biased and selective; they were not compiled for research purposes, but written for different purposes and audiences (Plummer, 1983). For example, annual reports written by the Southwell Diocesan Board for Moral Welfare/Family Care were specific to the running and development of the organisation,

therefore were constructs of the governing body of Family Care. APMM were constructs and represented the personal and professional views of adoption panel members. Similarly, adoption records were the constructs of social workers. Case materials and retrospective accounts of social workers represent their own social construction and interpretation of events. This introduces an element of bias in to the construction of these documents, as the motives recorded on case materials are not birth mothers own accounts of their reasons for relinquishment (Tosh, 2002).

Therefore, in appraising the veracity of written sources it is necessary to question the context in which the document was written, who wrote the document and the original intention and purposes of the document (see Figure 5.5). Similarly it is important to consider who wrote the document, the interests of the writer and the position and knowledge–ability of the author (Cohen et al., 2007). By doing so, it is possible to understand the biases which may have been introduced into the construction of the document.

**Figure 5.5: Purpose of Documentary Sources**

<b>Documentary Source</b>	<b>Date written</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Intention and purpose of document</b>	<b>Data collected from documents</b>
<b>Adoption case files:</b>	- 1947 to present day	Adoption worker/social worker	- Develop a case history on clientele - Levels of detail recorded on case files changed throughout the 20 <sup>th</sup> century	- Birth mothers' motives for relinquishment - Birth mothers' role in the adoption process.
- <b>Social worker case notes</b>	- Prior to 1960s case notes were brief  - After 1960s case notes become more detailed regarding birth mothers' motives for adoption	Adoption worker/social worker  Adoption worker/social worker	- Develop background information on clientele, i.e. basic information such as name, age, address.  - More detailed information about birth mothers circumstances and motives for relinquishment	- Birth mothers' socio demographic profiles  - Birth mothers' motives for relinquishment
- <b>Correspondence</b>	- After 1980s more detail of birth mothers feelings and thoughts  - Throughout and sometimes after the adoption had taken place  - Throughout and sometimes after the adoption had taken place	Adoption worker/social worker  Adoption worker/social worker. Professionals from other agencies (i.e. Mother and Baby Home, Children's Departments, G.P s, Nurses)  Birth mothers	- Detailed information on counselling birth mothers underwent and the nature and outcomes of each session. - Arrangement of adoption/ confinement in mother and baby home or hospital/medicals  - Birth mothers writing to adoption/social workers throughout confinement in hospital/ mother and baby home.	- Birth mothers' motives and experiences of adoption  - Birth mothers' role in the adoption process and her experiences of adoption  - Birth mothers' experiences of adoption

<b>Documentary Source</b>	<b>Date written</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Intention and purpose of document</b>	<b>Data collected from documents</b>
<p><b>- Correspondence</b></p> <p><b>- Matching Reports</b></p>	<p>- From late 1960s</p> <p>- From 1990s</p> <p>- From the 1980s</p>	<p>Birth mothers and adoptive parents</p> <p>Birth mothers and adoptive parents</p> <p>Social worker</p>	<p>- Exchange of letters between adoptive parents and birth mother prior to placement</p> <p>- Exchange of letters after placement</p> <p>Social workers prepared matching reports which recommended why a particular child should be placed with a particular set of adoptive parents.</p>	<p>- Birth mothers experiences of adoption. Contact in adoption</p> <p>- Birth mothers experiences of adoption. Contact in adoption</p> <p>- Birth mothers' motives and experiences of adoption</p>
<b>APMM</b>	From 1957 – present day	Adoption panel members (changed throughout history), but included social workers, members of clergy, and professionals	<p>Minutes of Adoption Panel meetings detailing:</p> <p>- Discussions of birth mother and prospective adoptive parent cases presented to the panel</p> <p>- Policy changes</p>	<p>Impact of changing religious, moral, social and policy environments on adoption policy and practice.</p> <p>Impact of changing adoption policy and practice in shaping birth mothers' experiences of adoption.</p>
<b>Annual reports</b>	1944, 1951, 1971, 1991, 2001	<p>Pre 1970s: Southwell Diocesan Board for Moral Welfare.</p> <p>After 1970s: The Southwell Diocesan Council for Family Care</p>	<p>Separate reports for each adoption society, mother and baby home, shelters and under the auspices of the diocese.</p> <p>Financial records</p>	The evolution of Family Care Impact of religious affiliation
<b>Ledgers</b>	From 1940s	Family Care	Quick reference ledgers - details on unmarried mothers, 'outdoor cases', adoption placements, referrals to Mother and Baby homes.	Details on adoption placements (used for sampling adoption case files)



All documents, the author, the place and the date of writing were established and verified (McCulloch, 2004, p.42). In order to account for the reliability of a document it is important to ascertain how far the account can be relied upon (*ibid*). This point is true of the motives recorded by social workers on adoption case files, questioning the veracity of motives recorded on these materials. Documents are interpretations of events rather than objective accounts (Bailey, 1994).

It is important to pay attention to the viewpoint, and knowledge-base of social/adoption workers, and consider how workers own views may be construed as a bias in the construction of these documents. Prior to the 1970s, those working on the frontline with birth mothers were known as ‘adoption workers’ or ‘moral welfare workers’. Their agenda may have been closely linked to the organisational agenda of Family Care. For instance, until the 1970s the work of the agency was closely linked to the objectives of the Diocese (rescue and preventative work). The nature of this work automatically assumes a certain ‘world view’ from which experiences are interpreted, i.e. from Christian viewpoint. This would have had ramifications for how birth mothers were perceived, and dealt with, by adoption and social workers. This may have lead to workers being viewed as authoritarian by birth mothers; after all it was the workers who were the ones deciding whether the child would be accepted for adoption, or not.

This has implications for the credibility of motives stated on adoption case files. It may have been the case that birth mothers were not entirely honest about their motives. For example, it was not uncommon to find the term ‘unmarried mother’ stated on case files from Period I. It may have seemed the most ‘common sense’ motive for birth mothers to state, ensuring the child was accepted for adoption. There may have been other factors influencing birth mothers’ motives to relinquish, such as a parental coercion, or birth mothers may have faced financial and practical constraints if she were to have kept the child.

The credibility of motives recorded on adoption files is also compromised by the level of detail recorded on adoption case files. Bailey (1994) argues that a selective interpretation by the writer may mean that they may present an incomplete record of the situation. Case notes from the 1940s and 50s detailed very few details of why a birth mother relinquished her child to adoption. It was not uncommon to see no more than a sentence describing

these motives. It may be the case that the worker interpreted the reasons birth mothers offered and summarised this for the purposes of documentation; after all, it was never thought that these records would be used for any other purpose. It is also worth noting that accuracy in recording information has improved alongside changes in social work professional practice (see chapter 6.2 p.225), suggesting that the authenticity of these documents have become more accurate over time.

Discussions above show that motives for adoption recorded on case materials may have been biased, and/or may not have been an entirely true reflection of the birth mothers experiences and motives for adoption. This it is not to say that the motives for relinquishment recorded on these materials are not a valid source of data. Understanding the biases involved in constructing documents “*gives the researcher a significant clue to the issues being studied*” (McCulloch, 2004, p.43). They provide important details of birth mothers’ circumstances at time of pregnancy, the agency’s role in birth mothers’ experiences of adoption, and insights to how wider factors, such as how attitudes towards unmarried mothers impacted on a mother’s decision to part with her child. Correspondence documents are also highly subjective accounts. Nevertheless, letters written from birth mothers are an important source of data, as these documents were constructs of birth mothers themselves. Documents such as these are more authentic than case notes in representing the birth mother’s viewpoint.

Despite the lack of material derived from birth mothers themselves, and gaps in data as discussed above, the methodological approach, design and data collection were still considered to be robust. Nevertheless, it would be important for future research to validate and strengthen findings from this PhD by interviewing birth mothers and corroborating the themes uncovered from documentary data and interviews with adoption agency professionals.

More generally, several additional measures have been taken to maximise the validity of this research (Johnson, 1997; Kirk and Miller, 1986; LeCompte and Preissle, 1993; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Some of these strategies include (see Johnson, 1997, p.283):

*The researcher as a ‘detective’*: by the researcher taking on the role as a detective, they are able to search for evidence about the effects and causes. In the case of this PhD, I was

searching for evidence of changing moral, social, religious and legal factors on adoption agency policy and practice and subsequently how birth mothers' experiences and motives for adoption may have been shaped by changing contexts.

*Extended fieldwork:* in the case of this project data was collected in the setting of the adoption agency amongst a team of social workers for a period of two and a half years. This not only allowed for me to be fully immersed in the data but also allowed for the opportunity to engage with members of the social worker team, some of whom had been there for over 25 years. Collecting data in this setting not only allowed me to uncover a wealth of knowledge and experiences of these workers but also use the workers' knowledge to help solve discrepancies within cases.

*Low Interference descriptors* are described by Johnson (1997) as “*the use of description phrased very close to the participants' accounts and researchers' field notes*”. In the case of presenting evidence, direct quotations were used as a type of low interference descriptor.

*Triangulation* refers to methods cross check information and conclusions derived from the research (Johnson, 1997). In the case of this PhD, multiple data sources and methods were used to help understand how moral, social, religious and legal factors have influenced and shaped agency policy and practice and consequently shaped birth mothers experiences of adoption. Birth mothers motives for relinquishment were also cross referenced in multiple data sources.

*Participant feedback:* this involves the feedback and discussion of the researcher's interpretations and conclusions with the actual participants and other members of the participant community for verification and insight. Verification and insight into key preliminary findings was sought with adoption agency professionals in an ESRC funded Knowledge Transfer Event. The event was run as a Knowledge Café and the group of 18 professionals were mostly practitioners who had worked with relinquishing birth mothers for several years. Also amongst this group were academics and researchers. The Knowledge Café was a useful exercise as it allowed me to verify the themes and preliminary findings emerging on birth mothers characteristics, motives for

relinquishment and experiences of adoption<sup>54</sup>. After a presentation of the preliminary findings, delegates were asked to discuss if the findings were surprising in any way, the implications of these findings for current policy and practice with birth mothers and how services for birth mothers could be improved in the light of the evidence presented. On the whole, practitioners agreed that birth mother characteristics described for the three conceptualised periods, had been an accurate reflection of birth mothers who had approached their agency over the years. Some agency professionals reported some variations in the birth mothers their particular agency dealt with. For example, some practitioners reported that they often dealt with birth mothers who were living independently rather than residing in the parental home. This particular agency dealt with a large number of Catholic birth mothers who had migrated from Ireland, suggesting that there were some important differences between differently affiliated agencies.

Three more findings workshops (London, Leeds and Bristol) were carried out in partnership with the British Association for Adoption and Fostering. These workshops took the same format as the ESRC Knowledge Café and attracted a further 38 practitioners from across the country. Again these workshops were important in disseminating emerging findings and getting feedback from childcare and adoption agency professionals from those who attended.

## **5.7 Research Ethics**

I have worked within clear ethical procedures to protect the interests of all concerned, and have been guided by the principles of the Code of Ethics for Social Work Research, the General Social Care Council's *Social Care Codes of Practice* (GSCC, 2002) and the NTU Graduate School's code of guidance on research ethics. The ethical code of Family Care has also been adhered to regarding requirements on third party information and the sharing of information.

The project underwent ethical approval via Nottingham Trent's College and Research Degrees Committee. Special attention was taken to consider the ethical issues in accessing confidential and sensitive adoption records. These issues were discussed with

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<sup>54</sup> See Appendix 9 for the programme for this event along with the report produced on preliminary findings.

the collaborating agency. Access to Family Care's archives was negotiated through the organisation's adoption services manager, and was granted on the grounds that all documents stayed on agency premises. It was also agreed that any data collected would be recorded on an encrypted laptop, which only I had access to. Throughout the data collection phase, all data were saved to two memory sticks and these stayed on agency premises until all data collection had been completed and anonymised. This was merely a security measure to guard against problems of lost memory sticks.

I have ensured that the welfare of all respondents was given paramount consideration at every stage in the conduct of this study. All interviewees were given an advance written statement explaining the ways in which information will be used and were advised that they had the right to withdraw from the interview at any time. Informed and signed consent was sought from all respondents interviewed<sup>55</sup>. All respondents were given details about the research and had an opportunity to ask any questions and were advised that they had the right to request and view their transcript. Additionally they were advised that data would be anonymised and identifying information would be removed from any reported data.

In order to maximise confidentiality and security, several procedures were put in place. All data was kept on an encrypted laptop which only I have access to. A back-up copy of the data was made and was kept in a locked drawer at university. Additionally, all identifying information was removed from the transcripts and the write-up. All participants' names were removed from the transcript and assigned a code. The list of codes and names of participants were re-recorded on to a separate document and kept securely on an encrypted laptop. Taped interviews and transcripts were securely stored on University premises and will be destroyed at the end of the project.

## **5.8 Summary**

This chapter has presented the methodological approach taken in this project. The chapter has discussed the four phases in the research process and has discussed research tools used, sampling strategies employed and approaches taken to data analysis. The

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<sup>55</sup> See Appendix 10 for the consent form used for interviews with adoption agency professionals, former Family Care staff and focus groups carried out with current members of Family Care staff.

thesis moves on to present analysis, findings and a discussion of the data gathered through the process discussed above. This discussion is organised into two further chapters entitled 'Birth mothers: choices, reasons for relinquishment and experiences of adoption' and the 'The changing contexts of birth mothers' options, choices and experiences'. The organisation of the following chapter allows for understanding of how birth mothers' choices, options, motives for relinquishment, along with their experiences of adoption, have changed over time. After which, chapter 7 seeks explanations for these changes in the context of changing adoption agency policy and practice. In particular this chapter will focus on the influence of moral social, legal and political factors on birth mothers' changing motives, choices and experiences of adoption. The thesis now presents the fieldwork and discussion, organised within the two chapters discussed above.

# 6

## **Birth mothers: choices, reasons for relinquishment and experiences of adoption**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents and discusses findings relating to how birth mothers have reached decisions about the adoption of their children, their role in the adoption process and how answers have varied historically. It will build upon previous literature and empirical evidence to build a richer understanding of how birth mothers' motives and experiences of adoption have changed over time. Findings presented in this chapter will be used to understand birth mothers' motives and experiences sociologically in the light of the theoretical considerations of Chapter 4. I begin by examining how the socio-demographic profiles and social circumstances of birth mothers' who relinquished their children to adoption through Family Care changed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These profiles expose limitations to the choices and options available to birth mothers. In addition, by examining birth mothers' social circumstances at time of pregnancy, it sets the context for understanding birth mothers' motives for adoption. I shall then go on to examine changes in birth mothers' motives for relinquishment. This section will largely draw upon motives for relinquishment recorded on Family Care's adoption case files. The subsequent section will go on to explore birth mothers' experiences of adoption. It is important to pay separate attention to birth mothers' motives and experiences of adoption for two reasons: firstly motives for adoption allow us to understand what drove birth mothers' to have their children adopted; secondly by examining birth mothers' experiences of adoption it is possible to understand their role in the adoption process, how this changed over time and how options and choices were mediated in to their experiences.

Before proceeding it is important to outline the limitations presented by the data. Firstly, as noted in the previous chapter there was a lack of documentary evidence pre-1944. Secondly, interviews with adoption agency professionals only covered a limited time period. This was largely due to the fact that the eldest members of former staff who were interviewed practiced from the late 1950s. Therefore adoption agency professionals' viewpoints only relate to the second and third periods (1956 – 2006). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that those who practiced from the mid-1970s acquired a working knowledge of cases prior to the 1950s. This was largely due to the nature of birth records counselling work they carried out. This limitation has important implications for this PhD, as it will not provide any insights into birth mothers' social circumstances, experiences and motives for adoption prior to 1944.

Thirdly, details about birth mothers' motives and experiences of adoption were limited on case files for PI. However, some evidence of birth mothers' motives and experiences of adoption can be gleaned from the correspondence documents and the scraps of information recorded on adoption workers case notes. Some rationale about why earlier case files recorded so little information is offered by Family Care's former Principal Adoption Worker in response to a letter written by an adopted adult enquiring about his natural parents.

*(June 1984) Other details about your mother would be very limited because in 1944 there was considerable emphasis placed on adoption matters to the point of little recorded information. (Case 28, PI, 1944)*

Fourthly, apart from the data derived from letters written by birth mothers, little evidence is directly derived from birth mothers themselves. Some evidence presented in this and the subsequent chapter is derived from case material or retrospective accounts of social workers, representing social worker's construction of events. Where possible, evidence from correspondence documents written by birth mothers will be cited in attempt to represent accurate accounts of their experiences of adoption. It must be noted that data from these sources are patchy for PI and PII. Letters written by birth mothers in the earlier two periods were often to make arrangements for the adoption, and birth mothers may have written a few sentences about their feelings. However by PIII, some birth mothers wrote letters to social workers, as an archive of information for the child. These



letters provide a rich source of data for exploring birth mothers own perceptions of the choices they made.

## **6.2 Birth mothers' socio-demographic profiles**

This section will present findings relating to the characteristics and social circumstances of birth mothers represented in the dataset derived from Family Care's adoption records. Examining socio-demographic profiles are important in exposing the severely limited choices birth mothers' faced at the time of their pregnancy. They also contextualise birth mothers' motives and experiences of adoption by shedding light on their social and economic circumstances at the time. Thus, the data presented in this section will set the context for understanding birth mothers' motives for adoption by examining how social and economic circumstances may have constrained the options available to them.

The socio-demographic profiles of birth mothers represented in other research studies carried out between 1970s - 1990s (Raynor, 1971; Bouchier, Lambert and Triseliotis, 1991; Triseliotis and Hall, 1971) showed them typically to have been single, residing in the parental home, largely unqualified and were often working in manual occupations. This conceptualisation of birth mothers' circumstances at the time of pregnancy was drawn from studies carried out after the 1970s. As a result, gaps remain in understanding how the social and economic circumstances of birth mothers changed over time, and the implications for their options, choices and motives for adoption.

It is important to note, no claims of statistical significance are being made from analysis presented in this section. This dataset is specific to Family Care's clientele. The dataset is based on data collected from small sample sizes and in the case of some variables, analysis was conducted on a very small number of cases. It is worth noting the extent of missing data, especially in the earlier case files (pre 1960 cases)<sup>56</sup>. This is interesting in itself; the fact that not much was recorded indicates something of the climate of the day where social workers recorded very little information. Because of these limitations, it is not possible to generalise these findings to the wider population of birth mothers. Nevertheless, analyses presented in this section are important in validating the motives for adoption recorded on adoption case files. For instance, the data presented in this

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<sup>56</sup> See Appendix 11 for tables with further detail of case file analysis.

section provide us with important points to consider when questioning how realistic the option of self-support may have been for birth mothers at different points in history.

Local Census data will be used to contextualise socio-demographic data to understand if birth mothers represented in the dataset were typical of the local population<sup>57</sup>. Where local data is not available national data will be used to make comparisons. Before proceeding to examine the socio-demographic data derived from adoption case files, it is worth discussing the limitations of using local and national statistics to compare birth mothers socio-demographic profiles with. Firstly, as Census questions reflect the economic, social and cultural issues of the day, the questions asked and the way data are recorded varies. This therefore makes an analysis of changes over time somewhat a challenge. For example, when looking at housing and tenure information, the questions that the Census asked varied over the decades. For example, the 1951 Census focused on how many people were living in one house, sanitation issues and number of rooms in a house. However by 1991 issues of overcrowding and sanitation were not pressing, and what was more important was to record the nature of tenure, e.g. owner occupied, rented etc. The main reason for the variation in the type of information recorded by the Census is because it is increasingly politicised. The type of data collected in each of the Censuses varies due to the nature of the current debates and political philosophies of the time. In the 1950s the government was highly concerned with issues of sanitation and overcrowding, more recent governments have been concerned with the 'housing shortage'. This is reflected in the structure of the Censuses. A second challenge relates to changes in geographical boundaries. Ward boundaries are regularly adjusted to reflect the geographical movement in residential location of people. Major changes in Nottinghamshire boundaries took place after the 1971 Census. Despite these limitations, comparing the dataset with local and national statistics provides an indication of whether birth mothers represented in the dataset were typical or untypical of the local or national population. The remainder of this section will go on to present detailed analysis of quantitative data relating to birth mothers' socio-demographic profiles for each of the three periods.

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<sup>57</sup> In some cases it was not possible to make comparisons between birth mother data and National or Local Census statistics, either because the information was not recorded or because data was not directly comparable.

As can be seen from Figure 6.1 the average age of the birth mother decreased over the three periods. On the whole, compared with the general population of mothers giving birth to a child outside marriage, birth mothers relinquishing a child to adoption through Family Care bucked the trend towards unmarried mothers being older.

<b>Figure 6.1: Age of Birth Mothers</b>			
<b>Age</b>	<b>PI (n = 27)</b> 1944 - 1947	<b>PII (n = 37)</b> 1948 - 1974	<b>PIII (n = 50)</b> 1975 – present
Average Age	24	23.6	20
16 – 20	26% (7)	44% (16)	54% (27)
21 – 25	37% (10)	30% (11)	28% (14)
26 – 30	22% (6)	15% (6)	14% (7)
31 – 35	-	3% (1)	2% (1)
36 – 40	11% (3)	5% (2)	2% (1)
41 – 45	4% (1)	3% (1)	-

Source: Family Care adoption records (1944 – 2009)

National statistics (ONS, 2005) show that in 1971 the average age of a mother giving birth outside marriage was 23.7 years old, the same as for Family Care birth mothers in Period II. National statistics show that by 1991 average age of a mother giving birth outside marriage had increased to 24.8 and by 2009 it had risen to 27. Thus, women giving birth to children outside of marriage were getting older. Analyses of PIII age data from Family Care’s dataset show that birth mothers relinquishing their children to adoption were much younger than the national average age for 1991 and 2009 (20 years old). Generally speaking, Family Care’s dataset show that the proportion of relinquishing birth mothers under the age of 20 gradually increased over the three periods. However when compared to national statistics for live births outside marriage some important differences emerge. For example, almost half of birth mothers from PII were under the age of 20 (44%), almost double the figure when compared to national statistics for live births outside marriage in 1971 (26.1%) (ONS, 2005). However, by PIII although there are a slightly higher percentage of birth mothers under the age of 20 (54%) compared with PII, it was significantly lower than the national percentage of live births outside marriage in 1991 (82.9%) (ONS, 2005).

The percentage numbers of single (i.e. never married) birth mothers relinquishing

children to adoption increased over the three periods (PI: 66%, PII: 74%, PIII: 76%). Correspondingly, the proportion of birth mothers who were married, widowed or divorced decreased over the three periods (PI: 34%, PII: 26%, PIII: 24%). Over a third of birth mothers from PI were married, divorced or separated (37%). These birth mothers tended to be a little older than the single mothers and often had other children. Adoption agency professionals from other agencies felt they dealt with smaller numbers of married, divorced and widowed birth mothers than my findings seemed to suggest, and were surprised at these figures. The 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and an increase in ‘extra marital activity’ could have been one possible explanation for these high figures and another may have been an increase in the numbers of widows left to raise their children alone.

All birth mothers in the first two periods were of White origin. However, by the third period we see a small number of ethnic minority women requesting adoption for their children (10%). This suggests that by PIII birth mothers’ were from more ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds. However, these figures may also be explainable by other factors. For instance, as will be demonstrated in the subsequent chapter, Family Care did not accept the children of birth mothers who were from ethnic minority backgrounds until the 1970s. This may explain the lack of BME (Black Minority Ethnic) representation in the sample groups for PI and PII.

Further, the majority of birth mothers in all three periods were affiliated to the Church of England (CoE) (PI: 93%, PII: 82%, PIII: 67%) although affiliation to the CoE was higher in PI than PIII. The same declining trend in affiliation is reflected in baptism statistics. For example, Church of England statistics (2008) show that from 70% of live births in 1920, baptisms have dropped to 20% in 2007. Other studies have also shown that Church attendance has also declined over the years (Brierley, 2008; Bruce, 2002; Gill, 2003). For example, Hamilton (1998) has found that half of England and Wales population in the 1950s was attending a Church on a weekly basis. However by 1990s this figure had decreased to just under 10%. Additionally after analysis of Church attendance statistics Slattery (2000) has found that *“in Britain today only about one-sixth of the adult population belong to a Christian faith and only about 10-15% regularly attend Church”* (Slattery, 2000, p.179). This shows birth mothers to be typical of the wider population in PII. However, there was a much higher level of Anglican affiliation than was the case in the wider population in PIII. There are two probable explanations for these discrepancies.

Firstly, the majority of the sample cases selected for PIII was pre-1990s (76%) and the declining trends in church attendance are stated for the 1990s. A second explanation, one offered by former and current practitioners is that many birth mothers were non-practicing; many would state they were affiliated to the CoE so the agency would arrange their adoption.

An examination of birth mothers' occupational status revealed that in the second period birth mothers were over-represented in skilled non-manual and partly-skilled occupations and under-represented in unskilled occupations when compared with the local population of economically active females (Nottinghamshire Census statistics, 1971) (see Figure 6.2). However, the highest proportion of birth mothers was found in unskilled occupations. One possible explanation for this discrepancy may be resulting from the fact that indications of social class are deduced from the actual occupations of the minority of women who were economically active (16,094 persons). However, Census statistics show that a larger proportion of women in Nottinghamshire were economically inactive (21,507 persons). Nevertheless, the figures presented in Figure 6.2 below are important in indicating that the unskilled status of birth mothers, as in almost half of all cases for 171, would have had implications for their capabilities to financially provide for a child.

<b>Figure 6.2: Comparisons in Social Class between Birth Mothers and Economically Active Females in Nottinghamshire</b>		
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Nottinghamshire Census 1971 (1) (%)</b>	<b>Birth mothers in Period II (%)</b>
Self employed	4	-
I: Professional	1	-
II: Managerial & Technical	3	-
III: Skilled Manual	1	-
III: Skilled Non-Manual	1	18
IV: Semi Skilled	2	35
V: Unskilled	87	47
Other (Family Workers)	1	-

(1) The figures detailed in this column are based on the numbers of females who were classified as economically active. (Source: Nottinghamshire Census, 1971).

As can be seen from Figure 6.3 by 1991 economically active females in Nottinghamshire were spread across the occupational categories. Comparisons of the occupational profiles

of birth mothers between the two periods are difficult because of the emergence of a large proportion coded as housewives, students or unemployed in PIII. Generally, birth mothers were untypical of these trends. For example, birth mothers in PIII were only represented in skilled non-manual, semi-skilled and unskilled occupations. By the third period, the largest group of birth mothers seeking adoption are those in unskilled occupations. This group was clearly over-represented when compared Nottinghamshire Census statistics (1991).

<b>Figure 6.3: Comparisons in Social Class between Birth Mothers and Economically Active Females in Nottinghamshire (1991) (1)</b>		
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Nottinghamshire Census 1991 (%)</b>	<b>Birth mothers (%) PIII</b>
I: Professional	2	-
II: Managerial & Technical	24	-
III: Skilled Manual	34	6
III: Skilled Non-Manual	10	19
IV: Partly Skilled	20	-
V: Unskilled	8	35
Other	2 (2)	40 (3)

(1) Source: Nottinghamshire Census, 1991

(2) Based on those in Armed Forces, on a Government Scheme or occupation inadequately described or not stated.

(3) Based on those recorded on case files as housewives, students or unemployed.

Figure 6.4 details birth mothers tenure information for PII and PIII. No tenure information was available from PI case files. Analysis of tenure information from Family Care's adoption records showed birth mothers were not typical of Nottinghamshire's population. For example, Census statistics for 1971 show that 44% of Nottinghamshire's population were residing in owner occupied accommodation, increasing to 68% by 1991. However evidence of owner occupation was only found in PIII; even then very few birth mothers were residing in their own home (2%).

<b>Figure 6.4: Birth Mothers Tenure</b>		
<b>Type of accommodation</b>	<b>PII (n -17)</b>	<b>PIII (n- 50 )</b>
Bed Sit	6% (1)	4% (2)
With Parents	64% (11)	62% (31)
With friends	6% (1)	-
With relatives	6% (1)	-
Rented accommodation	18% (3)	22% (11)
Hostel	-	4% (2)
In marital home	-	6% (3)
Owner occupied	-	2% (1)
Psychiatric hospital	-	2% (1)

Source: Family Care's Adoption Records (1944 – 2009)

Based on the figures presented in the table above birth mothers were also under-represented in the rented sector in PII. For example, Nottinghamshire's Census statistics for 1971 show that over half of the local population was residing in social and private rented accommodation (55%). However by PIII almost a quarter of birth mothers were living in rented accommodation (22%). Generally speaking, the majority of birth mothers from the final two periods were still residing with their parents (PII: 64%, PIII – 62%). It is important to note, no information was available on the type of accommodation birth mothers' parents were residing in.

The numbers of birth mothers with educational qualifications increased over the final two periods. For example analysis of birth mothers' educational attainments revealed that only 10% held educational qualifications in PII (CSE - 40%; work based training qualifications - 60%). By the third period 60% of birth mothers had educational qualifications. As can be seen from Figure 6.5, the comparison with the general population trends reveals something of significance - birth mothers were much less well educated than their peers.

<b>Figure 6.5: Highest Held Qualification (PIII) (%)</b>		
<b>Highest Held Qualification</b>	<b>National Statistics (%) (1)</b>	<b>Birth Mothers PIII (%) (n- 50)</b>
Degree or equivalent	14	6
Higher education	9	9
GCE A-level or equivalent	17	3
GCSE (A* -C) or equivalent	27	36
Other qualifications	14	13
No qualifications	18	33 (2)

(1) ONS (2001) Highest qualification held: by gender and ethnic group, 2000-01: Social Trends 32

(2) Figure includes 13% who were still at school

This section has demonstrated that the socio-demographic profiles of birth mothers who relinquished their children to adoption through Family Care changed over time. Additionally, comparisons with local and national population trends provide some important insights in to how typical birth mothers' socio-demographic profiles are with the general/local population. Generally speaking, evidence suggests that birth mothers represented in the dataset derived from Family Care's archives had important similarities to the general population in PI and PII. For instance, in PI and PII the average age of birth mothers relinquishing their children to adoption were comparable to the national population of mothers who were having children outside marriage. The dataset also shows that the majority of mothers relinquishing their children to adoption in PI and PII were single. However, it is important to note that at least a quarter of birth mothers from PI and PII were married, widowed or divorced. Despite the fact that the numbers of married, widowed or divorced mothers declined over the three periods, these are important distinctions in the profiles of birth mothers and warrant further investigation to understand the reasons which drove these birth mothers to relinquish their children to adoption. Important distinctions are found between the occupational status of females in Nottinghamshire and birth mothers from PII. For instance, birth mothers from PII were found to be largely in working class occupations; however a fair proportion of mothers were in semi- skilled and skilled non-manual occupations. Statistics on the occupational status of females residing in Nottinghamshire in 1971 suggests that the majority of those who were economically active were in working class occupations. However as noted earlier local census statistics show that over half of the female population in Nottinghamshire was in fact economically inactive. One possible reason for this



discrepancy is statements relating to birth mothers' occupational status in PII are based on analysis of just 17 of the 50 cases examined for this period (data was not recorded for 33 cases). Thus, it may well have been that for the remaining 33 cases, birth mothers were economically inactive. This could explain why occupational statuses were not recorded on these case files.

By PIII important dissimilarities are found between the socio-demographic profiles of birth mothers and those of the general/local population. For instance, when compared with the national average age of mothers having children outside marriage, the average age of relinquishing birth mothers was much younger. Additionally, by PIII birth mothers found to be from more culturally diverse backgrounds. Further, data on occupational status reveals that birth mothers from PIII were largely in unskilled occupations, students, unemployed or housewives. However, local statistics show that females in Nottinghamshire were more evenly spread over managerial and technical, skilled manual, skilled non-manual, and partly skilled occupational groups. This suggests that birth mothers relinquishing their children to adoption through Family Care in PIII were pretty distinctive in their socio-economic background.

Based on these findings inferences can be made about birth mothers socio-economic identities and the extent to which they possessed the social and economic resources which would have enabled them to keep their children. For instance, on the basis of the working class status of many of the birth mothers from all three periods it is fair to say that access to economic capital would have been limited. This would have had important implications for birth mothers' who wanted to keep their children. However, findings suggest that access to social capital may have been more realistic as a large proportion of birth mothers were still residing in the parental home, although access to social capital would have relied on whether or not parental support was offered. In exploring birth mothers' motives for adoption, it will be important to examine the implications of living in the parental home for the choices and motives offered by birth mothers.

Findings presented in this section provide important insights into factors which amounted to *circumstantial* motives for adoption. These along with moral, aspirational and other factors will now be examined further.

### 6.3 Birth mothers' motives for adoption

This section will examine how parents have reached decisions about the adoption of their children and how this may have varied over time. Analysis of adoption records, documentary sources and interviews with former and current adoption agency professionals showed that birth mothers' motives for relinquishment have changed over time, as have the circumstances under which they relinquished their children. Figure 6.6 details reasons for relinquishment recorded on Family Care's adoption records and case file notes.

<b>Figure 6.6: Reasons for Relinquishment</b>			
(Source: Family Care's Adoption Records)			
<b>Reason for relinquishment</b>	<b>Percentage of birth mothers stating as reason for adoption <sup>(1)</sup></b>		
	<b>PI: 1926-49</b>	<b>PII: 1950-74</b>	<b>PIII:1975 - present</b>
<b>Moral Reasons:</b>			
Mother unmarried/no prospect of marriage	50	38	22
Breakdown of relationship/not wanting to be single parent			20
Extra-marital affair	18	22	-
Best interests of the child	-	12	60
Abandonment of child	-	-	2
<b>Circumstantial Reasons:</b>			
Financial/housing/material/practical constraints	28	22	24
Father killed/cannot be found/not interested	26	20	6
Lack of parental support/parents do not know	-	42	10
Birth mother mental illness	-	2	4
Rape/incestuous relationship	-	2	4
Do want no more children	-	-	4
Not ready/too young for responsibility of parenthood	-	6	43
<b>Aspirational Reasons:</b>			
Continue education	-	4	2
Pursue a career	-	-	6
<b>Other</b>			
Mother died at birth	-	2	-
No info	8	16	-

(1) In most cases, birth mothers stated more than one motive for relinquishment. As a result, percentages were worked out based on the number of birth mothers stating that particular reason for adoption. i.e. 50% of birth mothers from PI requested adoption because the mother was unmarried etc.

As can be seen from Figure 6.6, motives for relinquishment have been grouped into four categories: moral, circumstantial, aspirational and other reasons. Moral reasons were categorised as those relating to the moral assumptions prevalent at the time. These included reasons such as ‘mother unmarried’, ‘not wanting to be a single parent’ and ‘adoption being in the best interests of the child’. As will be demonstrated later in this chapter these reasons were tied in with wider moral, social and religious contexts. Circumstantial reasons were those related to birth mothers’ circumstances at the time of pregnancy (as discussed in the previous section). These included cases where birth mothers did not have the financial and material capacity to provide for a child. This could have been as a result of poorly paid employment, they were unable to provide accommodation for the child or because they did not have the support of the birth father and/or parents. Cases where there were allegations of rape or abuse were also categorised as circumstantial reasons. Aspirational reasons were categorised as those relating to the birth mother’s own aspirations to improve her life, before wanting to have children. These included cases where birth mothers wanted to continue with their education or pursue a career. The other category included cases where the mother had died and the child was relinquished by the birth father.

Quantitative data presented in Figure 6.6 reveals significant changes in birth mothers’ motives for adoption. It is evident that over the three periods, some reasons have become more prominent, others have become less commonly stated, some have disappeared and new ones have emerged. It is evident from Figure 6.6 moral reasons were commonly stated by birth mothers over the three periods. Reasons such as ‘mother unmarried’ and ‘no prospect of marriage’ were common motives for relinquishment in PI and II. However by PIII, reasons such as unmarried motherhood and no prospect of marriage ceased to be stated and were replaced by other moral reasons, such as not wanting to be a single parent or because the birth mother felt that adoption would be in the best interests of the child. These motives for adoption indicate changes in wider changing moral contexts (which will be explored throughout this chapter and chapter 7). Circumstantial factors were the second most common category of motives stated by birth mothers over the three periods, with the exception of lack of parental support in PII, which was the most common motive for relinquishment in PII. The high number of mothers citing lack of parental support as a motive for relinquishment during this period illustrates what an important factor it was for birth mothers in restricting the level of social capital available

to them. Aspirational reasons were stated by smaller numbers of birth mothers. Nevertheless it important to note, these reasons were new motives which began to emerge in PII.

The subsequent sub-sections will present qualitative evidence and provides a richer understanding of the motives stated in Figure 6.6.

### **6.3.1 Moral reasons**

#### **Unmarried motherhood/Not wanting to be a single parent**

Figure 6.6 (p.172) shows the number of birth mothers requesting adoption because of ‘unmarried motherhood’ declined over the three periods. Unmarried motherhood was the single most common reason for relinquishment stated on case files from PI (50%). However by PIII, although it was stated less than previous periods (22%), almost an equal number relinquished because they did not want to be a single parent (20%).

A closer examination of birth mothers relationship status in PI and II showed only small numbers of single birth mothers were in a relationship with the birth father (PI - 2%; PII – 8%). In most cases, the birth father had indicated that he was not interested in marrying or bringing up the child with the birth mother. In other cases, the birth father had disappeared or the birth mother had no knowledge of who the birth father was, indicating some children had been conceived as a result of a one night stand. In the extract below, one agency manager speaks of his experience of dealing with relinquishing birth mothers who were without the support of the birth father.

*Well I think the main reason was because the birth mother was single. Very often (she) either was not allowed to continue with the relationship, or the relationship had not been a lasting relationship because it had been a casual fling, or once the father was aware that the woman was pregnant he opted out of any responsibility (Agency 2, CoE)*

Analysis of Family Care’s case files revealed reasons relating to the birth father were commonly stated by birth mothers alongside the reason of being an unmarried mother until the 1970s. For example in PI over a quarter of birth mothers requested adoption of

their children because of a lack support from the birth father (26%) and a fifth of birth mothers did so in PII. These points are illustrated in extracts taken from Adoption Worker case notes below.

*Mother not married, father is not interested (PI, Case 11, 1944)*

*Mother not married. When birth father knew baby was coming he said he was not prepared to marry her (PI, Case 17, 1947)*

*Requested adoption as it was rather unlikely that she would ever marry the birth father (PII, Case 19, 1962)*

*Father not married to the mother and knows nothing about the child. (PII, Case 37, 1948)*

These quotations suggest that the birth mother's unmarried status was in itself a motive for adoption. It is important to explore why this was the case. Former adoption workers felt this motive was tied in with the appropriateness of sexual behaviour, which was legitimised through marriage. All twelve respondents interviewed, spoke of the role of moral standards and social attitudes in influencing birth mothers' motives for adoption. For example, one former adoption worker said:

*From 1926 onwards I understand it was the culture and expectations at the time, the shame, the disgrace of having a child out of marriage and that would have been reinforced by the teaching of the Church (Former Social Worker, 1991 – 2006).*

In discussing birth mothers' motives for relinquishment Family Care's former Case Committee Chair stated,

*...it was the embarrassment of the pregnancy and it was considered a very disgraceful thing, well in to the 1970s (Former Case Committee Chair, 1965 – 1974).*

As can be seen from the first quotation, the former adoption worker spoke of the role of the Church in reinforcing moral standards and attitudes to unmarried mothers. The majority of former and current Family Care staff spoke of the stigma, shame and disgrace of unmarried motherhood, and attributed this as one of the major factors in influencing birth mothers' decision to relinquish, especially in Periods I and II. The stigma of unmarried motherhood and illegitimate pregnancy was also identified by other adoption agency professionals. In the extract below, one respondent speaks about the social conditions during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s and the perceived impact on birth mothers motives for adoption.

*They had done something taboo, it was unacceptable and they would be ostracised because of social pressure. The only choice they had was to give up the child for adoption (Agency 3, Independent).*

As noted in chapter 4 the shame and stigma of unmarried motherhood is attributed to the notion of respectability and discourses relating to appropriate family structures, in this case, a nuclear family structure through which children are best brought up in a two-parent family, the male as a breadwinner and the female as a homemaker. It is against these ideals that birth mothers in PI and PII were judged and birth mothers requested relinquishment because of her unmarried mother status. In the extract below, taken from a letter written by a birth mother to the adoptive parents after she had 'reclaimed' her child contextualises this point further.

*I have always wanted a baby of my own, but never thought it would be this way. I know I shall never marry now....mother says no one will have me... I have had too much sorrow and heart break (Case 13, PI, 1947)<sup>58</sup>.*

The extract shows how the birth mother was facing up to the reality of being an unmarried mother and suggests that if you were an unmarried mother, society would have ostracised you. Some former practitioners suggested that birth mothers themselves

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<sup>58</sup> This case was an exception within the 150 selected case files, because the birth mother had reclaimed the child after it had been placed for adoption. The case was selected in the 150 sample size as details of the case had been entered into the adoption ledger (which was used as the sampling frame) as the agency had initially placed the child for adoption. It was decided to include this case in the sample of 150 cases as it provided important insights into the birth mother's motives and experiences of adoption.

realised how their status of being a single mother with an illegitimate child was seen as a drawback to potential future relationships. Family Care's former Case Committee Chair spoke of his experiences where "*the girl realised that her life will be confined and her possibilities of meeting somebody else would be diminished... it was just seen as a drawback*" (Former Case Committee Chair, 1965 – 1974). This suggests that if a birth mother had kept her child, it would have profoundly impacted on potential future relationships. This is important as it suggests that birth mothers relinquishing because of their unmarried status were sub-consciously attempting to preserve their respectability. It also suggests that notions of respectability were tied in with the ideals of the 'breadwinner' family.

It was evident from analyses that those who did not conform to idealised notions of the highly gendered notion of appropriate family structures would have been socially and morally condemned. For instance, there was a general consensus amongst adoption agency professionals and former and current Family Care staff that birth mothers would have been morally and socially condemned for being unmarried mothers. Attitudes such as "*they made their bed so they can lie in it*" (Agency 4, Independent) were prevalent. Unmarried motherhood was considered to be "*shocking in social circles*" (Agency 3, Independent). As a result, the birth mother's decision to relinquish was reinforced 'socially' and 'morally' to be '*the responsible thing to do*' (Agency 4, Independent). It is important to note that findings have also suggested that the birth mother's parents often felt the shame of their daughter's situation more than the mother herself did. This is highly significant, because it implies that adoption was little more than an exercise in policing motherhood, but one that helped to preserve the respectability of the birth mother and her family. Elsewhere in this chapter, I will demonstrate how lack of parental support often impacted on levels of support offered to birth mothers. This in itself is important in understanding how realistic the option of parental support would have been for birth mothers; as a result, this motive for relinquishment will be discussed separately. Further, findings also suggest that the policies and practices of adoption agencies reinforced this stigma. For instance, evidence presented in chapter 7 will show that adoption agencies helped make arrangements for birth mothers to be sent away to Mother and Baby homes. Additionally, many adoption agencies refused their services to birth mothers who wanted to relinquish a second or third child to adoption. These findings are significant as they imply that adoption agencies were acting as guardians of public

morality at the time. It will be important to investigate the impact of this on the choices offered to birth mothers by adoption agencies.

The term 'unmarried mother' was stated less frequently on case files in PIII. Additionally by this period, very few birth mothers were requesting the adoption of their children because they were without the support of the birth father (6%). By the mid-1970s the term 'not wanting to be a single parent' and 'relationship breakdown' was more commonly stated on case files. Birth mothers requesting adoption because of not wanting to be a single parent often stated this motive in relation to circumstantial factors, such as financial and material constraints. These points are illustrated in extracts taken from Adoption Worker case notes below.

*Does not feel that as a single parent she could cope with two children (PIII, Case 19, 1984)*

*Birth mother and birth father were courting. They broke up after 2 years. Both wanted adoption (PIII, Case 48, 1978)*

*She has friends who are single parents and sees the realities involved in being a single parent, the stresses and the relationship problems. (Case 31, PIII, 1990)*

A change in terminology suggests that ideologies relating appropriate family structures and the standards of respectability which women had earlier been judged against had changed. This is reflected in wider social attitudes towards marriage and children. Both Family Care staff and adoption agency professionals spoke of these changes. Many felt that unmarried motherhood has become more socially and morally acceptable, along with cohabitation more generally. One worker felt that moral standards had changed due to changing attitudes towards sex and women's liberation.

*Attitudes towards sex have changed. Women are more liberated today. Women no longer need to be married to have sex and children. Moral attitudes have changed. Today, some people find it hard to understand the stigma and shame those mothers relinquishing in the 40s, 50s and 60s because those conditions*



*do not exist anymore.* (Former Social Worker, 1985 – 1997)

Another former social worker argued that there had in fact been a decline in moral standards. In her interview, she spoke about some mothers relinquishing in PIII who had engaged in one-night stands and casual relationships. These points are illustrated in the extract below.

*There were those who had been to a party and drank too much which is quite common nowadays, but less so back in the 1960s because there was more of a moral standard which I think has gradually slipped away.* (Former Social Worker, 1966 – 1991)

One former social worker who practiced during PIII noted that although the shame and stigma of illegitimacy had subsided by PIII, it was still prevalent in some cultures. In the extract below, she notes how the shame and stigma of illegitimate pregnancy was still a motive for birth mothers from a BME background.

*Well I suppose the attitudes of society were one of the key contributing factors to the stigma of illegitimacy disappearing. But I am conscious that that might have varied within different communities. Some cases I dealt with came from other cultures, who were perhaps in this country for educational reasons and there for that matter. For them, it was the shame and stigma and rejection. It was very similar to a mother here in the 50s and 60s.* (Former Social Worker, 1991 – 2006)

An examination of BME birth mothers case files from PIII (10% of cases) also indicated that the shame and stigma of illegitimacy was still prevalent in other cultures. The extracts below, taken from a BME birth mother case files contextualise this point further. In the first case, it is evident that the birth mothers parents were disgraced by her actions and felt this would affect her chances of any future marriage. Strikingly, the extract demonstrates a strong sense of parental pressure. It is important to note that the social worker notes also stated that the child had been conceived as the result of an inter-racial relationship. Thus, it may have been the case that some of the disgrace and stigma may have been the result of the birth mother's inter-racial relationship. In the second case,

the BME birth mother had arrived in the UK to study. The child was conceived with a man she met at university, from the same cultural background. As can be seen from the second extract, the birth mother did not feel as if the relationship was strong enough for marriage and that marriage was culturally necessary before she could have children. Adoption was perceived to be a solution to avoid the stigma of illegitimacy.

*Her family told her that she will be taken to India and get married in to a poor family as her chance of marriage in this country are over. They feel she has disgraced her family and that she must put this child up for adoption. She feels she has no alternatives. (Case 2, PIII, 1979)*

*The birth mother and birth father have known one another for nearly three years but it is doubtful whether their relationship is strong enough for it to continue. They are both very fond of one another but both feel they cannot keep the child unless they marry. Their families would not agree for them to return home with an illegitimate child in tow. (Case 2, PIII, 1977)*

It is important to note the similarities between these cases and the cases of White birth mothers cited earlier where illegitimacy was perceived to result in limited marriage opportunities. These findings suggest that the same discourses of respectability and appropriate family structures which had governed the choices and motives of White birth mothers in PII were governing the choices and motives of BME birth mothers in PIII. These findings are of great importance in understanding how different constraints were placed on birth mothers on the basis of ethnic background. These findings also add weight to the argument that what is deemed to be appropriate in terms of appropriate family structures and standards of morality are ethnically and culturally specific.

Generally speaking, this section has demonstrated that the shame and stigma of unmarried motherhood has been stated less frequently as a motive for adoption by birth mothers over time. Findings also show that underlying discourses of respectability and appropriate family structures are culturally specific. In the case of White birth mothers, the ideologies governing their choices and motives for relinquishment have shifted over time. The fact that White birth mothers were less concerned with the stigma of unmarried motherhood and more with the practical constraints of being a single parent is a key

signifier of these shifts in PIII. Based on the analysis presented in this section, there is an important point for further consideration - it remains to be understood why birth mothers risked pregnancy by engaging in sexual activity, especially when there was such a stigma attached to unmarried motherhood (in PI and II). One possible explanation is that birth mothers themselves weren't entirely conformist to idealistic notions of appropriate family structures. But it was the parents of birth mothers, who were more concerned with conforming to moral standards; after all they would also face the social condemnation. In this context, adoption may have simply been a way of managing a growing inter-generational tension.

### **Extra-marital Affair**

Figure 6.6 (p.172) indicates approximately a fifth of birth mothers' in the first two periods requested adoption because the child was conceived as a result of an extra-marital affair (PI – 18%, PII – 20%). One adoption agency professional argued that the relinquishment of illegitimate children by married women would have been common during the war period, as many husbands would have been away from home for periods of time, as a result of their enlistment in the armed forces.

*There were a proportion of birth mothers who relinquished their children to adoption - their husbands may have out at war; they were gone for lengths of time and the child was conceived as the result of the mother having an affair. In some cases they wanted the child rid of before the husband returned, so he wouldn't have been any wiser of her extra-marital affair (Adoption Agency 4, Independent).*

The extracts below provide examples of cases where birth mothers relinquished their children because they had engaged in an extra-marital affair.

*Mother married, child not of husbands. (Case 23, PI, 1943)*

*Mother having to support family, husband will not accept the child and the mother is unable to look after child (Case 32, PI, 1946)*

*Not the husband's child, he will not accept the child. The paternal father is contesting paternity. (Case 8, PII, 1952)*

Analysis of case files revealed married birth mothers offered their illegitimate children up for adoption as it became a choice between saving the marriage and keeping the child. One social worker said “*if women had affairs in the 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s, they were in position to having to choose between the husband and the child*” (Focus group, Social Worker 3). The extract below is taken from a letter written from a worker from the Women’s hospital to an Adoption Worker at Family Care. It demonstrates how a birth mother wanted her child adopted in order to save her marriage from entering divorce proceedings. If the relationship did break down and the marriage ended in divorce, it would have had serious repercussions for her capacity to financially support the child. Her circumstances as a single parent of two children would have meant severe hardships, as she would have only received maintenance for the legitimate child. From 1966, she would have been entitled to Supplementary Benefits, but the benefits office might have made efforts to recover maintenance, which was offset against benefit entitlement (Smith and Hoath, 1975). As noted in chapter 2, this has always been an uncertain means of support.

*Her baby is due sometime in May and she states that the father is not the husband, and she is anxious to have the child adopted. She states that her husband, who is a Sergeant in the army, has been abroad for three years and is due for his discharge in March. She thinks that if the baby is adopted her husband will not proceed with the divorce. I have told Mrs D that you may be able to help her in this matter; and have advised her to get in touch with you when she leaves hospital.....she lives alone and has one child aged 4 ½ years. (Case 43, PI, 1946)*

It is important to note, if the birth mother had ‘chosen’ the child over the husband she would have faced similar social condemnation as the unmarried mothers faced in bearing an illegitimate child. In some cases, married birth mothers felt they had no alternative but to place the child for adoption. For example, as demonstrated in the extract below, one birth mother avoided prison by relinquishing the child and returning to her husband.

*She is married and has illegitimate son aged 2 years old. She left her husband but has now returned to him. Another illegitimate child is expected. Mrs A was charged...in association with another man with robbery. She was placed on probation for three years on condition she returned to her husband. Adoption asked for because the husband does not wish to accept this child and with view of this marriage becoming more stable. It was agreed to accept the child for adoption. (APMM, July 1962)*

It is important to note that by PIII requesting adoption because of an extra-marital affair ceased to be stated by birth mothers. One possible explanation for this is that the standards of morality used to judge the actions of married women shifted resulting in changing social attitudes towards divorce. Further, developments in welfare support for single parents in PIII would have had important implications for the choices available to these birth mothers.

### **Adoption in the best interest of the child**

Over half of birth mothers from period III relinquished their child to adoption because they felt it was in the best interests of the child (60%), a much larger proportion than in PII (12%). It is important to note that the term ‘best interests of the child’ is language used by social workers from the 1970s, although the term was mentioned in the Children Act (1933). When this term was recorded on case files, it was based around one or both of the following: so the child could have the love of two parents and/or so the child could have an emotionally and financially secure childhood.

More often than not, the motive of ‘adoption being in the best interests of the child’ arose from the barriers presented by their individual circumstances. For example, a birth mother who had not wanted to be a single parent felt adoption would afford the child the love of two parents in a stable relationship. The motive for relinquishment was as a single parent, she could not provide the love and stability that two parents could provide.

*Marian is anxious that she (the child) is given the love of two parents in a homely, friendly atmosphere with the support and caring that she would have liked to have given under different circumstances. (Case 13, PIII, 1981)*

The extract below taken from a letter a birth mother wrote to the adopters shows the various factors which motivated her to relinquish her child to adoption, all based on her own capabilities to provide for the child. The extract shows that the birth mother was reflective both of her own circumstances and what would be best for the child.

*I thought about Kyle's future deeply but felt that as a single parent I could not give him the sort of upbringing I wanted him to have. I wanted him to have the love and security of two parents and that is why I decided that adoption was best for him. (Case 18, PIII, 1984)*

This motive also arose from a lack of support from the birth father or an inability to provide for the child emotionally and/or financially. In such cases, birth mothers felt that it would be in the best interests of the child to have the love of two parents, a secure home and the chance of a happy childhood, something which they could not provide themselves.

*She does not feel ready for responsibilities of single parenthood, either by giving up work and claiming supplementary benefit or by continuing to work and placing the child in a nursery or with a child-minder. She has no support from the birth father and would struggle to provide adequately for the child. She would like Summer to have two parents who were more financially secure and who would provide the love of two parents. (PIII, Case 17, 1980)*

Other mothers were moved by a sense of not being able to emotionally and mentally cope with a child.

*She felt Carla should have two parents together who were materially secure and emotionally ready for children. (Case 31, PIII, 1990)*

*Roxy feels too young for the responsibilities of parenthood. She does not feel as if she is mature enough to cope with bringing up a child on her own. Roxy would like Justyna to be placed with a couple who are ready to be parents. (Case 41, PIII, 1989)*

Family Care's adoption records showed in one particular case the birth mother was able to recognise the limitations her own mental health presented and recognised that it would be better for the child to be brought up in a stable two parent family. Adoption workers took special consideration with cases such as these to ensure that the birth mother understood and explored options to keep the child and also encouraged her to consider how she would cope if she was to have kept the child. The following extract taken from social worker notes details this case further.

*Miss Holland has indicated that adoption is probably her preferred plan for the baby. In view of her mental state, I have taken great care in counselling sessions with her to enable her to take slow steps in thinking through her choices. She has difficulty in acknowledging her status as a mother and as a responsible parent, though intellectually she has a grasp of legalities and implications. She has said that she would not know how to care for the baby herself and seems to accept her mother's comment that she has difficulty in looking after herself let alone a child.*

(Case 30, PIII, 1991)

It is evident from the extract above that the social worker case notes reflect a judgment on a mother's capabilities, rather than the mother's concern's for the child's best interests. A possible explanation for this is the influence of social worker discourses which embraced considerations of the child's needs and the welfare of the child are of paramount consideration. It is evident from the analysis presented in this section that birth mothers were considering what would be in the best interest of their children (i.e. a stable two parent family, financially secure). However it remains to be understood if these changes can be attributed to changes in social worker practice. The development and influences of child welfare discourses as an impetus for changes in birth mothers' experiences of adoption will be explored further in the subsequent chapter. Nevertheless, the motive of 'best interests of the child' was a more positive motive for relinquishment and significantly differed to those offered previously, which can be viewed as reasons of 'desperation' (e.g. unmarried motherhood, financial, practical and material constraints). They were also rather more positive reasons than the stigma avoidance of previous generations. Relinquishment because adoption was seen to be in the best interests of the child was the default motive found among the remaining birth mothers of this final

period, the ones who still wanted to pursue adoption despite all the other options that would not previously have been available.

### **6.3.2 Circumstantial reasons**

#### **Financial, Practical and Material Constraints**

Figure 6.6 (see p.172) show approximately a quarter of birth mothers over the three periods requested the adoption of their children because of financial, practical and material constraints (PI - 28%, PII – 22%, PIII – 24%). Financial, practical and material constraints included cases where birth mothers were unemployed or in low income occupations, didn't have anywhere to live and were often without the support of family. During PI this motive for adoption was often stated by divorced, separated and widowed birth mothers. In PII, it was often stated by single birth mothers. However, by PIII it was stated by single mothers (often by the ones who were young and hadn't established economic independence); but largely by those who had other children and were already financially struggling. As a result, the motive of financial, practical and material constraints and relinquishment because of having other children will be examined in parallel to one another. It is important to note, this motive was profoundly affected by changes in social policy and changes in welfare provisions for single parents. Although developments in wider social policy and welfare support for single parents have been outlined in chapter 2, reference to these changes will be made throughout this section to contextualise the evidence presented.

In the case of widowed birth mothers relinquishing in PI, many were requesting the adoption of legitimate children. One Independent (previously a Methodist affiliated) agency dealt with a significant number of widowed birth mothers during and after the Second World War. The adoption services manager from this agency felt these mothers largely relinquished because they were not able to financially support the child (Agency 3, Independent). This is surprising, considering Widows Pensions became available under the National Insurance scheme in 1948. However as Thane (2006, p.1) has argued *“widows would continue to draw pensions while they had dependent children, but thereafter 'every widow of working age and capacity' would be entitled to apply for 'training benefit' after which she would be expected to work and to contribute to the*



*fund*'. Thus, widowed birth mothers would have been able to draw Widows Pension for any legitimate children; however the state would not provide any assistance for illegitimate children. The birth mother was encouraged to return to work to support any illegitimate children.

Adoption records from PI and PII revealed that in most cases divorced, widowed and separated mothers were already supporting a child<sup>59</sup>. This had significant implications for their capacity to financially cope with another child. The following extract taken from a letter written by a divorced birth mother's solicitor illustrate the problems this group of birth mothers faced.

*A client of ours who has divorced her husband is left with two young boys without the means adequately to support them. The husband has married again, started a fresh family and is apparently without means. Our client is forced, therefore to consider parting with her younger son who was three in November last. (Case 55, PI, 1945)*

The circumstances of married birth mothers requesting adoption because of material and financial constraints differed from those of divorced, widowed and separated birth mothers. During PI, married mothers who were offering their legitimate children to adoption stated financial, economic and practical reasons as motives for relinquishment. This was especially true of large families with several children and cases where the husband was enlisted in the armed forces and away for lengths of time, leaving the birth mother and child(ren) inadequately supported. These points are illustrated in the extract taken from adoption worker case notes below.

*Mother is married and has a girl of 3 and boy of 1 and doesn't feel she can look after them properly as well as provide for the forthcoming child...husband in Service. (Case 15, PI, 1947)*

Another birth mother wrote to Family Care to ask for arrangements to be made for the

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<sup>59</sup> In some cases mothers were supporting illegitimate children, others were supporting legitimate children, and some were supporting both.

adoption of her illegitimate child. In the extract below, she details the reasons for why she was requesting the adoption of her legitimate child.

*I would be grateful if you were able to arrange the adoption of my youngest son. My husband is in the Navy and I do not know when he will return. I am struggling to keep my eldest two clothed and fed. I simply cannot go on like this. (Case 10, PI, 1944)*

Macintyre (1977, p.159) has argued “*it is simply assumed in the literature that this type of adoption (permanent relinquishment and severance of all ties) is appropriate only for unmarried mothers and the children of unmarried couples and their illegitimate children and not for the children of married couples*”. Macintyre goes on to argue that for married women the “*appropriate action is seen to be the mobilisation of social support in order to keep the family together*” (*ibid*). However, the relinquishment of legitimate children during the 1940s suggests that the welfare support available to married couples may have been insufficient, resulting in some mothers having to relinquish their children to adoption.

Despite the fact that unmarried birth mothers did not state financial, material and practical constraints as a motive for relinquishment in PI, it is important to speculate why. It may have been the case that the motive of ‘unmarried motherhood’ was more significant than the motive of financial, practical and material constraints. It also may have been the case that the self-support was simply not an option at the time; therefore was not considered.

An examination of case files from PII showed single mothers began to request adoption of their illegitimate children because of material, financial and practical reasons. Analysis of these case files revealed single mothers faced several obstacles if they had decided to keep the child. Professionals revealed that this may not have been explicitly stated by birth mothers at the time, but “*they would have thought through the obstacles they face*” (Adoption Agency 2, CoE). Cases in PII where birth mothers stated financial, practical and material constraints are cited below.

*The girl is unmarried and has nowhere to take the child. The child is illegitimate and she cannot maintain the financial commitment to look after it.* (Case 2, PII, 1968)

*Margaret's mother said that she must have baby adopted. She has no income to support it and her mother will not let her bring the child home.* (Case 18, PII, 1961)

The majority of former and current Family Care personnel along with other adoption agency professionals spoke of the difficulties a birth mother would have faced if she were to have kept the child. Those practicing in the 1960s and 1970s spoke about how birth mothers in the earlier periods would have liked to have kept their children. One former adoption worker said *“they all wanted to keep the baby which is perfectly natural and normal, and I always say I have never placed an unwanted baby in my life, they were very much wanted but their decision did reflect their circumstances of the time”* (Former Social Worker, 1962 – 1979). It was perceived *“if you were single, female and pregnant your options were fairly limited, even within your own families”* (Adoption Agency 1, CoE). For instance, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter some birth mothers were pressured into the decision of adoption by their parents because of the stigma associated with unmarried motherhood.

It is important to present evidence of the various obstacles birth mothers faced in the first two periods. Finding employment to support the child would have been one obstacle. It is evident from the extract below, taken from adoption worker case notes, that the birth mother considered keeping the child; however she was also thinking practically about how she would support the child.

*Sarah has considered the option of keeping the child. However, she knows how difficult it will be to find employment to support herself and the child, as well as arranging adequate childcare.* (Case 42, PII, 1968)

As noted in the extract above, even if birth mothers had secured employment, they would have faced other practical obstacles such as finding adequate childcare and also somewhere to live. Greenwood (1969) has argued that as the unmarried mothers were

held responsible for their illegitimate offspring they were often forced out of employment once the employer became aware of their immoral actions. This meant that the unmarried mother had to search for new forms of employment after the baby was born but again unmarried mothers found themselves in another ‘Catch 22’ situation as they could not return to work with an illegitimate child in tow (Walkowitz, 1988). This would have had significant implications for a reliable source of income.

One former adoption worker spoke of the impact of external economic factors in PII, like the economic deprivation caused by the two World Wars as influencing birth mothers’ options and choices. The main war-time legacy would have been lack of housing, made worse by war damage which left many families suffering appalling overcrowding well into the 1960s (Hallett, 1993). Family Care practitioners made reference to the housing shortages during the 1950s and 1960s and the problems birth mothers faced in finding adequate accommodation. For example, one social worker said:

*If they were in a bed sit, they didn't want them with a baby. I think the morality aspects or the mess of a baby, whichever, they couldn't get anywhere...so you can understand how much more difficult it was previously it was to make a decision to keep them. (Focus Group 1)*

Both adoption service managers from the Catholic agencies spoke of the accommodation problems birth mothers faced during PI and PII. Both Catholic agencies revealed that large numbers of birth mothers’ they dealt with resided in lodgings. This is different to the clients Family Care dealt with, as the majority had been residing in the parental home (PII – 64%, PIII – 62%). The extract below taken from an interview with the Adoption Services Manager from a Catholic agency demonstrates very clearly the problems living independently as a single parent may have presented for birth mothers.

*With us a lack of accommodation was a big thing cos most of the women were in lodgings where they wouldn't have been allowed to rent the room with a baby as well. There were a lot of women who put on the forms that they had no home to keep the baby and they didn't feel that it was an option to return to Ireland to their families; and they didn't have any family or relatives here. And of course there was the factor that they didn't have any money because if*

*they were working, they couldn't afford to keep the child in the nursery or in foster care or whatever (Agency 5, Catholic)*

It was felt by agency professionals and former Family Care staff that even the most independent birth mothers in PI and PII who were in employment would have found it difficult to financially and materially provide for the child. Evidence of this was found in adoption case files from PII. Extracts from adoption worker case notes are detailed below.

*Her father refused to have her return home with the baby and she took the baby with her to lodgings. She has returned to work and is finding things much too difficult and is asking for adoption. (APMM, June 1962)*

*She would like to keep the child, but she has to work and is in lodgings. She has no one to care for the child. She feels adoption would be better for the baby. (Case 15, PII, 1959)*

There was a consensus amongst respondents that a mixture of these factors influenced the birth mother's decision to relinquish in PI and II. It is also worth noting that statutory facilities and welfare support was limited during PI and PII. Without these, it would have been difficult for birth mothers to provide for the child, especially if she did not have parental support. This point is further contextualised by an extract taken from an interview with a former Family Care social worker below.

*There were no statutory facilities to look after the child on her own...it was very hard indeed...there was not much to be said for trying to look after a child on your own, there wasn't the employment that there is now, housing facilities, work facilities just were non-existent. In some cases and the girl genuinely thought she was doing right for the child. (Former Social Worker, 1966 – 1991)*

By the 1980s birth mothers were entitled to various forms of financial assistance. As noted in chapter 2, welfare support entitled birth mothers to income support, child benefit, and housing benefits. The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act would also have been relevant after 1977, since birth mothers thrown out by their parents would have a

statutory right to housing once they reached a certain stage in their pregnancy. These developments would have had significant implications for birth mothers' options and choices. However despite greater state support for lone parents, a quarter of birth mothers from PIII were requesting adoption because of financial, material and practical constraints (24%). For these birth mothers, adoption was seen to provide the child with the financial and material aspects they were not able to provide. These points are illustrated from social worker case notes below.

*Helen is anxious that Jake should have every chance in life. She doesn't have a job and is still living with her parents. She is asking for adoption to give Jake the benefit of a settled home and the love of two parents who can also materially provide for him. (Case 8, PIII, 1976)*

*Jay's birth family were having great difficulty in releasing him for adoption, though they felt it was for the best and it was felt that a couple who could offer material security and advancement beyond that of the birth family, would be reassuring. There were further considerations in view of the birth parents ages. (Case 29, PIII, 1989)*

Some birth mothers stated the motive of financial, practical and material constraints in addition to other motives, such as being too young, not being ready for the responsibilities of parenthood, and for some it was about not having achieved financial independence yet. This point can be illustrated from a couple who relinquished their child in the 1980s. Both birth parents were under the age of 18. The birth mother was still studying and the birth father had left school without any qualifications and was unemployed. An extract from the social worker case notes is detailed below.

*They both feel too young for the responsibilities of parenthood. Leanne does not feel that Michael will be able to financially provide for her and the child in view of his limited skills. They both feel adoption would be better for the child to be with parents who are in a more financially secure than they are. (Case 16, PIII, 1984)*

These cases beg the question of why, when there was more state support for parents, birth parents relinquished their children because of financial constraints. There are several possible explanations. One explanation may have been that birth mothers were ignorant of the benefits they were entitled to. However, as will be demonstrated in more detail later, by the 1980s practice changed where options to keep the child with the support of benefits would have been explored with birth mothers. Another explanation, as demonstrated in the extract above is that financial, material and practical constraints were just one of the many reasons which contributed to the birth parent(s) decision to relinquish. Alternatively birth mothers may have been aware of the various benefits they were entitled to, but did not want to be dependent on benefits and wanted to achieve financial independence. A further explanation, as offered by a retired social worker is that actually getting support for single parents such as housing support and benefits was problematic, even into the 1990s. The following extract illustrates this point further.

*Financial yes, that was still presented as a problem even though you could actually help them get on housing lists and benefits ...however if they were young, they could not get benefits ... Nevertheless, it was not very easy to get this help for them. (Former Social Worker, 1985 – 1997)*

Some adoption agency professionals felt finding a job was a more realistic option for birth mothers in period III. This made the option of self-support more realistic. However, others suggested that opportunities in the paid labour market for women were still rather limited. In the focus group with current Family Care staff, participants spoke at length about wider changes in the labour market during PIII and the impact on birth mothers' motives for relinquishment. Extracts from the focus group discussion is detailed below.

*Social worker 1: Well women were more engaged in paid employment than women previously. They became more self-sufficient. Single motherhood was more achievable.*

*Social worker 3: I disagree...finding a job was still problematic. Especially for those who were young, unqualified, who were students, or indeed those who had other children.*

*Social worker 2: finding a job to support themselves was just one of the problems they faced. They also needed to arrange childcare, housing, benefits etc.*

Evidence collected from case files which showed that over half of the birth mothers from PIII were employed and earning a wage (58%). Statistics presented in a working paper by Gregg and Harkness (2003) suggest the last thirty years saw dramatic increases in the employment rates of married/co-habiting mothers in the UK. Yet the employment rates of lone mothers were lower in the early 1990s than in the late 1970s, at just under 40%; and 25% lower than those of married mothers. In 1997, the incoming Labour government initiated a series of policy reforms aimed at reducing child poverty. A key element of their strategy was a move towards increasing employment rates among families with children. Statistics published by the Labour Force Survey (ONS, 2009) show the current employment rate for lone parents to be 56.7%, a significant increase from 1997, when it stood at 44.6%.

It is important to note although birth mothers might have benefited from increasing employment opportunities, a number of wider contextual factors would have impacted on these opportunities. Firstly the recessions of the 1980/1 and 1990/1 resulted in record unemployment levels (Geroski and Gregg, 1997). The recessions would have considerably impacted on opportunities to enter the paid labour market. Research carried out by the Local Governments Association (2007) found England as a whole, and particularly the northern half of England, had not recovered to its pre-1980 levels of worklessness before the 1990 recession began. The report by the Local Government Association also highlights that many manufacturing industries were hit hard in this recession. The decline of the manufacturing industry would have directly impacted on birth mothers prospects to re-enter the labour market, especially as birth mothers' were often in manual occupations. In addition, the availability of child care and the means to fund it would have also impacted on job opportunities for mothers (Booth, 1992). Crafts, Gazeley and Newell (2007) have argued women who are the head of a single parent family face particular problems in entering the labour market, especially when their children are at pre-school ages. In addition, "*childcare costs make full time work impracticable while the withdrawal of benefits on entering paid work makes part time work unattractive*" (Crafts, Gazeley and Newell, 2007, p.172).



By PIII, financial, material and practical constraints were also stated by those who had other children (16%). In some cases, birth mothers were lone parent and in other cases birth mothers were in a relationship or co-habiting with the birth father. The following extracts taken from social worker notes demonstrates a case where the birth mothers were already lone parents and relinquished because they felt unable to provide for the child.

*Scott and Angel have known one another since they were teenagers and after Angel's husband left her they went out together for about two and half years. He is the father of her fourth child and Angel hoped to marry Scott after her divorce. However they have had no contact now for some time now, and their relationship has ceased. In view of this she feels she must ask for adoption for the baby Mia, as she feels she would be unable to cope adequately with another child. She is anxious that Mia should not be neglected and is sure she would have a better and more secure life with two loving adoptive parents. (Case 33, PIII, 1991)*

*She wants Chloe to have two settled parents and feels she cannot herself manage another child as a single parent without either child suffering. She wants to do her best for Nik (other child) who takes her full time and energies. (Case 38 PIII, 1997)*

In cases where couples made the decision of adoption, they often had large families (between 3 - 7 children) and were already financially and materially struggling to cope. The extract below taken from Social Worker case notes gives further details of one particular case where the birth parent's faced severe financial hardships.

*Both Andi and Jackie have thought very seriously about the baby's future and both feel that adoption would be in her best interests. They are financially embarrassed a great deal, and this causes Jackie a lot of worry. She is hoping to go out to work in the near future, and feels the addition of another baby would add to her worries and probably cause a marriage breakdown. As she is anxious to prevent this, both she and Andi are in full agreement concerning the adoption of the baby, believing that she would benefit from the loving care of adoptive parents in a secure home. (Case 32, PIII, 1991)*

It is evident from the quotation above that this particular couple was already struggling financially. It was perceived that by having another child, it would not only put further pressure on their financial situation but also on a relationship, which already seemed fragile. In cases such as these the birth parents felt that adoption was in the best interests of the child, as adoption could provide two parents, a secure home and financial stability for the child, all the things which the birth parents themselves were not able to provide.

Financial, material and practical constraints have been stated as a motive for relinquishment in all three periods. Evidence presented in this section has shown that financial, material and practical constraints were often stated by widowed, divorced and separated birth mothers in PI and by single birth mothers in PII. However by PIII financial, material and practical constraints were stated by those who had other children, and those who felt that they could not cope (i.e. because they were young or were not ready for the responsibilities of parenthood). Despite changes in welfare support for lone parents and low income families over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, financial, material and practical constraints continued to be stated as motives for relinquishment throughout PIII. One explanation for this is that in keeping with developments in welfare support, by PIII we are looking at the remaining birth mothers who felt they couldn't cope, after having screened out the vast majority who did not put their babies up for adoption. Further, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter, by PIII social workers were exploring different options with birth mothers, which would have included the option of self-support. Alongside developments in welfare support provision, the exploration of options with birth mothers may be responsible for the declining number of single women (as in PII) requesting adoption because of financial, material and practical constraints. As a result those who do relinquish for this motive are those who are in real financial hardship. This suggests that levels of welfare support may be sufficient for single parents with one child, but not for those supporting more than one.

A more general explanation for the declining number of single mothers requesting adoption because of financial, material and practical constraints is that the structures which have governed the options available to birth mothers are but a structural embodiment of the moral constraints that they have always experienced at a personal level. Welfare systems simply embody the values that we all believe in about family life, self-reliance and the roles of men and women. Social policy/welfare discourses are

themselves comprised of a range of discourses specifically about welfare but also about family, mothering, and sexuality. Carabine (2001, p288) argues that,

*“discourses are fluid and often opportunistic, at one and the same time, drawing upon existing discourses about an issue while utilising and interacting with, and being mediated by, other dominant discourses (about, for example, family, poverty, welfare, morality, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and class) to produce potent and new ways of conceptualising the topic or issue”.*

In doing so, these discourses are attuned to normative ideas and common-sense notions about what is natural and normal, and also political and ideological doctrines. The influence of these ideologies and discourses generate ideals of good and bad mothering, appropriate family forms, what is immoral and moral in terms of relationships, and who deserves welfare benefits and who doesn't. In this context, changes in what is constituted as being appropriate in terms family structures were embraced in policy decisions relating to whom welfare assistance would be offered to.

### **Parental support**

Previous studies have suggested that birth mothers who relinquished prior to the 1970s did so as a result of coercion and lack of support from family and friends (Field, 1991; Pannor et al., 1978; Hughes and Logan, 1993; Wells, 1993; Simone, 1998). Howe, Sawbridge and Hinings (1992) in their book *Half a Million Women* identified that some parents did support their daughters; however, there were many that did not. Howe et al. have argued that birth mothers were felt to have brought “*disgrace and shame*” (p.48) on the family. Others have found that hurt soon turned to anger and some cases abuse (Inglis, 1984). In some cases birth mothers were often told “*not to come home*” and were given money to stay away (Howe et al., 1992, p.48).

Analysis of motives for relinquishment recorded on Family Care's adoption files also showed that parental support influenced some birth mothers decision to relinquish. Figure 6.6 (see p.173) shows a lack of parental support was an important motive for relinquishment in PII (42%). However by PIII, it was less commonly stated on case files

(10%). Although a lack of parental support was not stated by birth mothers as a reason for relinquishment in PI, it is not to say it was not an influencing factor during this period. There may be several reasons for this. Firstly, as noted earlier very little information was recorded by social workers on case files; thus it may have been the case that the adoption workers did not record this detail. Secondly, it may have been the case that other factors simply took priority i.e. unmarried motherhood. Thirdly, some birth mothers may have been pressured by parents to relinquish their children because of the stigma of unmarried motherhood, and the parent's consequently dealt with the adoption arrangements and reported unmarried motherhood as the motive for relinquishment.

Before proceeding, it is important revisit earlier discussions. Analysis of socio-demographic data collected from adoption case files revealed almost three quarters of birth mothers in PII and PIII were residing in the parental home (PII – 64%, PIII – 64%). Although tenure information for PI was not recorded on adoption files, it was probably the case that many of the birth mothers relinquishing during this period were also residing in the parental home. Additionally discussions in the previous section suggest that financial, material and practical constraints would have limited birth mothers' options to keep their children, especially in PI and PII when state support for lone parents was limited. As a result, parental support would have been an important source of support if the birth mother was to have kept the child. The extracts below demonstrate cases where lack of parental support was an influencing factor on birth mothers' motives for adoption. The first extract is taken from a letter written by a birth mother to the adoption worker at Family Care, requesting the adoption of her child. The other three extracts are taken from adoption worker case notes.

*I am writing to request that you proceed with arranging the adoption of my forthcoming child. It is because of circumstances at home and also being a single girl. My father will not allow me to return home if I decide to keep the child... It would be better to have the child adopted in to a comfortable home.*  
(Case 27, PII, 1949)

*The father of Margaret will not accept the child into his home...* (Case 3, PII, 1954)

*Parents said will be best to have child adopted... (Case 10, PII, 1957)*

*This was a concealed pregnancy and Judie went to hospital supposedly with appendicitis. The reason for asking for adoption is that her parents do not want her to take the baby home. (Case 25, PII, 1967)*

Adoption agency professionals spoke of cases where the birth mother was still living at home. It was felt “*she would be under a considerable amount of pressure from her parent’s to relinquish the child*” (Adoption Agency 3, Independent) or *there may have been coercion from the family and the threat to be thrown out if the mother kept the child* (Former Social Worker, 1962 – 1979). One respondent’s impression was “*that the parental view seems to have been the more predominant one and it was more about ‘what would the neighbours think?’ rather than what the neighbours would have probably actually have thought.* (Agency 1, CoE). Another respondent felt that birth mothers “*didn’t have the opportunity to find out what the community felt about them*” (Agency 2, CoE) as the adoption was normally carried out under the ‘*veil of secrecy*’ (Agency 4, Independent). In the quotation below, an adoption agency professional discusses the reasons why parents would have pressured their daughters to relinquish their children to adoption.

*Not so much the mother felt the shame and stigma, but certainly it is how she was perceived by everybody else. And certainly the family put pressure on the mother to part with the baby, ‘our reputation is going to be a stake, how are we going to face the neighbours?!’ (Agency 1, CoE)*

Parental pressure to relinquish is also evidenced by correspondence data found on adoption case files. In the extract below, taken from a letter written to the Social Worker by the parents of a relinquishing birth mother, demonstrates how the parents of the birth mother were concerned about the shame which may be bought upon the family.

*As for Kate coming home, would it be possible for her to stay with you until she gets her job in the Land Army, as it would keep people from talking altogether if she went straight back to a job as you know I am out at work all day. We do not want to give any one a loop hole after we have kept it a secret*

*up till now. Please could you grant us this favour and we will pay Kate's board. Thank you very much for all the kindness and help you have given to Kate (Case 12, PI, 1947).*

This evidence is important when attempting to understand who made the actual decision to have the child adopted. An examination of case files which detailed a lack of parental support as a motive for adoption showed often the birth mother didn't have a choice in the matter; the parents were the ones who wanted and organised the adoption. These points are evidenced in the quotation below which is taken from adoption worker case notes:

*Sally's father is a headmaster...he bought her back to Nottingham... they want adoption because of his position in society... this would bring great deal of shame to the family, which this family are not prepared to live with (Case 18, PII, 1961).*

Earlier in the chapter, I demonstrated how adoption of their illegitimate children served to allow young women to preserve their respectability. However, one adoption agency manager felt that it was the parents of the birth mothers who were more concerned with respectability and the stigma of illegitimacy than birth mothers themselves were. These points are contextualised in the extract below.

*I don't recall birth mothers feeling the stigma. But obviously they felt embarrassed that they had let their family down, but I had not detected that many of them felt personally that what they had done was the worst possible thing. Certainly there were people who tried to make them feel like that. So I wouldn't have thought that the individual birth mother felt that they had committed the greatest sin. (Agency 1, CoE)*

Evidence from case files did suggest some birth mothers took steps to avoid bringing shame upon themselves and their families. In one case the birth mother had moved away from her home town and into rented accommodation to avoid the shame of being pregnant out of marriage (Case 14, PII, 1968). In many cases birth mothers in PI and II would have gone to a Mother and Baby home in a town other than her home town. This

will be demonstrated by evidence presented in section 6.4 which examines changes in birth mothers' experiences of adoption. This section will show that the Mother and Baby home seemed to be an important aspect of birth mothers' experiences of adoption in the first two periods; and was also a mechanism by which birth mothers' experiences of adoption were silenced and they were able to avoid the stigma of illegitimate pregnancy.

From the 1970s, lack of support from the parents' of birth mothers seemed to be less of an issue. Analysis of the reasons for relinquishment recorded on adoption case files showed that by PIII only 10% of birth mothers were motivated to relinquish because of this reason. Interestingly, some cases from PIII showed that some birth mother's parents were supportive of their daughter and the decision she choose to make in respect to the child. This point is illustrated in an extract taken from social worker case notes below.

*Eve's family have been very supportive of her, particularly her mother, and were willing for her to bring the baby home to keep if she wanted this; they were accepting, however of her adoption plans and can see positives in this for Danny and Eve. (Case 21, PIII, 1985)*

Interviews with other adoption agency professionals reinforced this. As seen from the extract below, by the 1990s adoption agencies were coming across very few cases where the birth mothers' parents were involved, and in some cases the parents did not know of the pregnancy.

*Well, parental decisions, in the mass majority of cases this wasn't a factor, the parents didn't even know, the decision to relinquish was done by the birth mother herself. There were a few cases by the 1990s where the parents were involved, but that was quite rare...also with better practice these days have meant that relinquishing mothers are aware of all their options. (Agency 3, Catholic)*

It is interesting to note that analysis of birth mothers' socio-demographic profiles showed the number of birth mothers residing in the parental home stayed almost at the same level in the final two periods (PII – 64%; PIII – 62%). However, it is clear from the analysis presented in this section that lack of parental support was more contributing factor to

birth mothers motives for relinquishment in PII than PIII. One explanation for this is that discourses of respectability had shifted by the third period and the parents of birth mothers were less concerned with the stigma of illegitimacy and were more prepared to support their daughters to keep their children. It is important to note that by PIII, the availability of Supplementary Benefits and a Council flat would have enabled parents to disown their wayward daughters without them having their babies adopted. We are therefore left wondering how far the demands of maintaining 'respectability' have really changed over the three periods. Alternatively, another explanation is that other factors simply took priority for instance financial hardship or not being ready for the responsibilities of parenthood.

### **Not ready/too young for the responsibilities of parenthood**

Analysis of adoption records showed the motive of 'not ready for the responsibilities of parenthood' was commonly stated by birth mothers in PIII (43%). This motive for adoption was often stated alongside age related reasons, i.e. 'too young for motherhood. In many cases 'not ready for the responsibilities of parenthood' was stated by birth mothers under the age of 24. For some, they were not financially and materially secure and felt they could not support a child. Others didn't feel they were mature enough or emotionally ready to have a child, or because they had not yet established their own independence. The following extracts taken from Social Worker case notes contextualise these points further:

*Marie and Stephen have been going out with one another for about a year, but they are mature enough to realise that they are much too young to settle down with the added responsibility of bringing up a child. (Case 11, PIII, 1980)*

*She thought about keeping Matt, but did not feel it would be right for him; she does not feel ready for parenthood nor can she give him material things; love or stability that a child needs. she still hopes to get a job; she is still dependant on her family in many ways, for example she has not through of leaving home ... she wants to be financially and emotionally secure before settling down with children. (Case 20, PIII, 1985).*



The extracts above demonstrate that by the 1980s young women were thinking through their options, considering if they could provide emotional and financial security for the child in light of their age and maturity. These reasons were often borne out of developments in practice which resulted in counselling birth mothers through their options. This is an important change in birth mothers' experiences of adoption and will be evidenced and discussed further later in this chapter. .

### **6.3.3 Summary**

Based on the evidence presented so far the following assertions can be made about the reasons why women relinquished their children to adoption during the PI. Firstly, choices and circumstances varied based on the marital status of birth mothers. The majority of single birth mothers in PI and PII have relinquished their children to adoption because they were without the support of the birth father or there was no prospect of marriage. Furthermore, although it was not explicitly stated on case files, economic constraints may have also influenced some birth mothers' decision to relinquish. For instance, analysis of socio-demographic data showed that many birth mothers were not in employment and state support was often viewed as highly undesirable. Evidence collated from adoption case files and interviews with adoption agency professionals revealed that the financial, practical and material constraints were often stated by divorced, separated or widowed birth mothers relinquishing in PI. Many of these birth mothers had other children and were already struggling to provide for them. Married birth mothers relinquished for different reasons, often because they conceived the child as the result of an extra-marital affair and were faced with the prospect of choosing between the child and the husband.

During period II birth mothers' circumstances and reasons for relinquishment became more complex. However, their options to keep the child remained fairly limited. It was not often a particular reason, but more likely a mixture financial, practical and moral reasons that informed birth mothers' motives for adoption. Evidence from studies such as Field (1991), Pannor et al. (1978) and Hughes and Logan (1993) reported significant numbers of birth mothers feeling as if they had little or no choice about the adoption. Evidence to support this has been presented earlier. Lack of parental support was commonly stated by birth mothers as a motive for adoption in PII. Parental support would have been important in providing alternatives to adoption for the birth mother, especially

as welfare, employment and housing opportunities were limited. Evidence from other studies has also suggested it would have been increasingly hard for the birth mother to keep the child without the support of her parents (Pannor et al., 1974; Pannor et al., 1978; Hughes and Logan, 1993; Wells, 1994).

By the latter quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the reasons birth mothers offered for the adoption of their children changed from the ones offered in earlier periods. During this period, some previously stated reasons disappeared (e.g. mother unmarried): others were stated less commonly (e.g. lack of parental support) and some became more prominent (e.g. too young/not ready for the responsibilities of parenthood). In addition, during PIII some new motives for adoption emerged (e.g. abandonment of child, not wanting any more children, wanting to pursue a career). Financial, material and practical constraints continued to be cited throughout PIII, often by those who already had other children or by those who felt they could not cope. Furthermore, relinquishment because adoption was perceived to be in the best interests of the child was the most common motive for relinquishment in PIII, often arising from birth mothers' own constraints, whether emotional, financial or practical. Wells (1994) reported similar findings which suggest that birth mothers now relinquish largely for reasons such as wanting the child to have two parents, emotional and financial security, or themselves not being able to cope with having a child.

The findings presented in this section provide some important insights in to the influence of changing ideological discourses relating to standards of respectability and appropriate family structures on the reasons birth mothers have offered for adoption. The fact that moral motives for relinquishment were influencing single birth mothers' decisions for adoption in Periods I and II suggest that maintaining standards of respectability were important influencing factors. It is also found that a woman's respectability would have been compromised by her status as an unmarried mother. This is further reinforced by findings relating to the lack of parental support offered by birth mothers' parents. These findings show that there is a complex relationship between the 'respectable' identities birth mothers (and parents) sought to maintain and what was seen to be appropriate in terms of family structures. By PIII fewer birth mothers were concerned with the standards of respectability the birth mothers in Periods I and II sought to maintain. This can be evidenced in the emergence of the motive of 'not wanting to be a single parent'. It can be

argued that by PIII the reasons offered by birth mothers became more individualistic e.g. not wanting any more children, wanting to pursue a career, too young, not ready for the responsibilities of parenthood.

It is also clear from the findings presented in this section that access to economic capital (e.g. housing, employment, income) has influenced the reasons birth mothers have offered for adoption over the three periods. However, more importantly, the access to economic capital was found to be stated as a motive for relinquishment by different groups of birth mothers, distinguished on the basis of marital status. For instance, in PI it was largely widowed, separated and divorced birth mothers who could not financially and materially provide for a child. By PII, it was largely single mothers who stated this as a motive for relinquishment. However by PIII, this motive was largely stated by those who were too young or not ready for the responsibilities of parenthood, or by those who already had other children and were already financially stretched. These findings suggest that the possession of economic capital was important in providing alternatives to adoption in all three periods. Further, findings also suggest that the possession of social capital (such as parental support) would have been equally as important for birth mothers. These findings are significantly important in advancing knowledge about the different constraints imposed on birth mothers throughout the three periods. These findings will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter.

#### **6.4 Birth Mothers Experiences of Adoption**

This section will go on to present findings relating to birth mothers' changing experiences of adoption. This section draws upon a mixture of data sources including social worker case notes, interviews with adoption agency professionals and correspondence documents written by birth mothers. Evidence presented in this section will discuss the three main themes emerging from the data. Firstly, I will discuss evidence relating to the shift of stigma in the birth mother's experience of adoption; since this constitutes an important change in birth mothers' experiences of adoption. The evidence presented in this section will form the basis of understanding how the stigma, reflective of standards of respectability and discourses relating to appropriate family structures have changed and shaped birth mothers' experiences of adoption. I will then go

on to present evidence relating to birth mothers' experiences of adoption under a closed model of practice which was characterised by secrecy and a permanent severance of the mother-child bond. After which, I will go on to evidence changes in birth mothers' experiences under the practice of semi/open adoptions. Explanations for changes in birth mothers' experiences will be sought in the subsequent chapter through the conditioning and mediating influence of the adoption agency.

#### **6.4.1 The shift of stigma**

This section will go on to demonstrate how the stigma in birth mothers' experiences of adoption has changed over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Findings presented in the previous section demonstrated how moral reasons such as unmarried motherhood drove large proportions of unmarried mothers to relinquish their children to adoption. They also showed how the stigmatisation of unmarried motherhood shaped the motive of parental pressure and lack of parental support. Findings presented earlier suggest that the notion of 'unmarried mother' carried with it social and moral connotations about standards of respectability and appropriate family structures. It is in this context that unmarried motherhood was socially and morally condemned. The condemnation of unmarried motherhood and the stigma associated with it had important implications for how birth mothers experienced the adoption process, largely the secrecy in adoptions.

One former adoption worker (1966 – 1991) felt that “*the secrecy was just so potentially disruptive*”. Previous studies have shown that the secrecy in closed adoptions was related to issues of unresolved grief, which ultimately affected birth mothers' long-term mental health (Winker and Van Keppel, 1984; Howe et al., 1992; Bouchier et al., 1991). Issues of unresolved grief were also evident from correspondence written by birth mothers. In the extract below, the birth mother had written to the agency several years after the adoption had taken place and continued to do so for the following seven years. The extract below demonstrates how this particular birth mother was struggling to come to terms with her decision of adoption several years after the adoption had taken place.

*I gather that you would be surprise to receive this letter from me after all this time. I have wanted to write on so many occasions but have somehow or rather decided against it for reasons beyond my understanding. Perhaps I*

*have not come to terms with what has been. I have always had this overwhelming wish to change the past. (Case 1, PIII, 1983)*

Previous studies have shown that relinquishing a child for adoption involves a loss, which has similarities with loss of a loved one and separation (Bouchier, Lambert and Triseliotis, 1991; Howe, Sawbridge and Hinings, 1992; Hughes and Logan, 1993; Wells, 1993). These studies were carried out years after the adoption. Correspondence data collated from case files showed that some birth mothers struggled with the separation at the time of relinquishment. Letters on case files also revealed that some birth mothers felt guilty and remorseful of their decision. This indicates that some birth mothers would have liked to have kept their child. In one particular case, in a letter written by a birth mother to the adoption worker, she spoke of her feelings of how difficult it was going to be to relinquish the child. It demonstrates how the birth mother faced the realities of her situation and felt that adoption was in the best interests of the child. Of course, there are mixed motives here, as the birth mother was also saving herself from the harsh realities of unmarried motherhood. An extract from the letter is shown below.

*I received your letter and am answering it straight away, well I know it is going to be hard to part with him, I don't want to, sometimes I don't think I can, but I want him to have a good home and can't face the world being a lone parent...he is a very contented child, he hardly cried. (Case 47, PI, 1947)*

Former Family Care practitioners also reported birth mothers experiencing feelings of sadness and anguish, also identified by Powell and Warren (1997) in their study of birth mothers. In the extract below a former social worker spoke of the cause of the sadness and anguish for birth mothers. The following extract illustrates this point further.

*All of them seemed to have sadness and anguish in some instances holding on to the belief that this was that best thing that they could do. But really wanting to know how it turned out, but fearful ....please tell me he or she is grown up happy and doesn't blame me. (Former Social Worker, 1991 – 2006)*

In the extract above the former social worker notes how birth mothers were anxious to know if the child was happy and had settled well with the adoptive parents. Evidence of

this was also found in correspondence documents. In a letter written by a birth mother to the social worker at Family Care shortly after the child was placed with the adopters, it is clear that she was still thinking of the child and was anxious to know of her progress and whether she was happy or not.

*I was wondering how the baby was getting on with her new family. I keep on thinking about her and wondering if she is happy or not and if she has settled with her new parents. Would it be possible to for you to ask the adopters to write to me and keep me updated with her progress? (Case 39, PII, 1967)*

In an interview with an adoption agency manager it was evident that the shame and stigma of unmarried motherhood created conditions of secrecy in adoptions. This point is further evidenced in the quotation below. The adoption agency professional speaks about one particular birth mother's story which had stuck with him, where the family went to great lengths to keep the pregnancy and adoption a secret.

*I remember one birth mother that I spoke to saying that it was obvious that she was pregnant; she wasn't allowed out of the house and was only allowed out in the night. I remember one woman talking about the fact the only relative who had a car actually collected her in the dark hours of the night and drove her to the Mother and Baby Home so they wouldn't be seen leaving the area. And I think she said that she stopped in the river valley which is a local beauty spot and that actually that was the first fresh air that she had for months. (Agency 1, CoE Agency)*

Interviews with adoption agency professionals and evidence gathered from correspondence showed that Mother and Baby homes were important in preserving the secrecy in birth mothers' experiences of adoption. As noted in chapters 2 and 3, they became prominent at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; many were set up by philanthropists and moral welfare agencies whose interest was in rectifying the problems caused by illegitimacy and prostitution (Hall and Howes, 1965). Elliot (2005) has argued that Mother and Baby homes "*were an essential component of the system for dealing with unmarried mothers; they usually took mothers in six weeks before the birth until six weeks after the child had been born* (Elliot, 2005, p.140).

Analysis of correspondence revealed that Mother and Baby homes were a mechanism by which birth mothers avoided the shame and stigma. It is difficult to say if birth mothers would have supported their confinement in Mother and Baby homes due to the lack of accounts provided by birth mothers themselves. They may have provided an escape from immediate neighbourhood opprobrium. However, a birth mother in a Mother and Baby home would have been confronted daily with her disavowed status. It seemed that Family Care had an arrangement with homes outside the county. Correspondence documents showed that birth mothers' local to Nottingham often went to a Mother and Baby home outside the county. This can be evidenced in the extract below, taken from a letter written by a social worker at Family Care in response to an adopted adult (relinquished in PI) who asked about why he was born in Bradford when his birth mother has resided in Nottingham.

*I understand in those days several of our "clients" were sent to a Mother and Baby home in Bradford, which would account for the possible reason you were born in Bradford. June 1984 (Case 26, PI, 1944)*

The home affiliated to Family Care often took in mothers referred from other agencies around the country. One adoption agency professional spoke more generally about why birth mothers went to homes outside the local vicinity. These points are further contextualised in the quotation below.

*I mean because of the stigma they would have gone away and hidden, gone to the other end of the country, gone into a Mother and Baby Home. These were seen as religious places and seen to be treating the women very harshly. But then they would go back home and nobody would know that they are a single parent and an unmarried mother, so they wouldn't be a recipient of prejudice because they had taken steps to avoid it (Agency 4, Independent)*

Mother and Baby homes were a distinct feature of birth mothers' experiences of adoption in PI and PII. Evidence from interviews with adoption agency professionals and documentary sources showed that the secrecy of pregnancy and their stay in the Mother and Baby homes were particularly isolating for birth mothers. This point is illustrated in the extract below taken from an interview with an adoption agency professional.

*They were away from their loved ones. Birth mothers I have spoken to over the years have told me how scary it was and how much they longed to speak to someone about what they were going through. They couldn't talk to their friends back home because of the secrecy. And in my experience of talking to them, being shipped off to the Mother and Baby Home just isolated them more. They became completely isolated, because often they didn't tell anybody about it (Agency 3, Independent).*

The isolating element of Mother and Baby homes was also evident in a letter written by a birth mother who relinquished her child in 1944. The extract below demonstrates how the birth mother struggled from being away from her family and pleas with the adoption worker to convince her parents to allow her to transfer to a Mother and Baby home closer to home.

*I am so very lonely here. I wish I could have stayed at Gorse Road (the Mother and Baby Home affiliated to Family Care) to be closer to mother and father. Please could you persuade mother and father to let me come back to Gorse Road until the baby goes. (Case 3, PI, 1944)*

In the accounts offered by adoption agency professionals, it was found that the shame felt by birth mothers may have differed between Catholic and CoE birth mothers. For example, it was perceived that Catholic mothers felt that they had in fact done something wrong by getting pregnant and by having sex outside marriage, and therefore needed to show repentance for their actions. This point is contextualised in an extract taken from an interview with an adoption agency professional below.

*Certainly the mothers that I have met who were in the Mother and Baby homes in the 50s and 60s felt that they had done wrong and they needed to show repentance. Catholic mothers essentially had a strong sense that they had done wrong. And I would also say that the reason why a lot of these young mothers didn't go on the pill was that that in itself was seen as wrong, So a lot of these young women did end up getting pregnant because they wouldn't do the wrong thing by planning to have sex, which was a crazy situation because they were in a worse situation by not planning (Agency 5, Catholic)*



However, it may have been the case that even if CoE mothers didn't express their illegitimate pregnancy in terms of sin, they would still have been acutely aware of having 'let the side down' and betrayed family expectations. Adoption agency professionals identified that although birth mothers may have stated they were affiliated to the Church of England, they would have largely been non-practicing, though their parents may have been practicing (Agency 1, CoE; Principal Adoption Worker, 1966 – 1991). However, adoption agency professionals from Catholic agencies identified that Catholic birth mothers would have been practicing and have attended church which would explain the generational difference in the sense of shame.

Analysis of birth mothers' motives for relinquishment show that the stigma of unmarried motherhood continued in to the beginning of PIII, at least until the end of the 1970s. However, analyses of interviews and focus groups carried out with former and current adoption agency professionals reveal that the stigma shifted in PIII and became associated to the act of relinquishing a child to adoption. Interviews with adoption agency professionals identified this attitude beginning to emerge from the 1980s. The points are illustrated in the extracts below.

*It has been more difficult in more recent years as society believes that the mother should bring up her own child. There has been such a swing around again with adoption so that it has become a pressure for the birth mother.* (Agency 5, Catholic).

*Relinquishing a child today, it must be a very tough thing to do as for most birth parents they will be judged and condemned for not looking after their children, so it must be very, very hard for them.* (Agency 1, CoE),

*Attitudes have changed hugely, from one extreme to the other ...birth mothers were disapproved of because they got pregnant in the first place, now they would be receiving a lot of negative attitudes if they were to relinquish a baby...you know attitudes like 'how can you palm your child off like that?'* (Former Social Worker 1, 1991 – 2006)

These extracts indicate that it is now thought best that children are bought up within their

natural families. This represents a shift in deeper ideological discourses concerned with respectability, motherhood and appropriate family structures. The condemnation of relinquishing birth mothers was attributed to single mothers now having the support networks and aid birth mothers in the previous decades did not have. This point is reinforced in the extracts below which demonstrates social workers' own perceptions of why birth mothers are now condemned for relinquishing a child to adoption.

*I think because things have changed so drastically. The perception is that "if she wanted to keep it, she had a choice". Because society has changed so radically, it is hard for people to empathise. (Agency 4, Independent)*

*Society now believes that unless there are issues of abuse, neglect or risk of harm, the child should remain with its mother. (Agency 6, Catholic)*

*There is now more of an emphasis on motherhood and mothers are now held accountable for their children. (Focus group with current Family Care staff)*

Generally speaking, adoption agency professionals attributed the shift in the stigma to the understanding that birth mothers who relinquish today have choices, choices which birth mothers in PI and PII did not have. It is important to note that it's not just about having choices, but about what influences the way they are exercised. The views of birth mothers themselves would have been important in verifying the views of social workers and it would be important for future research to do so.

It is necessary to examine why adoption is no longer the preferred option for unmarried mothers. The most obvious explanation is that adoptions are no longer considered as an option for birth mothers today, unless there are issues of abuse or neglect. Alternatives to adoption are now discussed with birth mothers, such as keeping the child with the support of welfare benefits. Another explanation could be that social workers themselves now work under the assumption that children are better off with their natural parents. This reflects an underlying shift in not only wider ideological discourses but also the values informing professional practice. Explanations for the shift in the stigma in birth mothers' experiences of adoption will be explored further in the chapter 7.

#### **6.4.2 Closed adoptions – the secrecy and finality of adoption**

A review of the literature has shown that under a closed model of adoption, there was minimal contact with the child (after birth and prior to adoption placement) and a permanent severance of the mother child bond through the finality of the adoption order. A clean break was advocated, where birth mothers were left to get on with life, as if the birth had never happened. These themes, evident in the data collected from adoption case files, and from interviews with former and current adoption agency professionals will now be explored further.

Analysis of case files from PI and PII show that in all cases there was a permanent severance of the mother child bond. However, in cases examined from the 1940s and early 1950s, it was evident from letters sent to adoption workers at Family Care from nurses and midwives that birth mothers were required to look after the child for 10 days and then were required to hand the child over to adopters. The 10 day rule, a medical practice, became known as a ‘rooming-in’. This refers to a hospital arrangement of keeping the new-born infant at the mother’s bedside and allowing the mother to take as much care of the baby as she wished (Phillips, 2003). However, this did not seem to always be the case. For instance, the following extract, taken from a letter written by a birth mother’s solicitor to the adoption worker at Family Care questions how his client could identify the child, when she had not seen it since the birth. This shows evidence of the clean break view where there was a relatively quick permanent severance of the mother-child bond.

*We understand that our client has been asked to attend the hearing of the case in order to prove the identity of the child. The circumstances are that although our client is the mother of the child the birth was premature and the child was taken from her immediately and placed in a premature ward. She never saw the child again. In these circumstances, it does not seem that our client could assist in proving the identity of the child in question. We are instructed that the child was kept in the premature ward...and was then handed over to the adopters. (Case 43, PI, 1947)*

In a few of the cases from the 1940s and 50s the child was placed with the adopters straight from the hospital. For instance, in one particular case adoption worker case notes

show that the birth mother refused to care for the child in hospital for the required 10 days. The child was subsequently placed with the adopters soon after the birth.

*Mother refused to care for the child. DR G (Chair of the Adoption Case Committee) made arrangements with the adopters directly. Child was placed with adopters directly from the hospital. (Case 28, PI, 1948)*

Evidence from Family Care's case files also suggested that in some cases birth mothers were required upon discharge from the hospital to take the child to Family Care for it to be placed with the adopters. This can be evidenced with extracts taken from adoption worker case notes and correspondence documents from one case in 1947.

*15/01/1947: Adoption worker notes – birth mother approached agency for relinquishment of her forthcoming child. Arrangements for confinement made with the midwife at the Mother and Baby home in Bradford. (Case 43, P1, 1947)*

*02/05/1947: Adoption worker notes from the birth mother case file – Marian bought child to the office. Child was placed with adopters (Case 43, P1, 1947)*

*02/05/1947: Adoption worker notes from the adoptive parent case file – Adopters arrived at the office. Child placed with them. (Case 43, P1, 1947)*

The practice of placing children with adopters and the birth mother's role in this was followed up in interviews with former agency staff. In the extract below, Family Care's former Principal Adoption Worker notes that mothers were required to bring their babies to Family Care so they could be placed with the adoptive parents. This seems like a rather harsh practice. In the extract below, the respondent spoke about why these practices were carried out with birth mothers. She felt that the motive behind this practice was to give the birth mother a last chance to reconsider her decision; as it would have been harder for the birth mother to reclaim the child thereafter because of the legality of the adoption order. The following extract illustrates this point further.

*I can remember meeting a mother, one that had come through the agency at some point and her describing to me having to take the baby from the hospital*

*to the agency and she said it was really hard to do. I can remember talking this over with the Principal at the time and saying why did they carry out such a practice? It seems so hard hearted in a way...but she said that they didn't have to bring that baby for adoption. It was in a sense their last chance to walk away with it ... something like that was interpreted as being hard by the mother and I heard it that way. But then you listen to the worker and they are saying you are giving them a last chance to walk away...once the baby was placed, after so many weeks they couldn't be reclaimed. It was more difficult to reclaim in the early ones. (Former Principal Adoption Worker, 1966 – 1991)*

Documentary sources revealed that the amount of contact birth mothers had with their children (prior to the adoption order) changed throughout PII. As noted earlier, in the earlier periods the birth mother was required to take the child to Family Care and 'hand the child over' so it could be placed with the adoptive parents. However by the 1960s, after the birth mother's 10 day confinement in the hospital or Mother and Baby home the child was placed in foster care for a short period of time until it was placed with the adopters. This point is contextualised in an extract taken from Family Care's APMM.

*Mrs B has agreed to stay in the nursing home for 10 days and has made arrangements to this effect. Arrangements will made for fostering or adoption after this period (APMM, June 1964)*

Foster care was given statutory endorsement by the Children Act 1948 and was introduced for the purpose of recreating 'normal family life' for 'deprived' children through small family group homes and fosters care<sup>60</sup>. Although children had been 'boarded' out prior to this date, fostering had not been used to provide temporary placements until the 1960s. An examination of Family Care's APMM revealed fostering became common in adoption practice from the 1960s. For example, fostering arrangements were made in almost a third of Family Care's case files from PII. Family Care's Adoption Panel Meeting Minutes (APMMs) revealed that the practice of fostering

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<sup>60</sup> See Triseliotis, Sellik and Short (1995) *Foster Care Theory and Practice* for a more detailed discussion on the historical uses for fostering.

before placement was a key point raised at the adoption conference held in 1963 by Josephine Butlers House in Liverpool. This suggests that the practice of fostering was becoming widespread amongst adoption agencies (APMM, April 1963).

The most probable rationale for fostering arrangements is that placing the child in foster care before the adoption placement gave birth mothers the chance to reflect on their decision for relinquishment. It is important to note that under the 1949 Adoption Act, it was stipulated that the birth mother could not consent for the adoption until at least six weeks after the birth of the child (Teague, 1985). This was seen a reasonable amount of time for the mother to consider her options and choices. If the child had been placed with the adopters before the birth mother had consented to the adoption and then subsequently changed her mind, this would have caused undue tension and heartache for the adopters. Thus, the practice of fostering in the period before the consent was signed looked after both the interests of the birth mother and the adoptive parent's.

Evidence from Family Care's case files from PI and PII showed that once birth mothers had signed the consent form, they either returned to their lives or moved away to start afresh. The following extract, from a letter written by a birth mother to the adoption worker at Family Care shows that the birth mother was attempting to make a fresh start and wanted to forget about the child and the adoption and simply get on with her life. In essence, this birth mother was abiding by the rules of adoption practice at the time, where there was a permanent severance of the mother child bond.

*I was sorry to put you about with signing my papers. I waited what seemed such a long time before I made my move down here. Anyway the adoption worker here is a very nice woman and was kind enough to get it done quickly. It has bought 'baby' back in my mind a little, but never mind I shall soon forget, I will try anyway. Sorry again for any trouble I may have caused you. I thank you for all your kindness. My kindest regard to you. (Case 2, PII, 1953)*

Under the practice of closed adoptions the birth mother had no contact with the adoptive parents and the secrecy of adopters was upheld for fear of the birth mother coming at a later date and attempting to reclaim the child (Baron and Pannor, 1990). Furthermore, there would have been no contact between the birth mother and the adoptive parents.

However, correspondence from a case in the 1940s revealed in one case there was evidence of a one-off exchange of letters and photos between the adoptive parents and the birth mother after the adoption order had been made. Evidence suggests this was not common practice, being a matter for the discretion of the adoption worker, as this was only evident in one of the fifty cases from this period (Case 47, PI, 1946). In this particular case Family Care acted as the intermediary between the adoptive parents and the birth mother to protect the adopter's identity. From the trail of letters it was apparent that the adopters were the ones who instigated the contact as they wanted to reassure the birth mother that the child had gone to a good home. The following quotation taken from the adopter's letter to the birth mother demonstrates that although this adoption was carried out under the practice of closed adoptions, the birth mother's sacrifice was recognised by the adopters.

*Though you had decided that the baby would have to be adopted we do realise that it could not have been an easy decision to make or to have been done without some slight heart ache... She has been accepted into our home and will receive all the love, care and attention that our own children would have received. We are not addressing or signing this letter as we feel it is better for all of us that we should remain unknown to each other, but rest assured that the baby is in loving hands and will be well bought up. (Case 47, PI, 1947)*

The birth mothers response to the letter was as follows:

*Thank you so very much for the snap of the baby, I think it is simply beautiful of her, I shall treasure it very much, also thank you for your letter. I am so pleased the baby is content and that you are happy with her, I know she will be a good little soul bless her. It is very kind of you, to offer to send another snap of her when you have one taken. I do appreciate it very much. Thanking you once again, very much indeed. (Case 47, PI, 1947)*

By the late 1960s there was some evidence of indirect contact between birth mothers and adoptive parents before the adoption order had been legalised. This is surprising as adoptions during this period were still closed and contact between the two parties was not encouraged. Wells (1994, pp.105-135) has defined this as 'semi-open adoption', although

her definition includes other aspects of openness apart from the one-off contact between adoptive families and birth families. This model of semi-open adoption challenges the traditional model of closed adoptions, which were largely practiced until the mid-1970s. Wells (1994) identified semi-open adoption becoming prevalent from the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, correspondence data showed that by the late 1960s practice was beginning to move towards the model of semi-open adoption. Contact between the birth mother and an adoptive parent was just a one-off exchange of letters. Analysis of correspondence data revealed that the purposes of these letters were two-fold. Firstly, the letter from the adoptive parents would reassure the birth mother that the child had a secure home and had settled well. Secondly, the birth mother's letter to the adopters would often display feelings of gratitude for providing a secure, loving home for the child. Although the letters were short and didn't display much detail, they did provide contextual data about contact under a closed model of adoption. An example of indirect contact between the adoptive parents and the birth mother is detailed in the extracts below.

*To Baby Margaret's Mother*

*I know that your thoughts must be with baby Margaret, and that you are wondering how she is, what she looks like and how she is developing. Perhaps if I tell you that she is very pretty, and so happy and contented and deeply loved by my husband and myself it will reassure you. This is very difficult time for all of us. You have had much anxiety, and we too in preparation for adoption and the continual appraisal and examination to discover whether we are suitable parents for this dear baby. Believe me if we are not, then we will not be permitted to continue to love and bring up this little girl. It is a very difficult time of probation, and one with very great desire and love would make the task impossible. A friend of mine once said how wonderful it is that out of such a dilemma could come so much happiness, and for us it is the most worthwhile event in our lives. By your sacrifice we have gained so very much, and we hope to repay this by giving Margaret every opportunity to enjoy a complete happy family life. We are convinced that we can do this, and want you to know that we will do everything to make her happy and to know that*



*she is a very important part of our lives. I hope I have assured you that your baby is happy and dearly loved.*

*Our most sincere good wishes. (Case 26, PII, 1967)*

The birth mother's response was as follows:

*Thank you for your letter. It was nice to hear Margaret was getting on with her new family. Your letter has put my mind at ease and I am certain that Margaret will be very happy with you and you will be able to provide everything that I wasn't able to. (Case 26, PII, 1967)*

An examination of adoption case files suggested that support networks for birth mothers were often minimal under closed adoptions. In the majority of cases from PI and PII case notes showed that birth mothers had very little contact with the adoption workers. Unless they had instigated the contact, the only contact they had would have been to arrange confinement in the Mother and Baby home or the legal proceedings of adoption. This was evident from the letters between birth mothers and adoption workers. These letters were formal and detailed the logistics of the adoption process, for example, arrangements for confinement in the Mother and Baby home, fostering fees, and letters to the birth mother once the child had been placed. In some cases, the birth mother may have written to adoption workers from the Mother and Baby home or after the adoption of the child. It was even rarer that the birth mothers would have discussed their options, or received counselling. Wells' (1994) study also identified a lack of support networks. Her survey of the birth mothers' experience of adoption showed that of the 262 birth mothers surveyed, 205 of them said they received no counselling or support during or after the pregnancy (pp. 4-5). Of the 57 birth mothers who said that they had received support throughout the pregnancy, only half had received it from their social worker (1994, p.4).

However, as Wells found, this was not the case for all birth mothers. For some, the adoption workers were an outlet of support they could draw upon. Analysis of correspondence indicated that a small number of birth mothers would write to the adoption workers after they had left the hospital or Mother and Baby home with details about how they were feeling and often thanking the adoption workers for their help. This point is contextualised in the extract below.

*I am leaving the Mother and Baby home today. I am feeling sad about everything that has happened. I wish things could be different. I know this is the right decision for him, he deserves the love of two parents. I met with the worker from the agency and she told me that the adopters were coming to pick Richard up tomorrow. Thank you for your help and for making the necessary arrangements for Richard's adoption. I do hope his new parent's realise how lucky they are to have such a beautiful boy. (Case 47, PII, 1955)*

Some adoption agency professionals who had experience of working in the archives spoke of evidence on their cases files which also suggested that their agency's former workers received letters from birth mothers after adoption orders had been made (Agency 3, Independent; Agency 6, Catholic).

Evidence presented thus far has shown that prior to the mid-1970s adoptions were practiced on the basis of a clear severance of the mother child bond and the birth mother's role in the adoption process was minimal. Additionally, Mother and Baby homes played an important role in preserving the secrecy in birth mothers' experiences of adoption. Changes have been identified in levels of contact with the child and the adoptive parents in PII. For instance, contact with the child and the adoptive parents in PI would have been rare. Towards the late 1960s we begin to see a gradual shift in practice where there was some informal contact between birth mothers and adoptive parents. Nevertheless, the closed model of adoption was still determining practice to a large extent, as the exchange of letters was anonymised to protect the identities of the adopters. In the 1940s and 1950s the birth mother was required to stay and look after the child for at least 10 days after the birth, after which the child was placed with the adopters. From the 1960s the practice of placing the child in short-term foster care before the child was placed with the adopters developed.

Analysis of documentary sources showed that by PIII the birth mother's role in the adoption process and her experience of adoption changed significantly. These sources showed that birth mother was more involved with the adoption process. For example, birth mothers during this period heard about the adopters, some even met the adopters and some were able to receive informal updates on the child through letters written by the adopters. Analysis of documentary sources has highlighted that from the 1980s social

workers began to explore (and document) different choices available to birth mothers. This is an important change in birth mothers' experiences of adoption. These developments warrant separate attention and will be discussed further in the next section as they are increasingly important in understanding changes in birth mothers' experiences of adoption.

### **6.4.3 Open/semi open adoptions and an exploration of choices**

A review of literature in chapters 2 and 3 showed birth mothers who relinquished their children to adoption after the 1970s did so under a very different model of adoption. Evidence collated from documentary sources and interviews with adoption agency professionals showed that birth mothers' experiences of adoption considerably changed in the final period. Several key changes were identified in birth mothers' experiences of adoption. Firstly, social workers began to explore different options with birth mothers and they were more involved in the adoption process than during the previous periods. In PIII birth mothers also received more information about the adopters and some had the opportunity to meet them prior to the placement. Further, the amount of contact birth mothers had with their children (pre-placement and post-placement) also changed. Changes were also identified in contact and levels of support offered by social workers. These changes will now be evidenced throughout this section.

An examination of Family Care's adoption case files from PI and PII showed there was little evidence to suggest that social workers were exploring different options with birth mothers. However case files from PIII (from the 1980s) showed that social workers began to explore different options with birth mothers. This suggests there has been a change in practice, where birth mothers began to receive help to consider their options, options which included keeping the child. The following chapter will examine what inspired these changes in practice.

It was evident from case notes that birth mothers during this period were beginning to take time and care in exploring their options. As noted in the previous section, birth mothers in PI and PII had very little contact with adoption workers and in most cases little support. However, case files from PIII showed that birth mothers began to receive counselling. Case notes revealed that the focus of the counselling sessions was to help the

birth mother to consider her options, explain the adoption procedure and to provide support. The following extract taken from a report, presented to the Adoption Panel demonstrates one birth mother's journey through the adoption process. It is evident from this extract that counselling sessions were important in helping the birth mother to consider her options.

*The social worker met Miss Hamilton...and regular interviews then took place throughout the remainder of the pregnancy and during the fostering period, and contact has been maintained since. Interviews were sometimes with Miss Hamilton on her own, or with her mother present and on one occasion with her father. Towards the end of her pregnancy and after the birth, she became more able to discuss the alternatives and consider the options to keep Adam. She thought about keeping Adam, but did not feel it would be right for him; she does not feel ready for parenthood nor that she can give him material things; love or stability that a child needs. (Case 21, PIII, 1985)*

In another case, the extract below taken from social worker case notes demonstrates the circumstances surrounding one birth mother's pregnancy and illustrates how different options were explored. It is also evident that the birth mother, along with her parents and the social worker explored options which would have allowed her to keep the child, including drawing on the support provided by parents.

*Jessica and Rory met through school and went out together for 8 months, parting by mutual agreement as they found they were losing interest in each other. Jessica subsequently came to realise that she was pregnant but kept the knowledge to herself until early December when she broke down and told her family.....it was she who raised the subject of adoption with her family. During interviews with Jessica it was clear that Mr and Mrs Bernard (Jessica's parents) were willing to support their daughter in whatever decision she made regarding the baby, and in fact took every care to make sure that she and they understood every detail and possible implication of adoption as an option, as well as talking about other possibilities about keeping the baby in the family (Case 24, PIII, 1990).*

An exploration of options was not the only change in birth mothers' experiences of adoption from the 1970s. During periods I and II case notes and correspondence data showed that adoptive parents' identities were kept secret from birth parents. However, from the 1980s more information was shared with the birth mother about the adopters. It became common practice to share details relating to adoptive parents' physical appearance, stability, personality traits and hobbies and interests. Additionally, case notes showed that by the 1980s birth mothers had far more involvement in the selection of the adoptive family than birth mothers did so previously. The following extract taken from case notes illustrates these points further.

*I stressed to her how much information would be given about the adopters, in order to see whether she liked them or not and told her that she could say no if she wanted to...she asked about the financial situation of adopters and I stressed that we have adopters from all walks of life, but one thing they had in common was that because both partners had been working for a long time as there were no children, they usually had lovely homes, physically and materially had everything they wanted and all they really wanted was to complete their lives with a child and would lavish it. She was reassured by this, she has clearly thought about her plans for the baby (Case 20, PIII, 1985).*

Case notes indicated that birth mothers not only had the freedom to accept or not accept the proposed adoptive parents, but they also shared more of what their expectations of the adoptive parents were. This includes specific requests, such as the child being the first child of the family, cultural and religious upbringing, personality traits and financial security. The following extract taken from case notes illustrates this point further.

*Miss M had no specific request regarding cultural or religious upbringing for A, but hoped for adoptive parents for who she would be a first child. She heard anonymous details regarding the applicants Mr and Mrs Smith...She was happy with this information and requested that Adam be placed with this couple as soon as possible, after Adam's medical examination. (Case 21, PIII, 1985)*

As well as birth mothers having more freedom and choice in the adoption process, they also had the option of meeting the adoptive parents, which demonstrates the openness in

adoption practice. Case notes from the 1980s onwards revealed that meeting the adoptive parents became common practice. Wells has argued that this meeting ‘offers her reassurance about the child’s welfare by giving her an idea of the family her child is living in’ (Wells, 1994, p.106). Other research studies have also shown that openness in adoption benefits the birth mother who may thereby feel empowered by having choices and feeling involved and in charge (Dominick, 1988; Iwanek, 1987). Although birth mothers were offered an opportunity to meet the adoptive parents, only a small number took up the offer of meeting them face-to-face. In all of the cases where a meeting between both parties was held, the birth mother had displayed feelings of attachment and wanted to meet the adoptive parents for her own peace of mind, to feel she had made the right decision and to reassure herself that the child was going to a good home. The meeting with adoptive parents may not have been a practice exclusive to the clients of Family Care, but other adoption agencies as well. The following extract, taken from social worker case notes illustrates this point further.

*She said a friend of hers who had visited the Catholic Children’s Society had mentioned seeing adopters. I explained that this was an option available to her ...she said that she was not really sure if it was for her as she would be anxious about bumping into them in the street. I reassured her that we did not place a baby with the couple in the locality of the mother anyway, whether there was a meeting or not and she was relieved to hear this. (Case 16, PIII, 1983)*

Only in one case did a birth mother meet the adoptive parents after placement (without arrangements for post-adoption contact), indicating this was an exception to the rule. The birth mother asked to see the child one last time. It was evident from case notes that the birth mother had unresolved feelings regarding the birth of the child and was unsure about whether she wanted to relinquish the child to adoption. The meeting was arranged and facilitated by the social workers representing both parties. Further details of the meeting between the two parties are detailed in the extract below:

*She is still asking to see the baby and is urges that she is allowed to... Mr and Mrs Sunny (adoptive parents) came to office bringing Nikki (child) with them. They were understandably very nervous. They decided to take Nikki in to see Lissa (birth mother) themselves. I talked to Nikki’s foster parents whilst Mr and Mrs*

*Sunny were with Lissa and her social worker. The meeting was relaxed and happy. Lissa cuddled Nikki and the Sunny's talked to her about her. Photographs were taken and given to Lissa. At the point of leaving, Mrs Sunny and Lissa were both in tears and comforting one another... Mr and Mrs S said how relieved they were that the meeting had gone so well. Lissa had reassured them that she wanted them to adopt Nikki. They are now glad that they met her and glad to have a photograph of the occasion to give to Nikki later. (Case 16, PIII, 1983)*

Additionally, an examination of case notes revealed birth mothers were often given detailed information about the process of adoption, something which was not evidenced in case files from PI and PII. This included information relating to signing the consent form in front of a magistrate (Case 32, PIII, 1982). The birth mother also received a visit from the Guardian ad Litem (Case 45, PIII, 1978), which had been a requirement since the Adoption Act (1952). Furthermore, the birth mother was made aware of adopted adults' right to access their birth records. The following quotation taken from case notes provides details of the various stages of the adoption process explained to the birth mother by the social worker.

*I explained the various stages, i.e. signing the agreement, how we matched a couple, Guardian ad Litem visit, and access to birth records at 18 ...Elle came to office to sign her agreement. I reassured her that I would write to her once Katelyn had actually been placed to let her know how she was doing. I went over the agreement form with her and Elle was quite happy and then showed the magistrate in to see Elle, on her own. I stressed that if she had any queries at any time she could contact me and that I would arrange to see her once I had visited and seen Katelyn nicely settled and could give her a report on her progress. (Case 18, PIII, 1983)*

These are important changes in birth mothers' experiences of adoption, as is the amount of contact birth mothers had with their children, both pre-placement and post-placement. As noted in the previous section, the only contact birth mothers had with their children was during the 10 days they spent in hospital taking care of the child, after which the child was placed in foster care until the adoption placement was made. However, cases from the mid-1980s onwards showed that birth mothers had more contact with their

children than previously. There are two elements to this contact: firstly, contact before the adoption placement which involved visiting the child whilst it was in foster care; and secondly arrangements for long-term contact through letterbox contact. Analysis of case files showed that during counselling sessions, birth mothers were advised that they had the option of visiting the child whilst it was in foster care. Some mothers did, however many choose not to. These points are contextualised in social worker case notes detailed below.

*Lilly chose not to see her baby at the birth nor did she want to know the sex of the child, or visit her baby. After counselling, both the natural parents requested knowledge of the babies' sex and received photographs. The foster mothers name, address and telephone number were provided, but the couple chose not to contact. The natural parents maintained contact with the social worker to discuss their feelings and wishes in respect of Lilly and to plan the adoption placement. (Case 30, PIII, 1990)*

*Wendy saw him briefly at birth, and chose for the nursing staff to care for him, she herself being discharged home within 36 hours. During the fostering time, Jai's birth mother considered visiting him, but decided against this. She maintained regular contact with her social worker to discuss her wishes and feelings, to consider her options and to plan the adoption placement. Wendy was counselled on various occasions concerning the benefits for baby Jai of involving and meeting with the birth father, but she did not agree to seek him out. (Case 32, PIII, 1992)*

Visits to the foster home allowed the birth mother more time to make an informed decision about adoption. For instance as can be seen from the extract below, the birth mother was struggling to make decision about the child's future and visited the foster home several times. This is one of the starkest changes in birth mothers' experiences of adoption. For instance, in previous decades the only contact the mothers would have had with their children was for the period of 10 days after the birth when they were required to care for their children Further, as is noted from the extract below, visiting the child in foster care was not only an option for the birth mother, but was also an option for the birth father and grandparents.



*Sherry did not plan to be pregnant, and she concealed her pregnancy from everybody, calling for ambulance help as she went in to advanced labour. She visited Hannah in hospital, and chose her name and she has visited her several times in the foster home. When Hannah was about 6 months old, Sherry's partner, mother and grandparents came to know of her, and all have visited her in the foster home. Sherry has been struggling to think things through for herself and for Hannah. She has known Hannah is safe in her foster home, but has found it very hard to face up to decisions concerning Hannah's future. (Case 32, PIII, 1995)*

As noted in the previous section, by the end of the 1960s, a one-off exchange of letters between the adoptive parents and the birth mother had become common practice. This one-off exchange of letters continued in to PIII. In over four fifths of case files from PIII, there was evidence of an exchange of at least one letter between the birth mother and the adoptive parents. The exchange of letters was normally shortly after the adoption order had been made and was often brief, not more than a sheet of A4 paper. More commonly, the adoptive parents were the ones to initiate the exchange, often thanking the birth mother for completing their family, reassuring her that the child had settled in well and would be well looked after. In some cases, adoptive parents made reference to sharing details of the adoption, the birth family and the circumstances surrounding the child's birth when it was old enough to understand. The following extract taken from a letter written by the adoptive parents to the birth mother contextualises these points further.

*Just a little note to say thank you for making our family complete, we already have a little boy called Simon and now dear little Lucy; she really is a sweetheart and has settled down very well....Please don't worry, we will tell her all about you and will give her the lovely presents you sent and your pictures. We found with Simon (other adopted child) a little talk every so often is OK they can take it in that way, in a story. But we would never not explain, rest assured...once again a very big thank you from the bottom of our hearts and all the very best for your future. (Case 14, PIII, 1980)*

Another distinct change in birth mothers' experiences of adoption comes with the practice of post-adoption contact. An examination of case files showed that birth mothers had the

option of having post-adoption contact with the adoptive parents/child implying that a continuous relationship maybe possible. The need for openness and awareness by children of their birth family runs through all current adoption practice. This is from the recruitment and preparation of prospective adoptive parents to the provision of post-adoption services (Howe and Feast, 2003). Retrospectively, openness in adoption is influenced by earlier research carried out on tracing origins and the need for adopted adults to know their origins (Sants, 1964; McWhinne, 1967; Triseliotis, 1973). Where post-adoption contact was evident on case files, it was normally through letterbox contact. Letterbox contact involved an exchange of letters between the adoptive parents and the birth mother, with the adoption agency acting as the medium for exchange. Analysis of case files from PIII showed there were only a small handful of cases where letterbox contact with the adoptive parents was maintained (8%). Previous research has shown that birth mothers valued forms of indirect contact. For example, Wells (1994, p.106) found that *“an exchange of the information helped to lessen the anxiety for the birthmother when the child reached 18 and the emotional turmoil that ensues should they be reunited; even limited contact gives some reality to the child’s existence instead of the birth mother having an image of her child ‘frozen’ in time”*.

As evidenced earlier in this chapter, post-adoption contact between the two parties in PI and PII would have been very rare. However during this period, letterbox contact enabled the birth mother to retain some form of indirect knowledge about how the child was progressing. Often the reassuring aspect of these letters for the birth mother was that the child had settled in and was happy. Letterbox contact was only practiced with the permission of the adoptive parents and involved an exchange of a letter with details of the child’s key milestones such as standing up, talking and starting school. In some cases, there was also an exchange of photographs.

Previously there was very little contact between adoption workers and birth mothers. However, in approximately one third of cases from PIII, birth mothers’ sustained some form of contact with the social worker at Family Care for various lengths of time. Analysis revealed that birth mothers maintained contact with agency personnel for two reasons. Firstly, normally in cases where the social worker had been the only source of support, birth mothers wrote to share their grief, sadness and thoughts over the adoption. According to Winker and van Keppel (1984) the effect of relinquishing a child to

adoption is negative and has long lasting effects. About half of the women they studied reported an increasing sense of loss. Therefore it makes sense that birth mothers would write to someone they felt could understand their feelings of loss and grief. The following extract, taken from a letter written by a birth mother six years after the adoption order had been granted illustrates this point further.

*I gather that you would be surprise to receive this letter from me after all this time. I have wanted to write on so many occasions but have somehow rather decided against it for reasons beyond my understanding. Perhaps I have not come to terms with what has been. I have always had this overwhelming wish to change the past. As a matter of fact I am spending much of the time on my present living and on my hopes and dreams for tomorrow... I stopped writing to you as Miles (the birth father) asked me to make sure that I was ready to cope with my emotions to bring back the past. I was not so sure then, but I feel that I have finally accepted the past as it was and I am now living for the future. I am so sorry if I disappointed you by not writing but I assure you that I feel just fine now and hope that you will not get fed up of receiving letters from me in the future. (Case 1, PIII, 1985)*

It was evident from the many letters written by this birth mother that keeping in contact with the social worker provided the birth mother with an outlet to work through the feelings arising from the relinquishment of her child. It is also evident that the birth mother formed a relationship with the social worker, wanting to write and keep in contact. Furthermore, analysis of correspondence documents revealed that in all cases where birth mothers wrote letters to social workers at Family Care, the workers always responded. If the worker had left the organisation, a response was always sent and the birth mother was encouraged to keep in contact. Some birth mothers wrote or arranged to meet social workers after the adoption had been completed to draw upon the support offered by the social worker. This was only evident in a few cases, indicating that it was not common practice. The extract below, taken from social worker case notes contextualises this point in a case where the birth mother was having difficulty in accepting the permanence of the adoption order.

*I asked Susan if she would like me to call and see her again and emphasised*

*that if I did I would not be able to tell her any more about Steven as I would not be seeing the couple again until they applied for their second child. I wanted to make sure that she did not keep in touch because she thought she might get information about Steven. I feel as if she must face up to the permanence of the adoption order and Susan said that she did understand this but did want me to visit as she felt it would be helpful to be able to talk it over with people especially people who knew the situation. (Case 16, PIII, 1983)*

Secondly, some birth mothers wrote letters to workers at Family Care with personal details about their lives. Case notes showed that social workers would have made birth mothers aware of the fact that their children could, if they wanted to, have access to their adoption file at the age of 18. This was due to changes in legislation in the mid-1970s which gave adopted adults the right to access their adoption records. Therefore, some birth mothers wrote letters detailing aspects of their lives and their thoughts and feelings around adoption; thus leaving an informal footprint of personal information on the case file for the child, if they ever came back to Family Care to access their birth records. Letters written by birth mothers for this reason was evident in seven of the fifty cases selected for PIII. In one case, the birth mother wrote to the worker at Family Care every year for the first six years of the child's life. Although these letters were addressed to the worker, they were often written for the child. For example, the extracts below show why the birth mother wrote on a yearly basis and how she felt about the adoption years later.

*I know one day Mia will want to know what happened to me and Tom, so that is why I write ... (Case 21, PIII, 1985)*

*Just another note for Mia when she is interested...With all this going on at home (parents' divorce) I realise I did the right thing for Mia when I gave her for adoption. I hate living as I am and I am sure it is no place for a little girl. She is still always in my thoughts, when I go out shopping and I hear some say 'Mia come here' I always look. I am sure I would know her if I saw her. Still, at least I know she is safe, warm and loved by her mum and dad... (Case 21, PIII, 1986)*

*There is so much to say, so much I want Mia to know but it will all have to wait. The most important thing for her to know is that she is never forgotten. She is as*

*much loved now as on the day she was born, I love her deeply ...* (Case 21, PIII, 1988)

This section has presented evidence which shows that birth mothers' experiences of adoption began to change from the mid-1970s. Distinct changes in birth mothers' experiences were identified in the amount of contact birth mothers had with their children, their involvement in the adoption process and the amount of support birth mothers received from adoption workers. In the subsequent chapter, explanations for these changes will be examined through the prism of changing adoption agency policy and practice. However before doing so, in light of the evidence presented in this chapter it is necessary to pay some attention to the issue of birth mothers' options.

### **6.5 Birth mothers' motives in 'real options'**

Findings presented in this chapter make an important contribution to understanding how changes in birth mothers' motives and experiences of adoption changed over time. This section will go on to discuss how realistic various options were in light of the evidence presented in this chapter. Theoretical options available to birth mothers over the three periods are presented in Figure 6.7. It is important to note that not all these alternatives were realistic. The extent to which these alternatives were pursued by birth mothers throughout the three periods will now be discussed further.

<b>Figure 6.7: Alternatives to Formal Adoption</b>			
<b>Alternatives</b>	<b>Period I</b>	<b>Period II</b>	<b>Period III</b>
<b>Abortion</b>	Backstreet/illegal abortions	Backstreet/illegal abortions until 1967.	Legally available under conditions set out in the Abortion Act, 1967, and subsequent legislation
<b>Birth father support</b>	- Marriage - Financial support	- Marriage - Financial support	- Cohabitation - Marriage - Financial support
<b>Parental support</b>	Informal adoption by parents	Informal adoption by parents	Financial and emotional support to keep the child
<b>Living independently of family</b>	Prostitution  Poor Law	With welfare provisions: - National assistance (limited provisions) - Supplementary benefits (1966)	Independent living more realistic with welfare support: - Housing provisions under the Homeless Act (1977) - Supplementary benefits/Income support - More employment opportunities and childcare provisions

During PI and indeed prior to the legalisation of adoption, informal adoptions would have been an alternative to keeping the child (Elliot, 2005). However, this option would have depended upon finding an intermediary or prospective adoptive parents. Another option would have been a family adoption. Elliot (2005) has argued that family adoptions may have been common in the first two periods. However, evidence presented in this chapter has shown that levels of social capital (i.e. parental support) available to birth mothers in PI and II were limited. Findings have shown that unmarried motherhood was highly stigmatised during PI and PII. This was found to have influenced family attitudes and parental support. Thus, a lack of parental support would have posed as a problem for some birth mothers in securing the option of family adoption. Thus, this option would have been unrealistic in practice.

Another option would have been to marry the birth father. However, evidence presented

earlier in the chapter suggests that this option would have been unrealistic during periods I and II, as large proportions of single mothers relinquished because they did not have the support of the birth father and because they did not want to be an unmarried mother. Evidence suggests that by PIII discourses relating to appropriate family structures had shifted, where marrying the birth father was no longer culturally or economically necessary. This is reflected in fewer birth mothers stating this as a reason for adoption in PIII, along with the reasons of 'lack of parental support'. Analysis of birth mothers' circumstances and motives for adoption showed that from the mid-1970s some birth fathers supported the birth mother and played an active role in the decision of adoption. This was an important change in birth mothers' experiences of adoption as birth fathers had not previously engaged in the arrangement of the adoption. In some of these cases, birth mothers were already co-habiting or in a relationship or married to the birth father. Nevertheless, these birth mothers' still relinquished their children to adoption in PIII. This suggests that even though birth mothers were co-habiting or in relationships, other factors were influencing their decision to relinquish their children.

Alternatively, the birth mother could have opted for an abortion. As noted earlier, this was only granted under certain conditions (see pp.63-64 for further details). Official Statistics (ONS, 1998, p.9) show that since abortion was legalised in 1968, there has been a steady rise in the numbers of abortions being requested (from 25,000 in 1968 to 170,000 in 1997). The fact remains that despite the advent of easily available contraception and abortion, the birth rate among single young women is as high as ever, yet hardly any of them want to have their babies adopted. For example, Official statistics for 2005 show that 7,464 girls under the age of 16 – some as young as 13 — fell pregnant in England in 2005, a rise of 283 on 2004, with nearly six in 10 ending in abortion (DOH, 2007). This suggests that the advent of abortion has become an important option for women who become pregnant and may not want to keep the child. However, the option of abortion cannot alone be contributed to explaining changes in birth mothers' options. The availability of options does not necessarily make them acceptable. The advent of abortion has evolved in a context where the underlying norms and values informing gendered roles have changed. In doing so, women's roles have changed; what is acceptable in terms of behaviours and actions have changed. The changing gendered role of women is reflected more generally in shifts in wider moral and social contexts and also in legislative changes. The influence of these changes and the extent to which they were mediated

through the evolving policies and practices of adoption agencies will be examined in the subsequent chapter.

A fourth option available to the birth mother would have been self-support. Evidence presented in this chapter showed that self-support would have been difficult for birth mothers in PI. For example in PI divorced, separated and widowed birth mothers' relinquished mainly because of financial and economic constraints. Having other children was common amongst this group of birth mothers and their financial and emotional capacity to support another child was limited. Single birth mothers also lacked the economic capital to make the option of self-support a realistic one. Self-support would have also been difficult for most of the second period. For instance, case files from PII revealed that a lack of parental support (social capital) coupled with financial, practical and material constraints (economic capital) severely limited birth mothers' options to keep their children. Documentary analysis also showed that by PII material, financial and practical constraints continued to be largely cited by unmarried mothers. Despite the fact that state support for lone parents was becoming more apparent towards the end of this period, realistically these provisions didn't amount to much as birth mothers' were often excluded from provisions if they were not living independently, which many were not. For instance, National Assistance, a discretionary means-tested benefit, would only have been eligible if they were living independently. The same applied to Supplementary Benefits 1966.

It is important to note that it takes time for welfare reforms to enter the public consciousness, so there is the question of whether birth mothers were aware of the assistance available to them. Additionally, birth mothers need more than benefits to sustain them independently. For instance, for those who were still residing in the parental home in PII (64%) would have required access to housing. State provision for fully or part-subsidised housing were not available until the late 1970s with the introduction of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. This would have provided access to affordable housing, although again, entitlement was only available if the birth mother had no home (for instance, in the case of a woman who may have been asked to leave the parental home). Of course, birth mothers could have also supported themselves through income generated by employment. However, findings suggest that finding employment would have been difficult, especially in the face other obstacles, such as arranging



childcare.

Adoption has been an option available to birth mothers over the three periods. However based on discussions so far, it is evident that adoption may have been the only 'realistic option' for birth mothers in PI and PII, after which, other options became more realistic. For instance, developments in welfare provisions for unmarried mothers meant that the option of self-support became more realistic in PIII. Additionally, other options such as legal abortions became more realistic as it became more widespread, although under prescribed conditions.

The fact that birth mothers were still relinquishing their children to adoption in PIII suggests that they were a distinct group, in the sense that they choose to relinquish their children to adoption, despite the advent of other alternatives. Findings show that by PIII we see a different type of birth mother emerging, one who could not support the child because she was too young or had other children and was already financially struggling. These are important changes in understanding why birth mothers have relinquished their children to adoption throughout history and raise questions about what prompted these changes. Explanations for these changes will be sought through the changing policies and practices of adoption agencies, themselves subject to the variable influences of religious, moral, social, professional and legal factors.

Based on evidence presented so far, it is possible to theorise about ways in which the adoption agency may have influenced and shaped birth mothers choices, options and experiences of adoption. Firstly, changes in adoption agency policy, practice and mission would have been important in governing the context in which adoptions were carried out. Thus, the values informing agency policy and practice at different points throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century requires further scrutiny. Secondly, it has been evident, to a certain extent that birth mothers' experiences of adoption have been shaped by legal stipulations over the three periods i.e. through the practice of closed and open/semi open adoptions. As a result, it is important to understand how the adoption agency channelled and interpreted these stipulations into practice. Finally, the adoption agency would have also been operating in a wider context. As a result, it is important to examine the extent to which independent factors, such as changes in external moral climates associated with the greater acceptability of contraception, abortion and varied family forms, and changes in

the availability of benefits, housing, employment and other aspects of the external welfare environment were mediated by the agency. Further, changes in the social work profession are crucial to understanding the process of agency mediation, after all it was adoption agency professionals who were on the front line dealing with birth mothers. But underlying all this is the changing experience of being a pregnant woman, confronted by the social demands and expectations of motherhood which will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

# 7

## **The changing contexts of birth mothers' options, choices and experiences**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Findings presented in the previous chapter demonstrated how birth mothers' choices, motives for relinquishment and experiences of adoption have changed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The aim of this chapter is to seek explanations for these changes. In doing so, I will advance the argument that birth mothers' choices and experiences of adoption were largely determined by the policies of adoption agencies and the practice of social workers. In doing so, it is theorised that they have mediated changes in policy and practice reflecting broader changes in wider discourses, moral and social contexts, and changes in external welfare and policy environments. Based on the conjecture that the purpose of adoption agencies has been to offer choices to birth mothers, whether and when they offered meaningful choices to birth mothers is something that yet remains to be examined and evidenced. As does the extent to which adoption agency professionals were the agents of processing and mediating these changes into the experiences and choices offered to birth mothers. This chapter will go on to ground these theoretical assumptions in documentary evidence derived from adoption case files, agency annual reports, adoption panel meeting minutes and data derived from interviews and focus groups with adoption agency professionals.

If it is argued that birth mothers' choices and experiences of adoption were largely determined by the adoption agencies to whom they turned for help, it is important to examine how birth mothers' experiences were shaped by the pressures on those agencies

from their religious affiliations and from child care policy. Thus, the first section of this chapter will present evidence relating to the operation of adoption agencies in a period of religious affiliation (1942 – c1975) and will demonstrate the impact of religious affiliations on the values, mission, policies and practices of adoption agencies. In presenting this evidence, the focus will be on understanding how moral agendas, whether religious or relating to the social hygiene, social imperialist and eugenics movements were constitutionally internalised by the agency and how these values transpired into agency policies and practice with birth mothers. After which, evidence relating to the changing affiliations, values and mission of adoption agencies will be presented. In presenting this evidence, the focus will be on understanding how and why agency religious affiliations changed and the implications for policies and practice with birth mothers. Further, the impact of changing ideological discourses (e.g. child welfare discourses) on the changing values informing the constitutional operation of adoption agencies will also be examined. Finally, the influence of wider adoption and childcare policy on adoption agencies' policy and practice will be examined. In doing so, evidence relating to the impact of adoption legislation on the operation of adoption agencies and more specifically, the policies of adoption agencies and practice with birth mothers will be examined. In particular, attention will be paid to understanding how adoption policy reforms were interpreted by agencies into practice with birth mothers. The aggregated impact of the three developments stated above will be examined to clarify how these factors affected birth mothers' choices, motives and experiences of adoption.

The second half of this chapter will be dedicated to an examination of how changes in welfare reforms were mediated by social workers in the exploration of choices with birth mothers. Finally, changes in wider social and moral contexts will also be explored in their impact on birth mothers' motives, options and experiences of adoption. I will go on to evidence these changes in accounts offered by adoption agency professionals to demonstrate how the dilution of the stigma attached to unmarried motherhood and its transfer to the renunciation of motherhood through adoption reflects a shift in underlying discourses of respectability, motherhood and appropriate family structures.

## **7.2 Changes in adoption agencies' policy, practice and mission**

The purpose of this section is to understand how adoption agencies' policy, practice, mission and values have changed over time, and the implications for birth mothers' choices and experiences of adoption. This section will examine the influence of two distinct but related factors: agency affiliation, and evolving legal framework. The rationale for examining these factors is to understand how evidence clarifies the way these factors affected birth mothers' choices, motives and experiences of adoption.

### **Institutional affiliation, values and mission (1942 – c1975)**

Interviews with former Family Care personnel identified that Family Care had stronger religious affiliations with the Church prior to the 1970s than it does today. When asked what it was like to work for Family Care, three former agency personnel (practicing between 1950s – 1990s) spoke about the nature of their work, which was interpreted as being Christian work.

*The work we were undertaking was in line with our religious and ethical principles. (Former Case Committee Chair, 1965 – 1974)*

*Well I liked very much the idea of the Church being involved. I think that was what originally attracted me to work for the agency. (Former Social Worker, 1962 – 1979)*

*The work we were involved in was directly linked to the objectives of the Church at the time. We were doing work for the greater good of all. (Former Social Worker, 1966 – 1991)*

All former agency personnel spoke about the relevance of working in an Anglican affiliated agency. Many were practicing Christians and felt that the Church's involvement in their work was important. One respondent felt that by working for Family Care, it brought together both professional and Christian values. The following respondent saw a clear alignment between the two.

*Well I imagine the Christian values, they were those related to the forgiveness of sins and the notion of unconditional love. And well the professional values, well they were concerned with helping those people less fortunate than ourselves.* (Former Social Worker, 1962 – 1979)

In order to understand the extent to which institutional affiliation impacted on agency policy and practice, it is important to show how the mission, values and organisation of agencies have evolved over time. Analysis of Family Care's annual reports revealed that the work Family Care was carrying out until the 1970s came under the definition of moral welfare work. A report by the Bishop's Commission on the Work of Moral Welfare undertaken in the Diocese of Southwell (Watson, 1962) demonstrated how objectives in the 1950s included promoting educational work in relation to sex, marriage and the family on the basis of a Christian interpretation of life, and preventative and remedial work.

Moral and spiritual health was important for the values which informed the work of the agency, along with the ideals of Christian life. This can be evidenced by Family Care's official documentation. For instance, as documented in the agency's annual report from 1945, a core object<sup>61</sup> of the Southwell Board was to "*foster the moral and spiritual health of individuals and to the community*" (Annual Report, 1945, p.3). By 1947, objects of the agency's constitution changed to "*to set before them the ideals of a Christian life*" (Annual Report, 1944, p.3) and this remained on official documentation until the 1990s. In accordance, former Family Care personnel practicing during PII felt that their work centred around reinforcing moral standards. These standards were concerned with the appropriateness of sexual relations, marriage and family which ultimately resulted in condemnation of sex outside marriage and illegitimate pregnancy (Former Social Worker, 1962 – 1979). One former social worker of the agency, who was working in the statutory sector during the 1970s, said Family Care's work was known to be "*based around Christian values and principles. The work they were doing was concerned with providing a moral framework for their clients, who were often seen as fallen women or women with lapsed morals...these principles and values informed the adoption work the agency were carrying out*" (Former Social Worker, 1991 – 2006).

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<sup>61</sup> 'Objects' were often stated at the beginning of each year's annual reports. Objects referred to details of the Diocese of Southwell's constitution or mission statements.

In practice, some former adoption workers perceived their role as primarily support work. One respondent said “*the work of Family Care really was rooted in support work, in terms of helping girls who got themselves into difficulty (i.e. pregnant)*” (Former Social Worker, 1991 – 2006). In essence, Family Care’s clients, who during PI and PII were largely unmarried mothers, fell short of the moral standards to which the agency subscribed. The key point here is that adoption agencies would have played an important role in applying Christian teachings. The fact that birth mothers were perceived as needing spiritual and moral guidance illustrates the extent to which their actions were condemned. One former Social Worker (1962 – 1979) argued that “*the option of adoption gave them a chance to make a fresh start. It saved birth mothers from the shame and stigma of unmarried motherhood*”. Implicitly, this suggests that the option of adoption for birth mothers in PI and PII may have been linked to the notion of ‘forgiveness’ in Christianity, i.e. mothers should be forgiven for the sins they had committed and helped to rectify their actions (i.e. place the child for adoption). However as will be noted later, there was a limited amount of forgiveness granted by adoption agencies. For instance, birth mothers who wanted to relinquish their second or third illegitimate child to adoption were normally refused by the agency.

In order to explain changes in birth mothers’ choices and experiences of adoption, it is important to understand how the value systems Family Care subscribed to impacted on policy and practice. Examining how adoption agencies made decisions provides a means by which the value systems embodied in agency policy, and how these were reflected in practice can be understood. It is apparent from interviews with former Family Care personnel that since the Case Committee was formed (1942), the Board of Trustees made overall changes to in-house adoption policies (for example, accepting children of another faith or whether a birth mother requesting adoption of her second illegitimate child would be accepted). The Case Committee made what were considered to be small decisions, such as vetting prospective adoptive parents. The role of the Case Committee was seen to have provided “*a common sense point of view rather than a social work view*” (Former Case Committee Chair, 1965 – 1974). A common sense view was interpreted by the former Chair of the Case Committee as one which took consideration of the circumstances of the case presented, rather than acting on protocol which was considered to be the social work view. It is important to note that a ‘common sense view’ would

have been informed by committee members' own personal values and opinions and therefore represented a rather biased viewpoint as opposed to the non-judgemental approach advocated by Biestek (1961). This would have had important implications for the choices and advice offered to birth mothers. For instance, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter, birth mothers' requesting adoption of their second or third child were often refused adoption services offered by the agency, on the basis that they had already offered one child up for adoption and that they should be made to face the consequences of their immoral actions.

Others felt the Case Committee provided a '*diocesan point of view*' (Former Social Worker, 1966 – 1991). The Diocesan point of view was interpreted as "*thinking based on Christian value systems*". The quotation below taken from an interview with a retired social worker shows instances where the Diocesan viewpoint was important.

*I think when it comes to the adoption panel, we were more aware of the Diocesan connection. Because the adoption panel members had to consider the circumstances of the child and the placement in terms of the Diocesan viewpoint. For instance, way back if a woman had a child placed for adoption, if you got pregnant again you wasn't considered morally right to place the second child, all that went by the Board. (Former Social Worker, 1966 – 1991)*

As can be seen from the extract above, the 'Diocesan viewpoint' informed Family Care's policy and practice with mothers who were relinquishing a second or third child to adoption. In essence, these were moral assertions based on the Christian values of the agency. These were loosely tied in with Diocesan objectives which were concerned with the appropriateness of sexual relations, marriage and family. Implicit evidence to support this was found in Family Care's APMM. As noted earlier, the option of adoption gave birth mothers a chance to avoid the stigma of unmarried motherhood. This was tied in with values of forgiveness. However, the agency's forgiveness was limited for those mothers who wanted to relinquish their second or third child for adoption. The extract below documents discussions amongst adoption panel members on the issue of women 'falling twice'.



*Concerning our own clients who come back to us more than once with illegitimate children, Sister L<sup>62</sup> spoke of some outstanding instances of this, but on the whole it is comparatively few of our clients who come back. A worker always feels that there might have been something she could or should have done to prevent this second fall, but it does not do to get introspective about this sad aspect of work. (APMM, September, 1967)*

Language used in this extract provides contextual details which enable us to understand why birth mothers who presented their second or third illegitimate child for adoption were often refused by the agency (until the 1970s). The term ‘fall’ is layered with moral, social and religious judgments relating to unmarried motherhood and illegitimate pregnancy. These were moral assumptions suggesting that if you ‘fall’ once, that can be fixed, namely through adoption. Adoption was a means by which they could avoid the shame and stigma of unmarried motherhood. However to ‘fall’ twice was unconscionable. The extract above also provides insights in to the thinking of adoption agency officials during the 1960s. It is clear that workers would have felt somewhat disappointed at their failure to prevent a woman from ‘falling twice’.

Given that Christianity teaches unlimited forgiveness, it must be questioned why these birth mothers were denied the option of adoption. One explanation is that Christian teachings were interpreted very specifically by Family Care. For instance, a birth mother who was requesting the adoption of her second illegitimate child had not shown any repentance for her first ‘fall’; therefore she was reprimanded by the agency by the refusal to offer a second adoption. This is evidenced by cases detailed in Family Care’s APMM. Family Care’s decision to reject cases was based on the supposition that mothers should be made to accept responsibility for their ‘immoral’ actions. For instance, in one case a married mother was offering her third illegitimate child for adoption. The first child was in the care of the Grandmother and the second had been fostered through the Children’s Department. The application for adoption was rejected because it was felt that the birth mother “*was flatly refusing to take responsibility for the child*” (APMM, April 1957). In another case, the Committee had refused to place the third illegitimate child of a single

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<sup>62</sup> Sister L was a member of the adoption panel. Her work was primarily concerned with the running of Gwendoline Grove, the Mother and Baby home affiliated to Family Care.

birth mother, having already arranged the adoption of her first two illegitimate children (APMM, February 1957). This case is further detailed in the extract below:

*A 22 year old single girl, mother of fourth illegitimate child. Her first girl is officially fostered by her own mother and known to the Children's Department. The second child was placed for adoption. The third one is a Mongol and is in the care of the Lincolnshire Children's department. At home there are her parents, her younger 7 siblings, her first illegitimate child and her sister's half-caste baby. This girl admits she has never worked steadily and her aim has been simply to enjoy herself.....After much discussion the committee rejected this application, agreeing that this mother must be helped to assume some responsibility for this child. (APMM, April 1967)*

Generally speaking all six other adoption agencies agreed that their agencies had also carried out practices such as these. An adoption services manager from a Catholic agency said she agreed with Father Felix Biestek, a Jesuit Priest, who wrote *The Casework Relationship* (1961), advancing non-judgemental attitude as one of his casework principles.

*I remember the book written by a priest working in a Catholic agency, he wrote about the pastoral care of the unmarried mothers. I recall him advocating that a non-judgemental approach is taken in the care of the young mother. (Agency 5, Catholic)*

A former Family Care adoption worker also recalled the work of Biestek, however questions the extent to which the non-judgemental approach was practiced.

*Our Principal (adoption worker) at the time was advocating principles of the non-judgemental approach. However the extent to which it was practiced was another matter. Well, you just have to look at the language used on case files (Ex Social Worker, 1966 – 1991)*

Other adoption agency professionals also discussed adoption professionals' views on birth mothers who wanted to relinquish a second or a third child to adoption. One

adoption services manager stated that *“the view was held that if you made it very easy for the unmarried mother you are making it easy for her to get back in the same situation again”* (Agency 5, Catholic). Another stated *“there were some where the mothers had had 2, 3, 4 babies....we (the agency) would not make it easy for them, by relieving them of the responsibility, and placing the child for adoption”* (Agency 2, CoE).

In essence ‘not making it easy’ to relinquish a second or third child to adoption was meant to act as a deterrent to having any more children outside marriage. Practices such as these were generally concerned with the long term spiritual welfare of the unmarried mother who would presumably ‘come to her senses’ following such a refusal. But such an approach contradicts social work values of self-determination and the non-judgemental attitude (Biestek, 1961), although it is important to note, these values did not become prominent in social work practice until the 1970s (McLaughlin, 2007). Further, Family Care did not seem to consider that their own aims might have been better served by continuing to support mothers through a second pregnancy, even if the child was not subsequently put up for adoption. Nevertheless, Biestek’s non-judgemental approach would have clearly thrown down a challenge to some of the practices of adoption agencies. There is a clear tension between agency values and social work values, which would eventually be resolved in favour of the latter. But the process by which this happened was an important element in the secularisation of welfare work, which would have profound implications for the choices offered to birth mothers. The critical issue here is the extent to which Family Care was employing qualified social workers at this stage. An interview with Family Care’s former Principal Adoption Worker who was in post from 1966 – 1991 noted that pre-1970s Family Care’s social workers received little training. She noted that *“most of the workers were part time. In most cases, if I saw a course that was relevant to our work, I would attend and then briefed the workers”*. This suggests that Family Care’s workers were largely untrained.

The previous chapter showed that unmarried mothers were often condemned for bearing illegitimate children and adoptions were carried out in secrecy to save the birth mother and her family the shame of bearing an illegitimate child. Until the 1970s Family Care was *“known as the silent service because people didn’t like to admit that the birth parent ever existed”* (Former-Social Worker, 1966 – 1991). The notion of Family Care as a ‘silent service’ suggests there was a sense of institutional secrecy surrounding adoptions.

Findings from the previous chapter also demonstrated how Mother and Baby homes were often a vehicle for sustaining the secrecy surrounding adoptions during PI and PII. All six other adoption agencies were in consensus that their agencies operated practices where birth mothers would have often been taken to Mother and Baby homes in another part of the country. Many attributed the practice of mothers going to Mother and Baby homes as one which allowed them to avoid the stigma of bearing an illegitimate child.

*They used to be sent to a Mother and Baby home the other side of the country so they could escape the shame they may bring upon their family name.*

(Agency 4, Independent)

This is significant because, although the stigma was avoided; it was not challenged. There are several possible explanations for this. Firstly as demonstrated in the previous chapter, social and family attitudes condemned unmarried mothers, often informing their decision to relinquish. Therefore, birth mothers themselves wanted to avoid the stigma of unmarried motherhood. Alternatively, birth mothers may have been pressured by their parents to go to the Mother and Baby home, in order to save the family from the shame of her pregnancy. Furthermore, social workers themselves may not have challenged the practice of sending mothers to Mother and Baby homes, as they believed that the stigma was symptomatic of a moral universe which it would be dangerous to challenge. In reality, it was likely that all three explanations meant that the stigma was avoided and not challenged.

As noted in the literature review, by the 1950s, psychological explanations were being used to explain the behaviour of unmarried women engaging in sexual activity; they were seen as 'neurotic' (Cooper, 1955). During this period the problem of illegitimacy was being attributed to the mother's '*neurotic character resulting from disturbances from her own family background*' (Cooper, 1955, p.8). Although this common misconception was prevalent during this period, research began to point to other factors as well, such as emotional factors like dominance or rejection by one or other parent or early disturbances in the parent child relationship (Young, 1954). Some evidence to support theories of neuroticism was found in Family Care's documentary sources. Evidence collected from correspondence showed that the mental stability of birth parents was often examined and questioned by adoption agencies. By the 1960s, it was common practice that the birth

mother (and where possible the birth father) would have had to undergo a medical examination. It was evident from correspondence and APMM that in cases where there was a history of mental illness in the family, a second opinion was sought to ascertain if there was any chance of the child inheriting the mental illness. The quotation below taken from a letter written by a birth mother's family doctor illustrates this point further.

*I reply to your letter of 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1969 regarding Annie. To the best of my knowledge she enjoys adequate physical health, but there is history of mental health extending over the years 1964 – 65.*

Further details of this birth mother's case were further investigated by the adoption panel. An extract from a letter written by a practitioner at the hospital where the birth mother was admitted is presented below.

*She was admitted here in October 1964 and again in Nov 1964 in a state of tension related to her domestic disharmony. There was no evidence of any major psychosis and no family history as such. There is no reason to suspect the presence of any hereditary psychiatric disease. (Case 21, PII, 1969)*

Another case was rejected by the case committee because of the birth mother's mental health history. Further details of the birth mother's circumstances are provided in the extract below.

*Baby due any day of single girl aged 28. During the course of the contact with the workers it became evident there was mental trouble here and it was later confirmed that the girl had mental history with attempted suicide. The paternal father is Canadian whom she thought at one time she could not trace but has not been able. In view of this most unsatisfactory history the committee were urged not to consider adoption. Case Rejected. (APMM, July 1957)*

The extract does not explicitly spell out the reasoning behind the committee's decision to reject cases where there is a history of mental illness. Thus, it is important to unpack the logic of committee members' decision to do so. It may have been the case that the committee was concerned with the genetic transference of mental illness. It also evident

from the extract below that the committee were not satisfied with the lack of details provided on the birth father's background. It may have also been the case that Family Care's policies, as well as being influenced by 'neuroticism' theories, were implicitly being driven by principles and values associated with the Social Hygiene movement. For instance, Family Care may not have wanted to be party to 'contamination of the race'. This seems a rather far-fetched theory; however evidence from Family Care's case records and APMM showed that the values associated with the social hygiene and eugenics movements were influential in shaping policies and practices relating to which children were accepted for adoption and which were not. The practical result of this was the refusal to place babies with from a BME background, children with physical impairments health conditions, or babies with a history of poor mental health in the family. Examination of the agency's documentary sources showed ethnic minority children were branded as un-adoptable until the 1970s. The extract below, taken from Family Care's APMM in the 1950s, although tantalisingly short on motives for not accepting children from other ethnic backgrounds, demonstrated generally only White children were accepted for adoption.

*Mrs S is a Jamaican woman who has offered her coming illegitimate child for adoption. The committee discussed the matter briefly but did not think the society could accept Jamaican babies. It was suggested however, that a general enquiry regarding the position in England be made through London (February, 1956). A letter read from the Central Council stating that adoption for Jamaican babies was not easy in any area, and perhaps not advisable, but recommending application to the Thomas Coram Foundation for Children. (APMM, March 1956)*

Children with mental or physical disabilities were also branded as unsuitable for adoption. This was evident in cases presented to Family Care's case committee for consideration. Often in cases from PII where the birth mother had suffered from a mental disability or the child suffered from a physical disability, the application would have been rejected by the committee and the children would have been referred to Barnardo's or The Children's Society, agencies who were perceived to be assisting 'destitute children' (Heywood, 1998). These agencies were regarded as 'dumping grounds' for black and disabled children. The fate of many of these children lay in residential care in the

orphanages run by these agencies. The extracts below, taken from APMM provides evidence which demonstrates that only ‘perfect babies’ were being placed in period II.

*Baby H was several weeks old...the birth mother is 20 years of age and at one time in a home for maladjusted children. The committee agreed baby H to be accepted providing a satisfactory report was obtained from the home for maladjusted children. (APMM, March 1956)*

*An adverse report on this mother had been received from the Children’s department, and the Dr at the clinic also has doubts about the advisability of placing for adoption before the age of 18 months. Adoption plans had therefore been dropped and an application made to Dr Barnardos. (APMM, July 1956)*

*Dr B has not passed this baby for adoption because of a heart murmur. The case has been referred to Barnardos. Mother cannot take baby home and fostering is not possible. (APMM, May 1963)*

The placement of ‘perfect babies’ can be further reinforced by Family Care’s ‘*Principals of Practice*’ from the early 1960s (see Figure 7.1). It is clearly evident from Figure 7.1 that the agency had clear policies relating to BME children (point a), the screening of birth parents for mental illnesses (point b) and children for physical disabilities (point c). Further point F in Figure 7.1 shows that the final decision about whether a child was accepted for adoption was not made until after the child had been born and medically examined. This suggests that adoption agencies put a lot of effort in to ensuring only ‘perfect babies’ were adopted.

**FIGURE 7.1: SOUTHWELL DIOCESAN BOARD OF MORAL WELFARE**

**ADOPTION COMMITTEE:**

*Principles of Practice (1962)*

*Regarding babies and birth mothers*

- a) Coloured babies are normally referred to other agencies operating in this field of work*
- b) Family medical history required from both natural parents where possible*
- c) A baby must be medically examined before placing*
- d) Notes requiring confinement are required from the hospital*
- e) The putative father is to be interviewed if possible*
- f) Cases may be provisionally considered before the birth of the child – the final decision to be subject to medical examination and the final decision of the mother*
- g) Age at which babies placed for adoption to depend on the circumstances*
- h) Baby must have been a) seen and b) cared for by the mother for at least the lying period (B – only waived in most unusual circumstances)*

As stated earlier, these practices amounted to discrimination against some birth mothers. ‘Bad blood’ exclusionary policies and practices would have significantly impacted upon the options available to birth mothers at the time, as adoption of their children through Family Care would no longer have been an option. It is interesting to note that other options, e.g. whether to keep the child in the family or care independently, were not discussed with the birth mother at the time. Instead, the children who were deemed to be unsuitable for adoption were relinquished into the care of societies such as the Barnardos or the Children’s society. This suggests that options to keep the child were generally not explored with birth mothers at the time.

It is difficult to reconcile the apparently conflicting ideological viewpoints documented in this section. For instance, there are clear contradictions in the values associated with Christianity and those associated with the eugenics movement i.e. Christianity teaches forgiveness and adoption; eugenics teaches racial purity and rejection. However, based on the evidence presented in this section it is possible to develop some kind of pecking order between the ‘deserving’ (legitimate babies), the ‘slightly undeserving’ (illegitimate babies) and the ‘very undeserving’ (illegitimate and black/disabled babies). In this context, it is possible to gain some insights into which ideological discourses were most influential in shaping adoption agencies policies. For instance, the Christian values were



informing the children who were ‘deserving’ and ‘slightly undeserving’ of the option of adoption. However values associated with the eugenics and social hygiene movements were informing the children who were ‘very underserving’ of the option of adoption. Whatever the case, evidence suggests that during PI and PII birth mothers were very much at the mercy of a moral regime over which they had no control.

By the 1970s, the types of children being accepted and placed for adoption by Family Care began to change. Factors influencing these changes along with its influence on agency policy and practice, and the implications for birth mothers’ options and experiences of adoption will be examined further in the subsequent section. Also by this time the purpose of adoption changed as the numbers of babies offered for adoption began to decline. This point is reinforced from extracts taken from Family Care’s APMM. Analysis of these documents showed the issue of declining numbers of children being offered for adoption was prominent from the 1970s onwards. It was also reflected in the practice of opening and closing adoptive parent lists. In practice, this meant that whilst the lists were closed, the panel would place certain restrictions on which applications would not be accepted. For example, as can be seen from the extract below, applications from certain couples were rejected on the basis of various criteria. These types of restrictive policies were very common during this final period.

*After a great deal of discussion it was decided to close the lists at the present time, but to accept only priority applications until the position eased, and those who fall into the following categories would not be accepted, even as an enquiry:*

- 1) Those who have a child or children already either biological or adopted with the exception of second applications to the society.*
- 2) Third and over applications to this society*
- 3) Those couples for whom no medical reason was available as to their inability to conceive.*
- 4) Those couples who had been married 10 years and either partner is over 40 years of age. (APMM, January 1972)*

The decline in the numbers of babies being offered for adoption also has important implications for adoption agencies’ priorities. For instance, their placement priorities have shifted from relinquished babies to children from the care system. The majority of

adoption agency professionals, along with former and current Family Care personnel, identified this as one of the main changes in their agency's priorities. However, it must be noted that changes in Family Care's policies was not prompted by the decline in the numbers of babies being offered for adoption but deeper ideological shifts influencing the operation, and policies and practices of the agency. For instance, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter, adoption agencies also became responsive to changing childcare ideology, with the emergence of a new over-riding consideration, i.e. the welfare of children.

In summary, evidence presented in this section suggests that Family Care's religious affiliation impacted on the mission, ethos and values of the agency. Interviews with adoption agency professionals and analysis of documentary sources have shown how the work of the agency was closely aligned with the objectives of the Diocesan Council. For example, one of the core objectives of the Southwell Diocesan Council was rescue and preventative work. Evidence from Family Care's annual reports presented in chapter 2 shows that adoption work was a core aspect of rescue work, as the act of adoption was perceived as giving mothers a route back into society, free of stigma. Some elements of preventative work were also evident in the work the agency was carrying out. This can be evidenced in policies relating to mothers who requested adoption of their second and subsequent illegitimate children. Further, the representation of the 'Diocesan viewpoint' by members of the Church on the adoption panel would have been important in shaping adoption policy and practice. After all, the decision whether to accept the child for adoption was a major function of the adoption panel. Nevertheless, there are some conflicts in the Christian values informing the agency's policy, and practice with birth mothers. For example, in practice there was limited forgiveness for birth mothers who 'fell' more than once. It is important to unpick this further to understand why birth mothers faced limited forgiveness if they 'fell' more than once. Forgiveness is offered unconditionally, but has to be accepted by the recipient. Acceptance has to be demonstrated by a willingness to change – repentance if you like. Initially, a birth mother is doing this by approaching the adoption agency that is acting as a kind of 'confessional'. If she does it a second time, she is not showing a willingness to change, quite the opposite. However, it is important to note that evidence suggests that the agency's interpretation of Christian values were increasingly subjective.

Furthermore, institutional affiliation also shaped the values underpinning Family Care's work. Evidence presented in this section has shown that values based on Christian ideals of life implicitly informed policy and practice. For example, interviews with agency professionals and documentary sources showed how the social condemnation of unmarried mothers was reinforced by agency policy and by practice, which enshrined secrecy in adoptions and further perpetuated the stigma of unmarried motherhood. As identified in the previous chapter, the stigma of unmarried motherhood was prevalent in birth mothers' experiences of adoption, and in some cases, informed their motives for relinquishment. The option of adoption was perceived as giving birth mothers a 'second chance' to start afresh, without being tarnished with the label of a 'fallen woman'. Former practitioners identified their role in helping birth mothers to understand the repercussions of adoption, in the hope of preventing a second illegitimate pregnancy. Therefore, it is questionable whether adoption workers would have made mothers aware of other options, e.g. keeping the child.

Analysis of Family Care's documentary sources also revealed that other moral frameworks, such as those concerned with the eugenics and social hygiene movements, were found to influence policy and practice, at least until the 1950s, after which maternal deprivation and neuroticism theories became influential. This is evidenced in policies relating to the acceptance of older children and children from ethnic minority backgrounds and the rejection of cases where there were history of mental illnesses. In essence, practices such as these denied these birth mothers the option of adoption.

It is worth noting that adoption agency policy and practice was not regulated for the greater part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Early regulations under the Adoption (Agency Regulations) Act 1939 dealt with issues such as registrations of adoption agencies, the requirement for a Case Committee (or Adoption Panel as it was later known), the means adoption agencies used to assess which children were suitable for adoption and how decisions were made about which children were to be placed with which set of adoptive parents (Lowe, 2000). Further regulation of practice did not emerge until the 1970s. As a result, for the greater part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, agency policy was generally formulated 'in house'. Adoption agency professionals identified with a general shift in priorities, mission and values of agencies from the 1970s. These changes will now be explored further.

### **Changing affiliations, values and mission (c1970s – present)**

Central to understanding how Family Care's changing relationship with the Church impacted on the mission of the agency, the values informing the organisation's work and changes in adoption policy and practice, are discussions relating to the secularisation of adoption agencies. An examination of Family Care's evolving religious profile (see chapter 2) provides some understanding of how changing religious affiliations impacted on the evolution of the agency. It demonstrated ways in which the agency has distanced itself from its affiliated Church, through changes in agency personnel, mission statements and the principles and values which informed the agency's work. Evidence of Family Care's changing relationship with the Church and its impact on the values and mission of the agency will now be explored further.

Generally speaking, interviews with former Family Care personnel showed that by the late 1970s the church was having less of an influence on the day to day running of the agency. The values associated with the Church were also influencing agency policy and practice less than in periods I and II. This suggests the agency was beginning to show signs of institutional secularisation. Wilson (1966) has described secularisation as the process by which religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance. Giddens (2006) has described secularisation as the process whereby religion loses its influence over the various spheres of social life.

Interviews with adoption agency professionals showed that the amount of contact agencies had with their affiliated Church began to decline from the late 1970s. Nevertheless, it is important to note there were varying degrees of contact amongst different affiliated agencies. For example, in Anglican affiliated agencies, levels of contact with the Church decreased over the years, where the only form of contact was maintained via Church membership on the Board of Trustees. The Agency manager from agency 1, which is located on Church premises, was surprised that not many people had knowledge that the Diocese had an adoption agency affiliated to it (Agency 1, CoE). Another respondent from an Anglican affiliated agency spoke about their attempts to renew links with local parishes, as the agency felt more distanced from the Church than it had been in the past. The following quotation illustrates this point further.

*Well I would say we have got an agenda to build stronger links with the Church, I don't mean that we have become estranged from the Church, but there has been a certain distancing. We had a service at the Cathedral a few months ago, parish contacts and members were invited, and that seemed beneficial in terms of interest in supporting us. But I don't think that we will ever get back that level of contribution. (Agency 2, CoE)*

Once the number of baby adoptions began to decline after the late 1960s, many adoption agencies closed, merged or developed other interests in order to survive. This impacted on agencies' relationship with their parent churches. Agencies increasingly saw themselves as providing a service for a different constituency which resulted in an institutional separation rather than a change of principle. The director of a former Church of England adoption agency contextualises this point further.

*I would guess that there were closer links with the Dioceses when we were actually placing relinquished babies. But in all the time I have been here the main focus on placing children who come from the care system and so I would guess that our links are stronger with the Local Authority than with the Dioceses. (Agency 1, CoE)*

A rather different picture emerged for the Catholic agencies. Respondents from Catholic agencies felt that although the Church did not have an influence on the day to day running of the agency, they valued their close ties with the Catholic Church (Agency 5, Catholic) and the Church was still actively involved in their work. It is important to note interviews with Catholic agency professionals were carried out prior to the implementation of the Equality (Sexual Orientation) Act 2006, after which these Catholic agencies became independent of their religious affiliations with the Church as the law had effectively made some of the practices of Catholic adoption agencies unlawful. This is state-initiated secularisation arising from a conflict of values between the Catholic Church's position on homosexuality and the enforcement of the Sexual Orientations Regulations under the Equality Act. Thus, the development of adoption agencies has been affected by changes in legislation, which amount to an institutional secularisation that has profoundly affected their character and purpose.

It is now important to examine how changing levels of contact and support from the Church impacted on the mission and values of the agency. Interviews with Family Care personnel and adoption agency professionals revealed that the nature of work and the mission of adoption agencies changed during PIII. Former and current personnel identified ways in which Family Care's priorities began to change in the 1970s. Prior to this date, Family Care's priorities were mainly concerned with the placement of illegitimate babies, after which the focus of the agency's work changed to providing families for children in care, through the process of adoption. This trend has been identified in previous literature. For example, Teague (1989) has argued that the adoption agencies witnessed a high number of applications from prospective adoptive parents and society witnessed a decrease in the number of suitable babies offered for adoption. The following quotation from a former director of Family Care contextualises these points further.

*Baby work was a high priority up until the 1970s. I can't remember at what point I started to look for families for older children... a lot of the adoption work had been placing of relinquished babies and gradually we were beginning to recruit families for local authorities who were willing to place children with. But there were still very few placements per year when I joined and I thought the focus of work had changed from relinquished infants. (Former Family Care Director, 1991 – 2006, previously Adoption Services Manager, 1986-1991)*

The former director of the agency felt that “*a real understanding of the work Family Care was doing was confusing and unofficial*” to the Diocese. The following extract illustrates this point further.

*That is a difficult one because certainly in the early 1990s the agency had become independent. About a decade earlier, I thought it was not a particularly clear relationship with the Diocese. My impression was that we were left to get on with what we needed to do. I mean there were people from the Clergy on Case Committees and the Adoption Panel and the Bishop of Southwell was a Patron for Family Care but there wasn't clarity about the relationship. (Former Social Worker, 1991 – 2006)*

Family Care's independence from the Diocese was identified as a gradual process over the final period. Analysis of documentary sources and interviews with former and current Family Care personnel showed several factors contributed to a distancing from the Diocese. These included changes in the composition of the agency, its funding sources and the values concerned with the work of the agency. Family Care has undergone some significant organisational changes since the 1970s. Analysis of board membership detailed in annual reports (1951, 1971 & 1991) and data derived from Family Care's faith affiliation questionnaire revealed the role of religious identity in the selection of board and senior members of staff was evident until at least 1971. It seems the religious identity of directors, members and trustees has become less important for the agency over the years. Nevertheless, *"today Family Care may be referred to as the Church of England's social work agency in the Diocese but not by many people. Additionally the policies which are decided internally may be 'run past' the Bishop who remains the President"* (Family Care Faith Based Questionnaire, 2009). This suggests that the Diocese is still involved with the agency, although to a lesser degree than previously, implying that there has not been a complete severance of ties with the Diocese. In fact, when the agency changed its name from the Southwell Diocesan Council for Family Care to Family Care, the organisation constituted itself as a separate charity. However, it is clear from the agency's revised constitution in operation in 1991, that there hadn't been a complete severance of ties with the Church and Christian values were still informing the ethos of the agency. For instance, APMM showed that in presenting the constitution which had been in place since the late 1940s (see Figure 2.10, p.52), to adoption panel members, it was explicitly stated that *"the Southwell Diocesan Board for Social Responsibility is a board set up by the Diocesan Synod. The Council for Family Care is a sub-committee of that board, its legal status as a charity and its separate constitution under the Bishop as the president being maintained"* (APMM, December 1991). This suggests, despite the name change of the organisation, the Church was still involved in the agency, although to a much lesser degree than previously. It wasn't until 2007 when Family Care became completely independent. This was reflected in the changing values informing the work of the organisation (see Figure 2.11, p.53). The only reference to religion is in acknowledging that Family Care's foundations are in the Christian faith, although the current values of the organisation still allude to Christian values. This has been a major change from the original mission and purpose, which included rescue and preventative work and promoting Christianity. Changes in the agency's constitution in 2007 were

prompted by the Equality (Sexual Orientation) Act 2006, to ensure the agency was conforming to legal stipulations. This is an important example which evidences state-initiated secularisation of the agency. Thus, the development of adoption agencies has been affected by changes in legislation, which amount to an institutional secularisation that has profoundly affected their character and purpose.

Further, in the prior 30 years to its name change, Family Care began to undergo significant changes financially. Analysis of Family Care's annual reports and other documentary sources revealed that Family Care's income during the three periods came from various sources. Figure 7.2 provides details of Family Care's accounts from 1951, 1971, 1991 and 2007. As can be seen from this table, there have been considerable changes in the level of contributions received from the Women's Offering and Mother's Union, the Diocesan Moral Welfare Board, income from donations and fundraising, income generated from work with local authorities, and from other sources (such as grants from Children in Need, Big Lottery Fund etc.).



Year	Figure 7.3 : Family Care's Sources of Income										
	Diocesan Board of Finance		Women's Offering		Fundraising/Donations <sup>63</sup>		Local Authority <sup>64</sup>		Other		Total
	Amount (£)	Percentage of total income	Amount (£)	Percentage of total income	Amount (£)	Percentage of total income	Amount (£)	Percentage of total income	Amount (£)	Percentage of total income	Amount (£)
1944	150	15%	203.15	20%	57.85	6%	38	4%	578.16 <sup>65</sup>	55%	1,027.16
1951	387.10	24%	315	20%	221.18	14%	425	26%	256.27 <sup>66</sup>	16%	1,604.55
1971	2,035	25%	200	3%	1073.03	13%	4,585	57%	125.17 <sup>67</sup>	2%	8,018.20
1991	22,000	6%	4,200	2%	92,720	27%	144,282	42%	78,618	23%	341,820
2007	41,752	7%	-	-	116,663	21%	27,871	5%	382,135 <sup>68</sup>	67%	568,421

Source: Family Care (1944) Annual Report  
Family Care (1951) Annual Report  
Family Care (1971) Annual Report  
Family Care (1991) Annual Report  
Family Care (2007) Annual Report

<sup>63</sup> Includes income generated from subscriptions and Church collections, adopters donations and publicity fundraising events

<sup>64</sup> Includes income generated from Public Assistance Committee Grants, Nottingham County Council, Nottingham City Council and the Department for Social Services

<sup>65</sup> Includes income generated from subscriptions to Mothers Union, life insurance, cash for quarterly leaflets (reimbursements from the Board) and the credit balance for 1943

<sup>66</sup> Includes income generated from Lay Readers, Ear Marked Subscriptions, receipt of repayment of Loan (Workshop) and the credit balance from 1950

<sup>67</sup> Includes income generated from fees for students and Bank interest.

<sup>68</sup> Includes grants received from Big Lottery Fund, Children in Need, Clothworkers Foundation and The Arts Foundation (£50,558), amounting to 9% of 'other' income generated. Income was also generated from interagency fees and other fees, and Bank interest. This was a major source of income for Family Care during this year, amounting to 58% of the total income for the year.

Figure 7.2 shows Family Care was never a fully financed Diocesan agency but was financed through various means. Generally speaking, financial contributions generated from the Church have declined over time. By 1971, contributions from the Diocesan Board of Finance amounted to a quarter of Family Care's income. However, by 2007, the Diocesan Board of Finance contributed just 7% to the agency's total income for the year. Additionally, contributions received from the Mothers Union and Women's Offering also declined over time. These contributions amounted to a fifth of Family Care's income in 1944 and 1951. However, by 1971 contributions from these sources significantly declined.

Both Women's Offering and Mothers Union had a vested interest in the work of adoption agencies such as Family Care for two reasons. Firstly, priorities of both of these organisations were dealing with the social problems associated with illegitimacy. And secondly Family Care had shelters affiliated to the agency to which both organisations would refer women. Changes in levels of contributions from these agencies can probably be explained by the fact that Women's Offering has disappeared over time, and the priorities of the Mothers' Union have changed; today it is an international Christian charity that seeks to support families worldwide.

The figures presented in Figure 7.2 show interesting trends in the amount of income generated from the Local Authority. Figures for Local Authority contributions in 1944 were negligible. However by 1951 these contributions amounted to a quarter of Family Care's income, and by 1971 amounted to over half of the agency's income, after which, contributions from these sources considerably declined. Interestingly, income generated from other sources and fundraising have generally increased over time. By 2007, income from fundraising and donations amounted to a fifth of the total for the year. Income generation via other activities has become crucial for adoption agencies, especially as funding from more traditional sources has changed. Income generation from other activities is important in reflecting the changing nature of Family Care's work, much of which is no longer concerned with adoption, but also with family support, emotional support to children and young people, safeguarding, consultancy and training.

Family Care's gradual independence from the Diocese can also be evidenced by the changing nature of the agency's work. Family Care personnel identified a gradual change in the values and moral frameworks which informed the work of the agency. Examining changes in the values which informed adoption agency policy is important in understanding changes in practice with birth mothers, and the implications for their options and experiences of adoption.

As noted earlier, by 2007 the values informing the work and mission of the agency differed considerably from earlier times to the point where the only reference to religion is acknowledgment of the Church in Family Care's origins (see Figure 2.11, p.53). By the 1990s, Family Care was working to 'all-embracing principles'. For example, in the agency's current mission statement, it is stated "*our work and partnerships embrace a spectrum of beliefs, ethnic origins and cultural backgrounds*". This is a significant change in the values driving the mission and ethos of the agency. Analysis of data sources showed that by the mid-1970s, Family Care began to subscribe to a different moral agenda, with different moral roots - that of the child's welfare being of paramount consideration. For instance, Family Care's 'Principles of Practice' in 2007 stated "*children's welfare is our first paramount consideration*" (Annual Report, 2007, p.2). This reflects a significant change in the primary moral agenda informing adoption agency policy and practice. Prior to the adoption of child welfare discourses, the primary moral agenda shaping adoption agencies policies was a moral welfare one. However, from the 1970s the primary moral agenda shifted where values such safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children were driving the work of the adoption agency. In this context, Family Care became less concerned with upholding standards of morality, as they had done so for a large part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and more concerned with the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. The process by which adoption agencies' adopted child welfare discourses were explored with social workers. Generally speaking, when adoption agency professionals' made reference to child welfare discourses, they did so in relation to legislative changes, which subsequently became embedded in the policies and practices of adoption agencies. The influence of wider adoption and childcare policy in shaping the policies and practices of adoption agencies will be explored further in the subsequent section. Some adoption agency professionals made

reference to other factors which drove adoption agencies to embrace child welfare ideologies. One adoption worker referred to changes in the social work profession.

*In the 1970s social workers were being trained in dealing with cases of adoption. Also we were learning from lessons emerging from research – the impact on development and identity...so all that was informing social worker practice. (Agency 3, Independent)*

The extract above suggests that child welfare discourses were being mediated through the professionalisation of social work. Thus, social workers would have been important mechanisms by which child welfare discourses were mediated into the lives and experiences of birth mothers. It is also important to note that wider child welfare discourses were themselves being informed by emerging research at the time and other wider contextual factors.

Analysis of Adoption Panel Meeting Minutes from the mid-1970s onwards showed that the panel's decisions were being driven by the principle that 'no child is unadoptable' (Churchill et al., 1979; Reeves, 1993). This was evident in changes in policies relating to the types of children being accepted and placed for adoption. On the basis of the evidence presented below, it appears that by the end of the 1970s Family Care was beginning to place children from various ethnic backgrounds, children suffering from physical disabilities and children other than babies.

*Details were given showing there had been nine adoption applications last year, eight of them accepted. Three of the placements were through the ARE (Adoption Resource Exchange), three from Social Services, three of them have been coloured, one had a cleft palate, one a talipes and three were aged 8, 6 and 2 and ½. (January, 1979)*

As can be seen from the extract above, 'bad blood' considerations were completely absent from Family Care discourses by the end of the 1980s. This suggests that policy and practice relating to the placement of older children and children from different ethnic minority backgrounds began to change in PIII. As noted in the previous section, in PI and PII birth mothers offering older children or children from non-white ethnic backgrounds were often refused the option of adoption. Changes in agencies'

policy and practice meant that these birth mothers were no longer denied the option of adoption. These changes in practice were attributed to two factors. Firstly, the introduction of Race Relations legislation was perceived to have legally “*banished discriminatory policies and practices*” (Former Social Worker, 1962 – 79). The impact of this statute will be explored further later in the subsequent section. Secondly, adoption agency professionals felt pioneering research carried out in the 1970s had profound implications for changing policies relating to the types of children accepted for adoption. In the extract below, the director of a CoE agency identifies research carried out by Rowe and Lambert (1973) as particularly relevant to the types of children that were accepted for adoption. This was perceived to have significant implications for the direction of the agency, where adoption agencies began to recruit families for children other than babies.

*Well I would think that in the 1970s when suddenly they discovered that children other than babies and children from minority backgrounds could be placed for adoption was a significant milestone. I know there was Jane Rowe who undertook some research suddenly identified these children who were in care and their long-term prospects were not very secure being looked after by the state. I think that is the most significant thing that has changed, certainly in my time of social work. Suddenly there was an understanding that children other than babies could be placed. And certainly my predecessor made a decision to recruit families who could cope with children other than babies.*  
(Agency 1, CoE)

Rowe and Lambert’s study was important in highlighting the issue of ‘children who wait’. However, deeper ideological changes seem to be apparent here. For example, the extract above suggests that earlier moral restraints on the children put up for adoption seemed to disappear in agency policy and practice, being replaced by the notion that ‘no child is unadoptable’ (Churchill et al., 1979). Analysis of Family Care’s APMM showed that Family Care responded to these ideological changes by working in partnership with the Adoption Resource Exchange project. In 1965 the British Adoption Project was launched, a four year project to help find new families for non-white children and stemming from this the Adoption Resource Exchange (ARE) was set up in 1968. The ARE was formed to find children for non-white and/or

special needs children who were currently under the care of the local authority and who were at the time being offered for adoption.

Evidence from interviews with adoption agency professionals suggests that child welfare discourses were also shaped by an emphasis on natural blood ties and parental responsibility. Stanworth (1987) has argued that dominant western culture continually reinforces the importance of blood ties, which have become a powerful cultural theme when discussing familial relations. One adoption agency professional felt that there is now an implicit understanding, both socially and legally, that the mother-child bond should not be broken, and that it is in the best interests of the child to maintain it. The former Case Committee Chair states:

*I think the feeling today would be that they are better off with their mothers unless there is cruelty or harm to come to the child, unless there is some other reason that they are better off with supervision (Former Case Committee Chair, 1965 – 1974).*

Another adoption agency professional felt that the practice of exploring options with birth mothers is borne out of a social and moral emphasis on ‘parental responsibility’. In the extract below, the adoption agency professional reflects on the implications of the emphasis of ‘parental responsibility’ on practice with birth mothers.

*Within society more generally there is an implicit emphasis on parental responsibility. Parents are encouraged to care for their own children, to be responsible for them; adoption is normally explored as the last option. Adoption has changed so much in the last 20<sup>th</sup> century, where we as ‘social workers’ think twice about separating a child from its own natural parents. (Agency 3, Independent)*

The quotation above is significant in progressing our understanding of how agencies have mediated changes in birth mothers’ options. For instance, it is clear from evidence presented earlier in the thesis that in PI and PII adoption was clearly seen as a remedial action to help uphold standards of morality. In this context, adoption was the only option offered by adoption agencies. However, it is clear from the extract

above that by PIII adoption was being perceived by agency professionals as a ‘last resort’. The fact that adoption is now perceived to be a ‘last resort’ suggests, in the final period, social workers were assisting birth mothers to help them keep their babies. The fact that they were, is evidenced in the previous chapter which identifies changes in birth mothers experiences of adoption. For instance, analyses have shown that in the final period social workers began to explore options other than adoption with birth mothers.

This section has demonstrated that adoption agencies’ relationship with the Church changed during PIII. They underwent some organisational changes. For example, evidence has shown that Family Care’s funding sources, Diocesan connections and the mission of the agency had changed over time. This has had implications for agencies’ priorities and the values informing policy and practice. Prior to the 1970s, adoption work was primarily concerned with the placement of illegitimate children, which was generally conducted in the name of moral welfare and rescue work. In this context, religiously informed moral influences have been found to be mediating in to agencies policies and practices. Evidence has demonstrated that until the 1970s, Christian moral frameworks concerned with upholding standards of morality were significant in shaping the values informing agencies’ policy and practice.

Adoption agencies’ changing relationship with the Church has meant these influences have diminished over time. After the 1970s, the moral agenda informing agency policy and practice changed. Evidence has shown that discourses concerned with what is perceived to be in the best interests of the child became embedded in adoption agency policy and practice, which placed an emphasis on parental responsibility and children being cared and bought up by their natural parents, unless there are issues of abuse or neglect. This is considerably different from the ideology of moral welfare. It is important to note that what is perceived to be in the best interests of the child has always informed the practice of adoption agencies; however what is perceived to be best for a child has changed. For instance, the adoption of illegitimate children was seen to be best for the child in PI and PII. However by PIII notions of what is best for the child changed, where children are thought to be better off with their parents, unless there were issues of abuse or neglect. Evidence suggests that in this latter period, there is a deep belief that child welfare rests on the principles of maintaining

natural blood ties and on parental responsibility. This reflects changes in what is seen to be appropriate in terms of family structures. Today, adoption agencies are less concerned with the single status of birth mothers and more concerned with ensuring that birth mothers receive the support which would enable them to keep their children. In this context, adoption is now perceived to be the 'last resort' for birth mothers.

Ideological shifts in adoption policy and practice have been important in understanding the extent to which wider ideologies concerned with standards of respectability, appropriate family structures have shaped the policies and practices of adoption agencies. For example, Christian values associated with upholding standards of respectability and morality, albeit interpreted rather variably by adoption agencies, informed the practice of refusing birth mothers who were requesting the adoption of their second or subsequent illegitimate children. Further, the influence of social hygiene and eugenics discourses were found to have shaped agency policy and practice in PI and PII. This is evidenced in the refusal of children from ethnic minorities, older children, and children with physical or mental disabilities. Changes in PIII, resulting from the notion that 'no child is unadoptable' dispelled the influence of eugenics and social hygiene on adoption policy and practice. These changes meant that birth mothers who were previously denied the option of adoption were no longer turned away by adoption agencies. Thus, as moral agendas and adoption agencies' relationship with the Church changed, the ideological values informing agency policy and practice during PI and PII also declined in significance. This had important implications for the experiences of birth mothers. For instance, by PIII practices such as the refusal of mothers offering their second or subsequent child(ren) for adoption had disappeared.

It is also important to note that the shame and stigma of unmarried motherhood, which was found to be reinforced by agency policy and practice in PI and PII, became less evident in practice in PIII. The previous section demonstrated that the stigma of unmarried motherhood was reinforced with the secrecy in adoption practice. For instance, the mother often went to a Mother and Baby home outside the county to avoid the shame and stigma of unmarried motherhood. By PIII, the secrecy in adoptions became less prevalent in adoption agency policy and practice. This is partly due to changes in wider moral and social contexts, which have also been reflected in



changes in adoption agency policy and practice (to be discussed later), which are partly responsible for the shift in deeper ideological discourses informing agency policy and practice.

As will be demonstrated in the sections addressing changes in legal and policy contexts and changes in wider social and moral climates, the influence of these factors provide important insights in to the changing moral agendas informing adoption agency policy and practice. Interviews with adoption agency professionals identified wider adoption and childcare policy and practice as having significant impact on agency policy and practice from the 1970s. The following subsection will go on to examine ways in which changing legal and policy contexts, in parallel to the cultural changes discusses so far, shaped agencies' policy and practice with birth mothers.

### **The influence of wider adoption and childcare policy**

In chapter 4 it was theorised that changes in adoption and childcare policy were mediated into the experiences of birth mothers through adoption agencies' policies and practices. This section will go on to examine how agencies channelled and interpreted changes in wider policy and legal contexts into practice and the implications for birth mothers' experiences of adoption. More specifically, this section will go on to evidence the impact of legislation on developments in the move towards openness in adoption, and in the development of post-adoption and intermediary services. In doing so, it will be demonstrated that changes in wider adoption and childcare policy, reflected in adoption agency policy and practice has had a profound impact on birth mothers' experiences of adoption.

Former and current adoption agency professionals felt the most significant legislative changes were those introduced in the 1970s - the Children Act 1975 and Adoption Act 1976. They were seen to have "*had a massive impact on the work of the agency, as they changed what adoption work was all about*" (current Family Care staff focus group 2). Adoption agency professionals identified two ways in which these pieces of legislation impacted on the nature of the work the adoption agency carried out. Firstly, some respondents felt the Children Act 1975 and Adoption Act 1976 were significant milestones in adoption policy and practice as they resulted in the

development of birth records counselling and intermediary services. Secondly, the Children Act 1975 and Adoption Act 1976, followed by the Adoption Act 2002 were seen as important milestones for the agency because of developments in adoption support services. Interviews with adoption agency professionals revealed that all seven adoption agencies had developed separate teams to deal with this work. This point is contextualised in the extracts below.

*The 1976 Act has been a major part of our work and we had to develop a separate team to deal with this work, which is what I do. (Agency 5, Catholic).*

*We have members of our team who specialise in delivering birth records counselling and who can assist with retracing birth parents. These members of our team have been working with the records for years, so they have the specialised knowledge and are able to help the adopted adults understand the context of their adoption better. (Agency 3, Independent)*

*We decided to actually split the team to have a placement team and an adoption services team because of the volume coming in and particularly because of the changes. Because by that time we were looking at the needs of the children we were placing not as infants. These kids and their families needed on-going support. And of course then there is the all the work involved in acting as an intermediary between the birth parents and the adopters – you know the ones that want contact. (Agency 6, Catholic)*

The impact of the Children Act 1975 and the Adoption Act 1976 on the development of birth records counselling services, intermediary services and adoption support services will now be examined further. Changes brought about by the Children Act 1975 and the Adoption Act 1976 in granting access to birth records counselling for adopted adults has impacted on birth mothers in different ways. There are two groups of birth mothers, each relinquishing under different conditions, and affected differently by these changes. The first group are those who relinquished prior to the 1970s (PI and PII) and did so with the expectation of a permanent severance of the mother child bond. These mothers relinquished their children to adoption under the

assumption of a clean break; they were told to get on with their lives as if the birth had never happened. Access to adoption records in the 1970s meant that these mothers were faced with the prospect that they may well be traced by the child they once gave up for adoption. The second group are those who relinquished their children to adoption after access to adoption records was granted in the 1970s. At the time of counselling, these mothers would have relinquished their children with the knowledge that they may well be traced by the children they relinquished. These are important differences in explaining changes in the way birth mothers' experienced the adoption process. Those who relinquished after the 1970s did so with the knowledge that there is a possibility that they may well be traced by their adopted children at a later stage. The knowledge that they may well be re-traced one day would have made dissipated the notion of a permanent severance of the mother-child bond from these birth mothers' experiences of adoption.

The changes brought about by the Children Act 1975 and the Adoption Act 1976 is important in understanding changes in the way birth mothers experienced the adoption process. The influences of these pieces of legislation are found to be mediated through the policy and practice of adoption agencies. The processes by which stipulations of the Children Act 1975 and the Adoption Act 1976 were mediated in to adoption agencies' policies and practices will now be examined further. As noted in chapter 2.2, the Houghton Report (1972) was important in laying the responsibility of birth records counselling for adopted adults with the agency that had arranged the adoption or local authority in which they live. This recommendation, enacted in the 1975 Children Act and reinforced in the 1976 Adoption Act had important implications for the nature of work adoption agencies carried out. For instance, as noted earlier in this chapter, for the large part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the work of the adoption agencies largely centred on the recruitment of adoptive parents and the placement of babies. However, many adoption agency professionals saw the statutes from the 1970s as significant in changing the work of adoption agencies. The adoption services manager of an independent agency stated:

*The 1975 Children Act and the 1976 Adoption Act, that's probably the biggest one for voluntary agencies with a long history. The whole business about intermediary services - that has been the big one for us, like most other*

*adoption agencies – we were forced to think about the post-adoption side.*  
(Agency 3, Independent)

Another adoption agency professional stated that:

*The development of intermediary services with the 1975 Act and 1976 Act was an important milestone for the agency; it completely changed the focus of our work.* (Agency 2, CoE)

Analysis of adoption agency personnel interviews revealed that the Children Act 1975 and the Adoption Act 1976 were interpreted in different ways by different agencies. For instance, as can be seen from the extract below, one agency interpreted the legislation as an adopted adult's entitlement to the details on the birth certificate, but after a while, followed suit with other agencies and began sharing case notes and any other documentation recorded on the adopted adult's case record.

*The law started to commit to adopted adults knowing of their birth identities in 1976 and then it took a few years for it to really kick off. Initially it was just an entitlement to what was written on the birth certificate. It took a while for the agency to gradually work out that it was not just an entitlement to what was on the birth certificate but also background information by using our discretion that social worker had.* (Agency 5, Catholic)

The amount of assistance agencies could offer in terms of tracing birth relatives was found to vary across the seven agencies. For instance, as can be seen from the extracts below, the respondents identify that their agencies assist within limits, while still recognising that agency personnel are always available to assist clients with reunions or to refer them to appropriate tracing services.

*We have had to put a limit on how much tracing activity we can do. We have always tried to point them in the right direction and have been involved in helping them with reunions and things like that.* (Agency 4, Independent)

*We do we have always been willing from the social worker end to do what we can within limits. We have always given them access to the information that we have got so quite often they will go off and do the actual searching but we have always said that we are happy to be an intermediary if they actually traced. (Agency 5, Catholic).*

Intermediary services have become a necessary element of work that adoption agencies undertake today, and this area of work has further developed with the legal recognition of the birth relatives' rights to initiate contact with their adopted child in the Adoption and Children Act 2002. As discussed in chapter 2, the Adoption and Children Act 2002 ensures the right of birth relatives to request intermediary services (DfES, 2004a). This is a significant development for birth mothers as this allows adoption agencies to contact an adopted adult to ascertain his/her views about renewed contact or communication, or an update of information with a specified birth relative. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 was seen as significant in, for the first time in adoption law, legally recognising the birth mother's rights.

*And of course more recently the law which has given the birth parents the right to initiate the process, which has also had an impact. Their rights are for the first time legally recognised. (Agency 5, Catholic)*

Interviews with adoption agency professionals revealed that many agencies had begun to offer intermediary services to birth mothers earlier than required by law. These services are indicative of the deliberate application of new agency policy. One Catholic agency claimed to be one of the first agencies to offer the birth mother intermediary services. This point is further contextualised in the extract below.

*We were one of the agencies in the country who offering this service prior to the law, the legal right to trace, but of course a large majority of people didn't know we were offering it. We haven't been inundated with extra enquiries because I don't think we had any build up waiting for a change in the law and because we were already offering, it is a steady trickle. I think we are getting more sibling enquiries than parents, I think that will become a more prominent feature in years to come. (Agency 5, Catholic)*

For many agencies, practices such as those outlined in the extract above developed in collaboration with other agencies' practices. One current practitioner stated "*I think the biggest change in my time was the decision that we would offer a service to the birth mother ahead of the recent legislation, I think it was as a result of a discussing with other agencies what their policy was, and we felt there was no consistency in the services different agencies offered*" (Adoption Agency 1, CoE). The rationale behind the decision to open up services to birth mothers was based on the assumption that the agencies "*shouldn't make the decision to whether an adopted person should know that the birth mother had made enquiries*" (*ibid*). As a result, similar policies to that detailed in the quotation below were developed by Family Care and the six other adoption agencies.

*We said if a birth parent got in touch with us, if we had a current address we would write to the adoptive family. We would put cases in to three categories. If the child was under 18, we would just write to the adoptive parents to let them know the birth mother had been in contact. So, if the child was under 18 the adopters would be the only people we would contact. If the child was over 18 and under 25 we would write to the adopters and ask them to pass on a letter to the adopted adult. If the adopted adult was over 25, we would try and find out where they were. Normally this was through the adoptive parents (Adoption Services Manager, 1983 – present).*

With policies such as those outlined above, it is clear that the agency began playing an intermediary role in establishing or maintaining contact between birth parents, adoptive parents and adopted children/adults far earlier than when it became a legal requirement. These changes have come about as a general move towards openness in adoption and have had important implications both for the nature of work carried out by adoption agencies and for birth mothers' experiences of adoption.

The other aspect of intermediary services offered by adoption agencies is the facilitation of on-going contact arrangements between adoptive parents, the child and birth relatives. Analysis of social worker case notes showed that from the 1980s

social workers were offering birth mothers the option of contact with their children. For instance, as can be seen from the extracts below birth mothers were offered the option of letterbox contact. These are important changes in practice as birth mothers relinquishing in PI and PII did not have the option of contact.

*I explained to Beth about the change in legislation happening at the end of May and outlined to her the provisions of freeing her child or signing her agreement in the usual way. She did not express any wish in either way but that she would very much want to know about what would be happening with the baby and would like to do whichever of those gave her that choice. I reassured her that we would keep in contact if she wanted us to tell her how the baby was progressing, provide photos etc. She was pleased to hear this. (Case 20, PIII, 1983)*

*The birth parents are very clear that they do not want any form of contact, but they are aware that if in the future they change their mind, the adopters are willing to exchange letters and photos. (Case 37, PIII, 1996)*

Interviews with other adoption agency professionals also showed that by the 1980s their agencies were also beginning to offer formal contact arrangements to birth mothers.

*There was also from the 1980s the setting up of the letterbox contact with formal arrangements being made. By that stage, we were talking to birth mothers about whether they wanted to set up a contact arrangement with the adopters. And also vice versa, we were talking through the option of contact with the adopters. (Agency 5, Catholic)*

Findings relating to birth mothers' changing experiences of adoption presented in the previous chapter showed that from the 1970s there was often a one-off exchange of letters between the adopters and the birth mother. Further, letterbox contact was evident in 8% of cases from PIII. In practice described by Neil (2002, p.15) as "a more successful model of agency involvement", Family Care acted as an intermediary between the birth mother and the adoptive parents, discussed the birth mothers'

request with the adoptive parents and assisted both parties in negotiating levels of contact with which they were comfortable. Social workers also worked with both parties to explain the implications of contact, the advantages for the child and assisted both parties in working through their concerns and fears about contact. For instance, as can be seen from the an extract taken from case notes below, the problems in maintaining privacy (in terms of geographical location) was considered and discussed with the adopters.

*The adopters have maintained intermittent contact with their first son's birth mother, and contact of this nature would suit the birth mother of Adam too. Geographical factors have been considered and discussed with the adopters. There are some areas of overlap but on consideration these should not cause problems. (Case 39, PIII, 1996)*

In another case, levels of contact were reviewed after the adopters raised concerns about the amount of contact the birth mother wanted. This point is contextualised with an extract taken from a letter written by the adopters to the social worker and an extract from the social workers response.

Letter from the adopters to social worker:

*With regard to the matter of sending photos, we haven't minded knowing when the Becky (the birth mother) contacted you, but at the moment we are getting to the point where every time a letter arrives from you we are worried what Becky and Gareth (birth father) are going to say or want. I am also worried if I keep on sending photos, one day Becky may walk up to me in the street, by recognising Penny by the photos, as there are only so many I can send of her as a baby. We don't want to appear mean and we are grateful that we have got Penny, but what we would like to do is every so often send details of how she is and maybe a photo of her as she gets older.*

The social worker's response:



*I am pleased you have felt able to share your feelings with me and thanks for sending the photo. What you suggest – sending details from time to time – is fine and perfectly acceptable and understandable. I will convey that to Becky and Gareth, and you have no need to worry. They will be very pleased with the photo. (Case 31, PIII, 1993)*

It is clear from the extracts above that the adoption agency acted as an intermediary between the adopters and the birth mother and also negotiated levels of on-going contact, in light of the concerns raised by the adopters. Nevertheless, the advent of contact in adoption is important both for the policy and practice of adoption agencies, and also for birth mothers' experiences of adoption.

The other area of agency development identified by adoption agency professionals resulting from the Children Act 1975 and the Adoption Act 1976 was the establishment of counselling and support services. The nature of adoption support services has developed over the final quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Today, it not only relates to the area of birth records counselling, as discussed above, but also supporting adopted children, adoptive families, and birth mothers, and facilitating contact arrangements (also discussed above). Under the 1976 Act, agencies have a responsibility to provide appropriate counselling services. Discussions detailed in Family Care's APMM show that by the 1990s, the agency was discussing the development of adoption support services. As can be seen from the extract below, the development of these services was seen to be necessary for two reasons. Firstly, post-adoption services were responding to the expectation of contact in adoption which had generally been prompted by the move from closed to open adoptions. Further, adoption support services also developed as a response to the placements Family Care was making at the time. During the 1990s, Family Care was working with the local authority to place children from the care system. These children may have already had established relationships with their birth families, and it may have been in the best interests of the child not to sever these ties. As can be seen from the extract below, openness in adoption had implications for the requirement of on-going support and advice for the adoptive family.

*This area of work is developing in light of the implication of placing a child where there is expectation of on-going contact with the birth family from the outset. One factor in the Local Authority seeking the open adoption was the availability of on-going support and advice for the adoptive family by this adoption agency. If the trend towards openness in adoption does develop then the expectations for our support services are considerable. There are implications for how we develop this side of our service and build on existing practice. (APMM, December 1991)*

Like Family Care, other adoption agencies had begun to develop formal adoption support services in from the 1980s. In doing so, their agencies were recognising the importance and need to provide on-going support to adoptive families and adopted children because the majority of children being placed for adoption today have complex and on-going needs. This point is contextualised in the extracts below.

*Over time what has become more afforded within practice is the support that needs to be offered while the young adopted person is under the age of 18. And adoption has changed dramatically into now exclusively dealing with interagency placements; we are finding adoptive parents for children who have come through the care system or social services. These families need on-going support. (Agency 2, CoE)*

*I think because we are placing older children with attachment difficulties, whereas those older style adoptions, I am not saying there were never problems. But with placing older kids - we are already seeing older children that we have placed some years ago, the parents are coming back and are dipping in. That is good, it is what we need to be doing, encouraging them and saying it is not a failing and we are not here to judge you...common times tend to be starting school, secondary school, definitely adolescence, the young kid getting to 18. (Agency 3, Independent previously Methodist)*

It was found that adoption agencies had been informally providing support to birth mothers prior to the formal development of adoption support services. Interviews

with adoption agency professionals revealed that all seven adoption agencies felt a duty of care to their former clients. This point is evidenced in findings presented in the previous chapter which demonstrated an exchange of letters between birth mothers and social workers, and is further reinforced with the extracts presented below. It is clear from the extracts below that birth mothers contact with social workers was always welcomed by the agency. Agencies recognised that birth mothers had shared an important aspect of their life, often a secret, and had developed close relationships with the workers.

*Throughout history we have always responded to birth mothers' queries about their adopted children. In most cases, they were after a reassurance that the child was OK and happy. We would never give out any specific information about the child or family, but send very brief details about the last time we were in contact with the adoptive family. (Agency 3, Independent)*

*By the 1980s the amount of work that you did in preparing the birth mothers was enormously intense and the volumes of information that you needed from the birth mother doing the Form E meant that there was a very close and tense relationship between the birth mother and the social worker, so very often you would have letters back after the adoption had finished, Christmas cards addressed to the social worker updating the social worker on their lives. They felt that they had built up a good relationship and because they shared the secrets of their lives which they couldn't perhaps share with anyone else. (Agency 2, CoE)*

Some adoption agency professionals spoke about offering support as their duty of care to clients. As can be seen from the first extract, the adoption agency manager speaks about the duty of care to the adopted person. However, in the second extract the adoption services manager recognises a duty of care to all those involved in the adoption, including the birth mother.

*If an adult came to us and they were placed as a baby with us, we would always see it as our responsibility to support and help them. (Agency 2, CoE).*

*Certainly if an adopted person was placed with one of our families and we have provided the service to the birth parents we would still feel we have a duty to offer a service to those people without cost. (Agency 1, CoE).*

Another adoption agency professional recognised that those who relinquished under a closed model of adoption may not necessarily access support services, largely because of the conditions of secrecy they relinquished under. As a result, agencies now have to recognise their duty to provide services for birth mothers. This point is further contextualised in the extract below.

*It is those birth parents from the 50s, 60s and 70s that are probably struggling more because of the closed door adoption process. And we would see it now as very much our responsibility to retrospectively, to kind of make it up, in terms to responding to that service users. (Agency 5, Catholic)*

In terms of accessing formal support and counselling services, adoption agency professionals felt the Adoption Act 2002, which ensures the right of birth relatives to request an assessment of their adoption support needs (DfES, 2004b) was significant in recognising birth mothers rights to formally access services which have been available for adoptive families and children for decades. However, as noted in the extract below, one adoption agency professional recognises that other factors may inhibit birth mothers' accessing adoption support services.

*With the older birth mother, I think it is very difficult for them to come forward. Again it is the whole stigma, and the judgmental approach they would have faced at the time. I suppose it all depends on how their lives have turned out and/or whether they have kept in contact with the agency. (Family Care Agency Personnel Focus Group 2)*

Thus far it has been noted that the Children Act 1975 and the Adoption Act 1976 were important legislative milestones for adoption agencies. These pieces of legislation were important in changing the nature of work adoption agencies undertake. For instance, for the large part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century adoption agencies, the work of adoption agencies was focused on recruiting adoptive families and placing relinquished babies. However from the latter quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, legal stipulations placed on adoption agencies meant that the work of adoption agencies became more diverse. For instance, adoption agencies are found to have developed birth records counselling services, intermediary services and adoption support services. These are important legal and policy changes which have been directly mediated in to the experiences of birth mothers. However, findings also suggest that adoption agencies may have been offering these services ahead of legal stipulations, as in the case of assisting birth mothers with enquiries about their adopted children.

Developments in race relations legislation were also identified as impacting on changes in the policy and practice (Former Social Worker, 1985 – 1997). The Race Relations Act 1976 was established to prevent discrimination on the grounds of race (Sanders, 1998). Both former and current adoption agency professionals identified changes in practice which dealt with mothers and children from non-white ethnicities. As evidenced in the previous chapter, until the 1970s Family Care almost exclusively dealt with white birth mothers. However from the 1970s, evidence collated from Family Care's case files showed 10% of birth mothers relinquishing in PIII were from non-white ethnicities. In all of these cases, the child was placed with White families. However, as can be seen from the quotation below, a former social worker states that from the 1980s Family Care was actively seeking families from BME communities alongside finding families for older children.

*In the 1980s I started to look for families for older children and BME children, and that included for me going out and speaking to people in Churches...and particularly trying to reach the Black community...it was kind of starting to put the fuels on it really, for families who could consider Black children. (Former Social Worker, 1966 – 1991)*

Research at the time considered the needs of these children and advocated same race placements (Small 1984, 1991), as these were perceived to be best for the child's developmental needs. It seems that all six other adoption agencies were also seeking families from BME communities in the 1980s. Despite the drive to recruit BME mothers, examination of the BME mother case files from PIII showed that in all cases the children were placed with White families. This is ironic given discussions relating to policy recorded in Family Care's APMM. Discussions relating to the agency's policies in the 1990s showed "*the agency would not wish to place transracially in order to co-operate with a parent's wishes*" (APMM, December 1991). However, it was stated that "*the agency would give such parents all the support, advice, counselling they could and advise them of other adoption agencies so that they would have an element of choice*" (*ibid*). The agency's rationale for not placing children transracially was because of "*the inherent tension of dealing with such situations*" (*ibid*). Unfortunately APMM did not provide explanations for why they felt there were problems with placing children transracially. One possible explanation is that adoption agencies were listening to messages from research which advocated same race placements (Small 1984, 1991), as they were seen to be in the best interests of the child as adoptive families were able to accommodate the child's cultural and religious needs. As a result, placing children transracially, it was perceived that adoptive parents would have faced difficulties in accommodating these needs, which generally was not in the best interests of the child.

In recent years, practice guidance (Prevatt-Goldstein and Spencer, 2000) has emerged, and issues of culture, ethnicity, 'race' and faith are contested, along with complex concepts in adoption policy and practice (Barn 1999; Mason 2000; Parekh 2000; Prevatt Goldstein 1999). The core issues in this debate relate to identity, cultural heritage and coping with racism and the capacities of families from a different ethnic background to meet these needs (Kirton, 2008). The importance of linking and supporting both the overall developmental needs of children, along with meeting their cultural needs, is not new to social work (Barn 1993; Department of Health 1995; Barn, Sinclair, and Ferdinand 1997; Barn, Andrew, and Mantovani 2005; Kohli 2005).

Nevertheless, it is important to examine how changes in policy (i.e. placing children of BME mothers) were implemented in practice. An examination of the five cases

from PIII where the mother was of minority ethnic descent reveal a change in the way these cases were dealt with by social workers. One case, from the mid-1970s, involved the child of an Indian birth mother being placed with a White family (Case 1, PIII, 1975). As can be seen from the extract below, taken from Family Care's APMM, at the time there was little consideration by social workers for issues of differences in culture, ethnicity and race.

*The baby girl was born on \*\*\*\*\*, the first illegitimate child of a young single Indian girl aged 15. She was referred to us by a contact at \*\*\*\*\* Social Services. She went to Gwendoline Grove house and had the baby 4 days afterwards, so has only had the initial interview. The baby is small and in special care but appears all right. Accepted to tests and medicals. The child was placed with the adopters on the \*\*\*\*\*.* (Case 1, PIII, 1975).

However, a case in the 1990s showed that ethnic and cultural differences were being discussed with the adoptive family. Social worker case notes showed that workers discussed and worked through issues such as identity and racism as well as how the adoptive parents could consider and accommodate the child's cultural needs.

*On the 16<sup>th</sup> Jan 1992, at the agency Adoption Panel, a possible match was considered between Mr and Mrs Smith and Maria. The panel recommended and the agency decided that the Smith's be approved as suitable adopters for Maria. Various factors were considered including the appropriateness of the family's race components i.e. that Mrs Smith is black British. Both Mr and Mrs Smith know the importance of a sound racial heritage and would do their up most to encourage this for Maria. They because of their own experiences would be able to help Maria cope with racist issues, or give her a grounding that may not come about if she were placed in a family with a racial mix different from her own background.* (Case 3, PIII, 1992)

There are significant differences between how each of the two cases were dealt with, indicating that the experiences of BME mothers relinquishing their children to adoption changed during the third period. It is possible that these changes are not just resulting from the implementation of the Race Relations Act, but also result from the

transformation of the social work profession and its whole way of thinking. Since the 1980s, significant changes have taken place in social work education and training in the UK. The development of service standards, professional registers and codes of conduct, together with the increasing levels of regulation and prescription of social work education and training, all aimed at improving service standards. These changes have created powerful regulatory mechanisms which may be used to discipline not only erroneous and poor practice, but also to quash or inhibit unorthodox and dissenting practitioners (Pugh, 2005).

Legislative changes underpinned by principles which promoted the welfare of the child were also identified by professionals as impacting on agencies' policy and practice. Many felt the Children Act 1989 had significant implications for the development of childcare policy and practice within their agencies. The most important provision of the Act was the idea of the welfare of the child being paramount in all child care proceedings. Interestingly, this was not officially absorbed into adoption proceedings until the Adoption and Children Act, 2002. However, adoption agency professionals spoke of the spoke of the 1989 Act in relation to the notion of 'parental responsibility'. It is important to note that, under the 1989 Act, 'parental responsibility' was assigned to birth mothers and only to birth fathers even if they weren't married. This meant that the consent of birth fathers was required in cases of adoption. However, former and current Family Care personnel found that they had already established practices whereby information on the birth father, when available, was recorded. Family Care had always advocated making contact with the birth father prior to 1989. This was evident from the records in Family Care's archives. Birth mothers were always encouraged to provide details of the birth father, so workers could get in touch "*to gain consent to adoption and also to chase up fostering fees*" (Focus Group 2). In addition, recording information on the birth father was seen as important for the purposes of birth records counselling. In the extract below, a former adoption worker provides details of how this was set up and why it was important to record information relating to the birth father.

*I started a scheme whereby the birth mother was interviewed we would ask her all her details about herself and the Putative Father. He'd taken a back seat prior to this. We started writing down details about both*



*parents; this had never been done before in the agency. In fact, my predecessor genuinely believed that it wasn't important; it wasn't necessary and the last thing in the world that the child should have knowledge of was of the birth parents. We ended up with books full of all sorts of information that made the birth parent exist for the child.....It is a development that just went on in all agencies really (Former Principal Adoption Worker, 1966 – 1991).*

The respondent clearly demonstrates how practice changed from earlier times. Collecting detailed information on birth parents was attributed to the emerging literature at the time which indicated the importance of adopted adults knowing about their origins (Sants, 1964; McWhinne, 1967; Kornitzer, 1971; Triseliotis, 1973). In addition, the extract above shows that both birth parents were beginning to be recognised as a part of the child's life, something which was previously not thought necessary under a closed model of adoption.

Interestingly none of the respondents referred to the implications of other conditions of the 1989 Act. For instance, the Act required local authorities to provide a range of services to support families whose children were in need. Such services include advice, guidance and counselling, day care and family centres and home helps (Dolan, Canavan and Pinkerton, 1996). As can be seen, policy emphasis began to be placed on supporting families, especially those in need, which the majority of birth mothers would have been as single parents. Developments such as these may have been implicitly mediated in to practice, which resulted in social workers exploring different options with birth mothers.

In summary, policy changes from the mid-1970s impacted on agency policy and practice in three different ways. These changes have had important implications for birth mothers' experiences of adoption. Firstly, a move towards openness in adoption has resulted in access to birth records and the development of post-adoption support services. The implications of openness in adoption have impacted on not only the experiences of birth mothers who are relinquishing today, but also those who relinquished under a closed model of adoption. It is important to note that many agencies had opened up their post-adoption services to birth mothers prior to changes

in legislation. This suggests that wider policy contexts were reacting to changes in practice. It also suggests that the needs of birth mothers were recognised by agencies long before they were required to do so by law. Changes in race relations policy also had implications for agency policy. In period III, adoption agencies became more accepting of non-White birth mothers and children. In practice, this meant that unlike the mothers in PI and PII, BME mothers were offered the option of adoption in PIII. However, it is important to note that the experiences of BME birth mothers changed throughout PIII. Finally, the emphasis on parental responsibility under the Children Act 1989 was seen to have particular implications for consent issues for those birth parents who were married. However, it is important to note that adoption agencies were already advocating contact with all birth fathers for the purpose of gathering detailed information on both birth parents.

### **7.3 Changes in the external welfare environment**

Adoption agencies have mediated the relationship between changes in external welfare environments and birth mothers' experiences of adoption through practices which have resulted in a more systematic exploration of options and choices with birth mothers. The availability of benefits, housing and employment opportunities for single parents have changed over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Developments in welfare provisions have had significant implications for the options and choices available for birth mothers. In re-visiting earlier discussions, the introduction of National Assistance 1948 was perceived as having a limited impact on providing birth mothers with financial support, largely because of its discretionary nature. However, the Supplementary Benefits/Income Support scheme would have had a profound impact on birth mothers' choices to keep their children because this scheme carried a greater sense of entitlement. These, along with provisions for housing brought about by the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act, 1977, would have made the option of self-support more realistic for birth mothers. However, as noted in chapter 2, birth mothers may have faced many obstacles in trying to access welfare provisions. For example, the housing shortage in the 1970s would have limited the stock and quality of housing available.

It is important to examine how changes in the external welfare environment were internalised by the agency and the implications for birth mothers' choices and experiences of adoption. Central to this is the issue of exploration of options with birth mothers. It is important to understand how and why this practice was developed. Findings presented in the previous chapter showed the practice of exploring options was common from the 1980s. So far, evidence presented in this chapter has shown that the practice of exploring options has stemmed from several different factors, including an emphasis on the preservation of blood ties and changes in moral climates. Along with these factors, developments in the external welfare environment are also important in explaining developing social worker practice with birth mothers. This section will examine how adoption agencies were involved in channelling changes in the external welfare environment in to the lives and choices of birth mothers.

Findings detailed in the previous chapter showed that, prior to the 1970s, it was difficult for birth mothers to have kept their children without the support of statutory facilities, support of the birth father or parental support. The following extract taken from an interview with a former adoption worker contextualises these points further.

*There were no statutory facilities to look after the child on her own. It was very hard indeed. There wasn't the employment that there is now, housing facilities, and work opportunities were non-existent. In some cases the girl genuinely thought she was doing right for the child by putting it up for adoption. (Former Social Worker, 1962 – 1979)*

Some adoption agency professionals noted that some mothers during these first periods may have kept their children. These respondents argued that in the majority of cases, birth mothers would have either had the support of the birth father or the support of their family. It is important to note that data collated from case files in this PhD would not have shown any evidence to support this as the sample was solely derived from a database of birth mothers who relinquished their children to adoption. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Family Care did assist those mothers who came to the agency and requested support. The amount of support the agency could offer birth mothers was limited to material items to help with the child. For example,

many former adoption agency professionals spoke about the clothes, cots, blankets, Moses baskets and bottles Family Care used to lend out to mothers if they needed assistance (Adoption Services Manager, 1983 – present). This is extremely important, because it shows that Family Care almost certainly did not simply abandon mothers whose request for placement was turned down, such as those who were requesting the relinquishment of their second or subsequent illegitimate child. Unfortunately, it is not possible to explain when and why the practice of assisting birth mothers with practical items was established, as evidence of it could not be found in Family Care’s documentation. However, it can be traced back to the mid-1960s, as the former Principal Adoption worker spoke of assisting birth mothers with practical items when she joined the agency in 1966.

Interviews with adoption agency professionals show that an exploration of options was not necessarily the prime objective of workers in PI and PII, largely because there were no external support mechanisms in place. At the same time, as noted in the previous chapter, there were alternatives to adoption, such as parental adoption or keeping the child with support from family members. It is important to examine if options such as these were explored with birth mothers. Family Care’s Adoption Services Manager stated that “*there were some indications in some of the records that they (birth mothers) had to do as we said, there was a power element in there I suppose*”. She illustrates this point further with an example of a case in the quotation below.

*I remember a woman who I spoke to whose child was placed for adoption...I remember her saying ‘you were asked questions, and you had to answer’. Cos if you saw this as the only way ahead, then you had to answer the questions, you had to do what was said. So I suppose there was probably a shift of power. There is now an element of choice or exploring choice. The records from the 1940s, 50s and 60s sometimes indicate things such as ‘you don’t want to be keeping the baby because how would you manage’. Whereas I think we have moved to a place where we are saying ‘you are thinking of keeping your baby, how will you manage?’ (Adoption Services Manager, 1983 – present).*

The Adoption Services Manager identifies an important shift in practice where previously the concern of the worker was adding weight to the birth mother's decision for adoption on the assumption that the birth mother who wanted to keep the child would not be able to manage. It seems from the extract above that these mothers may have felt that they had to do what the worker said, as the worker was perceived to be in an authoritative role. This was likely to be reinforced by the views and attitudes of the birth mother's parents. Assertions such as these may have reinforced the decision to relinquish along with social attitudes which condemned unmarried motherhood. In the extract below, the former Principal Adoption Worker (1966 – 1991) of the agency recalled a case where a young birth mother initially wanted to relinquish her child in the early 1970s, changed her mind and decided to keep the child.

*Her mother came to see me one day and she said 'oh we are not going to have adoption now so you don't need to come and see us anymore. Well she does want it so you can't take it off her' ...I said to her 'just a minute have you thought about the support she is going to need' (Former Principal Adoption Worker, 1966 – 1991).*

This adoption worker spoke of the need to make birth mothers aware of the practical, material and financial constraints they would have faced in keeping the child, especially as, prior to the 1970s, very little support was available for unmarried mothers. However from the 1970s, the majority of former staff and all of the present staff recognised that a network of support had developed, which has given the birth mother resources and practical support which would allow her to keep the child if she wished. The former head of the Mother and Baby Home affiliated to Family Care stated "*I think more and more as years have gone on the support has been there for young unmarried mothers, and more and more have kept their babies*" (Retired Head of Gwendoline Grove, 1979 – 87). Changes in the benefits system from the 1980s were also perceived to have had a profound impact on practice with birth mothers and their options. In the extract below, one current manager of an adoption agency reflects on the implications of developments in benefit and housing provisions for birth mothers' choices and options.

*The way the benefits system operated and the opportunity to get your own home provided alternatives to adoption for birth mothers. For instance, when you look at what teenage girls and men are offered now in terms of accommodation, if they can't remain at home, they can get housing and benefit support from the state. That wasn't an option for them in the 1960s (Adoption Agency 2, CoE).*

However, one former social worker suggested that actually getting support for single parents such as housing support and benefits was hard, even in to the 1990s. In the extract below, she states that despite housing provisions under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act, 1977 and Supplementary Benefits/Income Support, accessing entitlement was difficult. One retired social worker stated that the “*financial aspect of keeping the child was still presented as a problem even though you could actually help them get housing...even with housing and benefits - it was not very easy...it was hard to get hold of permanent suitable housing for birth mothers, often because of a long waiting list for council homes*” (Former Social Worker, 1985 – 1997). Which in some cases would provoke parents to evict their pregnant daughters so they could present themselves as homeless to the local authority who would then have a duty to accommodate them, a practice that has been curtailed by the Homelessness Act 2002 which placed a duty on local authorities to prevent homelessness wherever possible though e.g. family mediation services. This suggests that by the mid-1980s, workers were assisting birth mothers accessing benefits. It also suggests that helping birth mothers access these benefits was sometimes difficult. For example, the respondent argues that suitable permanent housing was an issue. Literature has also suggested that housing provisions may not have been as accessible as originally thought, largely due to the limited resources of local authorities (Pascall, 1997; Walsh, Stephens and Moore, 2000).

By the 1980s, interviews with adoption agency professionals revealed that the majority of birth mothers would have been in receipt of Income Support. Further, in the extract below, it is evident that the birth mother was responsible for paying fostering fees for the period until the child was placed with the adoptive parents. It is also clear from the extract below that workers would have assisted birth mothers in applying for funds to cover these fees.

*Well once they were of age it was Income Support, but if they were underage, ...and as the (fostering) fees got so much higher...obviously they had to go to Social Services for the fees....they would pay a small amount from their Income Support and the rest would be from Social Services (Ex Social Worker, 1985 – 1997).*

From 1988, in cases where the birth mother was under the age of 18, she would not have been entitled to Income Support, unless she could show she was estranged from her parents. If she could not demonstrate this, she would have been denied entitlement to Income Support. This is important in understanding how options may have differed for those birth mothers who were under the age of 18. In cases such as these “*it would have been their families which supported them*” (Retired Head of Gwendoline Grove, 1979 – 87).

It is important to analyse how developments in the external welfare environment impacted on agency policy and practice. Analysis of interview data showed changes in external welfare environments had consequences for the nature of work social workers were doing with birth mothers. In the case of Family Care, practice with birth mothers changed in the 1980s when it became common for social workers to explore different options with birth mothers (Adoption Services Manager, 1983 – present). This change in practice was attributed to the fact that the option of self-support became more realistic in PIII and changes in society made single motherhood more acceptable. (Changes in social and moral climates will be explored in the subsequent section.) In the extract below, a former social worker describes the nature of work she was carrying out when she joined the agency in 1985. She interprets the work of exploring options with birth mothers as support work. These points are contextualised in the quotation below.

*Although we use the word ‘adoption’ I would have called it support work for pregnant girls because we worked with many people and a lot of them didn't actually go to adoption. It was supporting people through their options of which route to take, and what they were coping with...listening to their story, helping them to work through the*

*difficulties. Then it was about which way they wanted to go. So at the end of the day, adoption was their decision. And when I say options, we are talking about possibly abortion, if that is what they wanted or keeping the baby and the difficulties around that for them...could they work through that? And adoption is another one.* (Former Adoption Worker, 1985 – 1997).

There was a consensus amongst current Family Care staff and other adoption agency professionals that practice with birth mothers changed when now “*you would do everything possible to help her keep the child, whether that is helping her access financial support, housing and support networks. It is about helping her work through any problems or issues she may have*” (Current Practitioners Focus Group 2). The Adoption Services Manager of an adoption agency stated that practice with birth mothers has “*gone the whole circle*” where “*a lot more is put in to trying to keep children at home. Adoption would be very much as a last resort, it still is for a small minority of children*”. As a result, “*it would be very odd to get a phone call, saying that I am expecting a baby and want to give up for adoption*” (Agency 5, Catholic). This is an extremely important admission from an adoption services manager, suggesting that even adoption services, far from offering impartial advice, were actually guiding young women away from adoption. This is an important change in adoption agencies’ practice with birth mothers. For instance as noted earlier, in PI and PII exploration of options would have been rare with birth mothers, largely because options such as birth father and parental support were unrealistic in practice and the option of self-support was problematic without adequate welfare provisions.

Evidence presented in this section shows that that changes in external welfare environments were mediated through the changing practice of social workers. Undoubtedly, changes in the provision of welfare have resulted in making the option of self-support more realistic for birth mothers. Further, birth mothers were supported by social workers to explore their options, self-support being one of them. Evidence presented in this section has also demonstrated that it has become common practice to explore different options with birth mothers. Thus the exploration of options is not entirely the result of developments in the welfare state, but is also the product of changes in the practice of social workers.



## 7.4 Changes in social and moral climates

Theoretical discussions presented in chapter 4 showed that the underlying moral discourses governing changes in birth mothers' experiences and motives for adoption have changed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In order to evidence these shifts and their changing impact on birth mothers' choices, motives and experiences of adoption, this section will go on to examine changes in external social and moral climates associated with changing attitudes towards birth mothers.

All respondents made reference to wider social changes in their interviews. Interview analysis reveals a distinct change in moral climates from the 1970s. Prior to this, moral climates governing unmarried motherhood were perceived to be important in shaping birth mothers' choices, motives and experiences of adoption. All of the respondents felt that unmarried motherhood was something 'taboo' and 'not socially acceptable' and 'disgraceful'. In essence, unmarried motherhood status compromised the birth mother's respectability and social standing. Moral conditions surrounding unmarried motherhood were perceived by adoption agency professionals as an important factor in informing birth mothers' motives and shaping birth mothers' experiences of adoption. The Adoption Services manager of an independent agency stated:

*They had, the mothers who in becoming pregnant had done something taboo, it was unacceptable and they would be ostracised because of social pressure and therefore the only choice that they thought was to give up the child for adoption. (Agency 3, Independent)*

This point can be reinforced by evidence presented earlier. Findings from the previous chapter demonstrated that in PI and PII, the stigma of unmarried motherhood was often felt by the parents and in some cases the birth mother herself. As a result, the option of keeping the baby with the support of the family was largely regarded as unrealistic. Additionally, it is important to note that birth mothers' experiences of adoption were also indirectly affected by this stigma. For instance, the

stigma associated with unmarried motherhood was instrumental in perpetuating the secrecy in adoptions and in that majority of cases from PI and PII informed birth mothers' motives for relinquishment.

Based on interviews with adoption agency professionals, it was apparent that they attributed changes in moral and social climates to more tolerant conditions for unmarried mothers. Attitudes to unmarried motherhood have changed over the three periods. This is evident in the motives birth mothers stated for adoption on Family Care's adoption records, as evidenced in the previous chapter. Former Family Care personnel who were practicing after the 1970s, along with current members made reference to changes in attitudes to unmarried mothers. Many identified a disappearance of the stigma, which had been so strongly associated with unmarried motherhood in PI and PII, as an indication of changing moral climates.

*Well there is not the stigma there was once. A mother can keep and raise her baby as a single parent today and no one will bat an eyelid....thirty or fifty years you wouldn't have been able to walk down the street without being judged. (Former Case Committee Chair, 1965 – 1974)*

*Things have changed drastically for birth mothers wanting to relinquish their children to adoption. The stigma that once was associated with illegitimacy has now disappeared. (Agency 3, Independent previously CoE)*

Additionally, some adoption agency professionals felt that diverse family forms have helped to dissipate the stigma of unmarried motherhood. One respondent stated:

*...what constitutes family life now is so variable, and there is an acceptance of that in society, there are step parents, foster families determined for permanent families, and I think that has helped unmarried motherhood become more acceptable. (Agency 4, Independent).*

Adoption agency professionals also identified changes in wider discourses of mothering. Some adoption agency professionals felt that a change in moral contexts has produced social conditions where there is an implicit understanding that the mother-child bond should not be broken; as a result mothers are now encouraged to

keep their children. For example, it was felt by the former Chair of Family Care's Case Committee that "*the feeling today would be that they are better off with their mothers unless there is cruelty or harm to come to the child*" (Former Case Committee Chair, 1965 – 1974).

Interviews with adoption agency professionals revealed that the implicit social and moral emphasis on the mother-child bond is reinforced through a shift in the stigma of adoption. For example, some adoption agency professionals felt that instead of a stigma of illegitimacy there is now a stigma attached to women who put their babies up for adoption, because it is seen as an abdication of responsibility, given all the support and services now available. For example, in the extract below the respondent discusses how mothers relinquishing their children in the 1980s were condemned by the mothers in the home who were keeping their babies, and by the wider community.

*Even whilst I was working with girls in the 1980s that wanted to go for adoption I was hearing around me in the general community things such as 'fancy giving your baby up'. It swung completely right round and you would hear that kind of attitude sometimes in places like Gwendoline Grove by mothers who were keeping their babies....so the ones who went there for adoption were pretty determined* (Former Head of Mother and Baby Home, 1979 – 87).

These changes in attitudes reflect shifts in a wider social and moral acceptance of lone parenthood, as well as changes in what is expected of women as mothers. Another respondent spoke of the unspoken assumptions that see motherhood as a natural process, that every woman is capable of being a mother. She also notes that a birth mother's circumstances and ability to raise a child are often overlooked or overshadowed by these moral assertions. In the extract below she speaks of the repercussions of these situations for the mother and child.

*Society now feels every female in the land should be able to be a normal average capable mother. Unfortunately in some cases their circumstances or their natural abilities for coping with a child are not there... and that I think that is where there is some difficulty in accepting*

*whether she should have adoption or keep the child. You can't expect too much of a girl who has had a very inappropriate relationship and made an inappropriate decision to keep the child and then for the child to go into care later on, Certainly you just damage the child and upset the mother more somewhat. (Agency 2, CoE).*

As can be seen from the extract above, the adoption agency manager of a CoE agency felt that a change in moral climates and a shift in the stigma surrounding adoption can compromise what should be the primary focus: the best interests of the child. This is surprising, given the fact that child welfare has become such a prominent issue throughout PIII. The best interests of the child are compromised perhaps by a birth mother who is unable to cope, not ready for the responsibilities of motherhood or cannot provide what two parents could provide. Motives for adoption recorded on Family Care's case files showed only a small proportion of birth mothers in PII (6%) were motivated by these reasons. However almost half of birth mothers in PIII relinquished because of these reasons (43%). This suggests that birth mothers relinquishing their children to adoption in PIII could be distinguished from those relinquishing their children in earlier periods who largely relinquished because of the stigma of unmarried motherhood. In the extract below, the former Head of the Mother and Baby home affiliated to Family Care speaks about her experiences of dealing with birth mothers who did not feel ready for the responsibilities of parenthood and how these mothers would have been perceived by society.

*Sometimes they were very honest about it and say they weren't ready to become mums and wanted a better life for their baby and that took a lot of doing. I saw some very brave girls, very brave girls, that people say they take the easy option, but no way, no way was giving up their baby an easy option, an easy way out...it was probably one of the hardest decisions they would ever make in their lives. (Former Head of Mother and Baby Home, 1979 – 87)*

The extract above contextualises changes in birth mothers' experiences of adoption. For a birth mother relinquishing a child to adoption in the 1980s, her decision for adoption was seen to be brave, in the face of social condemnation, where adoption

was seen as the 'easy option'. This further reinforces the stigmatization of relinquishing a child to adoption during PIII. Unfortunately, direct evidence was not found from case files, and it was not possible to interview birth mothers to explore this issue further.

Evidence presented in this section shows that there has been a complete reversal in social attitudes towards unmarried motherhood. Moral assumptions in the third period are derived from an emphasis on natural motherhood, assuming children are better off with their natural families, unless there are issues of abuse or neglect. Evidence presented in this section shows that the stigmatization of unmarried motherhood disappeared by PIII and was replaced by the stigmatization of relinquishment. The de-stigmatisation of unmarried motherhood, along with the availability of welfare provisions have given birth mothers options that were previously unrealistic. Nevertheless, the de-stigmatisation of illegitimacy has been replaced with a stigma of adoption.

This chapter has demonstrated the impact of three important influences on birth mothers' experiences of adoption – the adoption agency, wider moral climates and external welfare environments. The purpose of adoption agencies and social workers has been to offer choices to birth mothers. In doing so, they have mediated changes in policy and practice reflecting broader changes in wider moral and social contexts, and changes in external welfare and policy environments.

The concluding chapter will go on to discuss the extent to which the evidence relating to the moral, religious, policy and professional factors exerted an influence on birth mothers' experiences, options, and motives of adoption. In particular, this discussion will examine the extent to which changes in underlying discourses of respectability, the family and motherhood clarify reasons for changes in birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption.

# 8

## Discussion and Conclusions

### 8.1 Introduction

This PhD is an empirical investigation of the mediating influence of adoption agencies on birth mothers' changing motives and experiences of adoption. This thesis seeks to understand how changes in wider religious, moral, social, professional and policy environments have influenced birth mothers' motives for relinquishment and their experiences of adoption. This chapter aims to discuss the deeper theoretical relevance of the findings presented in the subsequent chapters. In doing so, I will draw on evidence and literature sources to answer the question of why so few women voluntarily relinquish their children to adoption today. In attempting to answer this question the theoretical framework proposed in chapter 4 will be tested and evaluated as an explanatory framework to understand changes in birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption.

### 8.2 Discussion

The central concern of this thesis is the 'birth mother'. Findings relating to birth mothers' motives for adoption suggest that their motives for adoption have been profoundly influenced by the availability of options. This discussion will focus on understanding how the world looked from her point of view, and particularly how she would have interpreted and viewed her choices and experiences, and how this has changed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In presenting this discussion, I will seek to explain why birth mothers no longer voluntarily relinquish their children to adoption today. The answer to this question is not simple and straightforward, but a complex

one, reflecting changes in wider and deeper ideological discourses, mediated through the policies of adoption agencies and the practice of social workers.

Evidence presented in this thesis demonstrates that the birth mother relinquishing a child to adoption in the 1950, 60s or 70s would have construed her choices and options very differently from a birth mother relinquishing a child to adoption in the 1980s onwards. There were several factors that influenced birth mothers' changing understanding of the options available to them. These include,

- the changing characteristics and identities of birth mothers;
- changes in wider moral assumptions relating to the gendered roles of women as housewives and as mothers which reflect wider ideological shifts in standards of respectability, appropriate family structures and mothering practices;
- the evolution of adoption agencies' policies and practices which derive from changing religious affiliations, moral agendas and legal frameworks;
- and the professional development of social work and its impact on the values and principles of social work.

These factors did not operate alone and independently of one another, but rather came together in the lives of birth mothers as they confronted the situation in which they found themselves. The impact of these factors on birth mothers' options and choices will now be discussed further.

Birth mothers as a group have changed in terms of their characteristics and social circumstances. This would have had important implications for the way in which they have interpreted their circumstances and options. The socio-demographic profiles of birth mothers who relinquished their children to adoption changed over the period since the 1940s. By the 1980s, relinquishing birth mothers were getting younger, were less likely to be religiously affiliated, were of more varied ethnic origin and were more likely to have been educationally qualified; however like birth mothers from earlier decades, they continued to reside mainly in the parental home. These findings suggest that the way birth mothers would have interpreted their options (based on

their personal circumstances) would have changed. By the 1980s, birth mothers were distinguishable from the national population of unmarried mothers by being much younger and largely working in unskilled occupations, or unemployed, or living as students or housewives.

Birth mothers' socio-demographic profiles are important in providing insights into how they interpreted and made sense of the choices and options available to them – their 'cultural capital'. For instance, the fact that significant proportions of birth mothers were religiously affiliated before the 1980s suggests that their choices were likely to have been construed and shaped in the context of religious moral frameworks. Another example of differences in the cultural norms and values shaping birth mothers' options and choices can be illustrated by the reasons BME birth mothers have offered for the adoption of their children. For instance, BME birth mothers relinquished their children in the defence of maintaining respectability (*izzat*), which were interpreted in the context of their own religion, ethnicity and culture. However, White birth mothers during the same period relinquished because they felt unprepared for the responsibilities of parenthood, too young for motherhood, or because of financial and practical constraints. These findings add weight to the work of Selwyn et al. (2008) and Neil (2000) who found that BME birth mothers family case histories bore a resemblance to the White birth mothers case histories in the 1960s.

The levels of economic capital available to birth mothers also had implications for the options and choices they made. Opportunities for self-support to enable birth mothers to keep their children were found to be unrealistic, especially without parental or birth father support and because of limited welfare support, employment opportunities and independent housing. This was reflected in the numbers of single mothers stating relinquishment because of material, financial and practical constraints during the 1950s, 60s and 70s. This suggests that adoption may have been the only realistic option for single birth mothers in this period. Findings show that by the 1980s social workers were more pro-active in exploring the option of self-support with birth mothers, thus helping them to acquire economic capital to enable them to keep their children. This is significant in understanding how social workers mediated options in to the choices of birth mothers. During this period, it was young birth mothers (i.e.



under the age of 16) and those struggling to provide for their other children lacked the economic capital which would have made the option of self-support a realistic one.

Moreover, birth mothers before the 1980s had limited access to social (i.e. parental support). Parental support was often withdrawn because of the stigma of unmarried motherhood. A lack of parental support posed a particular problem for those who may have wanted to keep the child, but were residing in the parental home. However, by the 1980s, the level of parental support available to birth mothers in previous periods was a less critical influence on their choices. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, with changes in state support and provisions for lone parents, birth mothers were not necessarily reliant on the approval and support of their parents if they wanted to keep their babies. The second point relates to the dissipation of the stigma associated with illegitimate pregnancy. Birth mothers during earlier periods were often at the mercy of their parents support and decisions, since the majority of them were residing in the parental home. However, by the 1980s, because of shifts in moral agendas (to be discussed more fully later), the standards of respectability used to judge the actions of unmarried mothers had disappeared. Thus, the parents of birth mothers were less concerned with the shame that the birth mother may bring on the family if she were to have kept the child.

These findings show that the way in which birth mothers have interpreted their options, choices and experiences of adoption has not only changed since the 1940s, but world-views have differed on the basis of ethnicity, marital status and class.

The expectations placed on young pregnant women throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century have changed. These expectations are reflections of the changing moral contexts which have governed birth mothers' options. This is echoed in the shift of stigma in birth mothers' experiences of adoption. For instance, birth mothers before the 1980s would have been subject to the shame of being an unmarried mother, if she were to have kept the child. This is precisely what drove significant numbers of birth mothers to relinquish their children to adoption in this period. Birth mothers sought to preserve their (and their families') respectability by relinquishing their children to adoption. It is clear from the analysis that for birth mothers, their actions were judged on the basis of whether they were conforming to gendered assumptions about what was seen to be

appropriate in terms of mothering practices and family structures. Since the majority of them were not conforming to these ideals, adoption was the only viable solution. This is evidenced in findings relating to changes in the reasons birth mothers stated for the relinquishment of their children. For instance, before the 1970s, large numbers of birth mothers relinquished their children to adoption because they did not want to be an unmarried mother. Further, the change in terminology from not wanting to be an 'unmarried mother' to not wanting to be a 'single mother' signifies the de-stigmatisation of unmarried motherhood.

In the period after the 1970s, different expectations were placed on young pregnant women. Evidence suggests that the discourses and ideologies governing the choices and experiences of birth mothers pre-1970s were less evident in the period thereafter. Instead, findings from interviews with adoption agency professionals show that social and moral attitudes have prevailed where it is no longer socially and morally acceptable to give up children for adoption. Shift from the 'stigma of unmarried motherhood' to the 'stigma of relinquishment' is reflective of changing ideals of femininity used to define a woman's role and govern her actions and behaviours. For instance, pre-1970s birth mothers were making their choices in a context where women were judged by standards of sexual constraint before marriage, and after marriage, their role within the home. After the 1970s, ideals of femininity are found to be tied up in mothering discourses which assume that motherhood is a natural and essential part of femininity. It is the departure from these ideals that creates the stigma.

Adoption agencies' are important mediators of choices and in shaping birth mothers' experiences of adoption. For, instance, birth mothers before the 1980s would have approached the adoption agency, either on the say-so of their parents' or in a desperate state. In this context adoption agencies would have wielded considerable power over the choices available to birth mothers. The role of adoption agencies has been to offer choices to birth mothers; however the context in which these choices and options were offered has changed and it is these changing contexts which explain changes in the options adoption agencies have offered to birth mothers.

The influence of changing moral agendas adopted by adoption agencies is found to be significant in shaping the options offered to birth mothers. Before the 1980s, adoption agencies' policies were found to be shaped both by their own religious moral agendas. For instance, for the large part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the seven adoption agencies examined in this thesis were found to be underpinned by Christian values which were concerned with appropriate moral standards and family values. This resulted in policies and practices which embodied these values. The option of adoption was therefore perceived as giving birth mothers a 'second chance' to start afresh, without being tarnished with the label of being a 'fallen woman'. On the basis that adoption agencies' primary moral agenda before the 1980s was to uphold standards of Christian morality, this implicitly suggest that agencies were conforming to wider ideologies concerned with standards of respectability and appropriate family structures. For example, Christian values associated with upholding standards of respectability and morality, although interpreted rather variably by adoption agencies, informed the practice of refusing birth mothers who were requesting the adoption of their second or subsequent illegitimate children. More generally speaking, it makes sense that adoption agencies did not practice exploring different options with birth mothers before the 1980s, as the work they were undertaking (i.e. arranging adoptions) provided a 'solution' to the problem of illegitimacy. In doing so, adoption agencies became mediators of ensuring that moral standards were upheld and that idealistic notions of the breadwinner family were maintained. Furthermore, the influence of social hygiene and eugenics discourses were found to have been shaping agencies' policies and practices in the 1940s and 50s, and theories of neuroticism during the 1960s and 70s. The impact of these theories is evidenced in the refusal of children from ethnic minorities, older children, and children with physical or mental disabilities. These moral agendas were important in deciding which birth mothers' were offered the option of adoption and who were not.

As adoption agencies' relationship with the Church changed, so did the primary moral agenda informing adoption agencies' policies and practice. For instance, the notion that 'no child is unadoptable' dispelled the influence of eugenics and social hygiene on adoption policy and practice. These changes meant that birth mothers who were previously denied the option of adoption were no longer turned away by adoption agencies. Moral agendas relating to ideals of femininity based on mothering

discourses which assume that motherhood as both natural and essential aspect of this, were found to be influencing the policies and practices of adoption agencies from the 1970s. After the 1980s birth mothers were relinquishing their children to adoption in a context where it was felt that unless there are issues of neglect or harm, the child should be looked after and cared for by its natural parent(s). This is reflected in agency practice. For instance, from the 1980s, social workers began to explore options other than adoption with birth mothers. The practice of exploring options with birth mothers is not one which has been prompted by just a shift in the moral agendas informing adoption agencies' policies and practices, but also can be attributed to changes in the social work profession which began to recognise the individual needs of their clients, and the advent of alternatives to adoption.

The changing practice of social workers has also been a conditioning force on birth mothers' options and experiences of adoption. This is evident in the level of support birth mothers received throughout the adoption and subsequently. Before the 1980s, the role of adoption worker was simply to make arrangements for birth mothers' confinement in the hospital or Mother and Baby home, and to match the child with suitable adoptive parents. The service adoption workers offered in this period was clearly aligned with Wootton's (conceptualisation of social work practice i.e. *"acting as a 'middleman', mobilising, organising and coordinating the services of other professional colleagues, and by guiding people through the mass of legislation and policy that could affect them"* Wootton, 1959. cited in Wilson et al., 2008, p.53).

Adoption workers were found to be largely untrained but driven by their desire to carry out work in the name of the Church, which was also the primary focus of adoption agencies. Evidence suggests that the social workers may well have held the same views on illegitimacy and morality, in which case, it would be clear why adoption was seen as the best course of action for a young girl who had got herself pregnant. By the late 1960s, we see the practice of social workers moving from practice based on a 'generic' caseload approach to an 'individualised' case approach. For instance, it is clear from case records as we move through the latter quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; social workers became played an important role in supporting and counselling the birth mother as oppose to managing the mechanical aspects of adoption. In addition, by the 1980s social workers were driven by a different agenda

from those practicing earlier. By the 1980s, there is a social and moral emphasis on natural blood ties and parental responsibility and social workers were implicitly colluding with these values in counselling birth mothers. Birth mothers were now being supported in exploring their options and choices. Adoption was seen as the 'last option', whereas previously adoption was a more 'preferable option' to keeping the child. In this context, social workers played an important role in mediating changes moral agendas in to the choices offered to birth mothers. Further, by the 1980s fewer single birth mothers were stating financial, practical and material constraints as a motive for relinquishment. This may also be a consequence of social workers assisting birth mothers in exploring the option of self-support.

By the 1980s, the birth mothers who were relinquishing their children to adoption were an unusual minority, in the sense that they were choosing to have their children adopted rather than keeping them. Evidence suggests that in the majority of cases these were young birth mothers, birth mothers with other children already struggling financially, birth mothers with educational or career aspirations, or birth mothers who wanted the child to have the things they could not provide e.g. a two parent family, financial and material security. Evidence from interviews with adoption agency professionals' suggests that these birth mothers were battling against the stigma of adoption after the 1980s. This begs the question of what happened to the other single mothers who were having children outside of marriage. Presumably, others who found themselves in a similar situation to the birth mothers in this period had either opted for an abortion or choose to keep the child. This is further reinforced by rates of relinquishment by mothers of their children in more contemporary times. Evidence cited earlier shows that just 1% of unmarried mothers relinquished their children to adoption in 2008, compared to 20% in 1975 (ONS, 2000; ONS, 2008; ONS, 2011b) (see Figure 2.5, P.32). This suggests that increasing numbers of single mothers are choosing to keep their babies rather than relinquish them to adoption. Further, abortion statistics show that in the period 1971 – 2010, the numbers of single women opting for abortion increased by over 30% (ONS, 1997; DoH, 2011).

Some important points emerge from these discussions which contribute to understanding why, today, so few mothers relinquish their children to adoption. Firstly, the changing characteristics and socio-demographic identities of birth mothers

are important in understanding the choices available to birth mothers. Evidence shows that the way in which birth mothers have interpreted their options, choices and experiences of adoption has not only changed since the 1940s, but world-views have differed on the basis of ethnicity, marital status and class. Secondly, changes in wider moral assumptions relating to the gendered roles of women as housewives and as mothers which reflect ideals of femininity have changed. This is reflective of changing ideals of femininity used to define a woman's role and govern her actions and behaviours. For instance, pre-1970s birth mothers were making their choices in a context where women were judged by standards of sexual constraint before marriage, and after marriage, their role within the home. This is what made them 'respectable'. However, after the 1970s, ideals of femininity are found to be tied up in mothering discourses which assume that motherhood is a natural and essential part of femininity. It is in this context that single pregnant women make their choices. The evolution of adoption agencies' policies and practices is also a contributing factor to understanding why so few mothers relinquish their children to adoption. The changing nature of religious, moral, social, and legal factors govern the way birth mothers' experience the adoption process. For instance, options which were morally unviable 30 or 40 years ago are today realistic and more preferable to adoption e.g. keeping the child through self-support. Changes in the way adoption agencies operate, the values informing their practice and missions, the nature of the work they undertake provided important insights in to how religious, moral and legal factors have been mediated in to the lives and choices of birth mothers. It is changes in these underlying factors which have shaped the choices adoption agencies have offered to birth mothers. For instance, the option of self-support was not explored with birth mothers in the 1950s, since adoption was seen to be morally the right thing to do. Finally, changes in the practice of social workers would have profoundly impacted on the choices offered to birth mothers. Social workers' have been the face of the adoption agency. They have played an important role in putting in to practice the policies of the agency. It is in this context that they became a conditioning influence on birth mothers' choices and experiences of adoption. The personal and professional judgments of these workers are also important in shaping the choices available to birth mother. For instance, findings show that from the 1980s social workers practiced on the belief that adoption was the 'last option', whereas previously adoption was a more 'preferable option' to keeping the child. The impact of the four factors above should not be viewed in

isolation from one another, since they are all equally aggregating factors in explaining why so few single mothers relinquish their children to adoption today.

### **8.3 Implications for policy and practice**

These findings have important implications for adoption policy and practice, beginning with the initiation of contact between birth mothers and their adopted offspring. Legal developments in the 1970s granted adopted adults the right to access birth records counselling and consequently the right to initiate contact with their birth mothers. Legally, birth mothers were given the right to initiate contact much later (under the Adoption and Children Act, 2002). However as noted earlier, findings have shown that the needs of the birth mother were recognised far sooner by adoption agencies than in legislation.

It is important to consider the implications of the changing nature of initiating and maintaining contact in adoption for birth records counselling today. Changes in attitudes towards contact in adoption have become a prominent feature in birth mothers' experiences of adoption since the 1970s. Although attitudes towards initiating and maintaining contact have evolved in the latter quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and are responsible for changes in birth mothers' changing experiences, they have also had implications for those birth mothers who relinquished prior to the 1970s. Discussions from the previous chapter have shown that the changing attitudes to initiating and maintaining contact have impacted birth mothers in different ways, based on when they relinquished their children. These are summarised below.

- Relinquishing prior to the mid-1970s under a closed model of adoption with some contact with adoptive parents prior to the adoption placement, none thereafter. With changes in the opening up of birth records for adopted adults, these birth mothers were faced with the prospect of being traced. They had relinquished with the expectation of a permanent severance of the mother-child bond.
- Relinquishing between mid-1970s – 1980s: these birth mothers were aware of the fact that they may be traced at a later stage by the child.

- Relinquishing after the 1980s: this group of birth mothers' experiences are distinct from the two other groups in having the option of maintaining contact with the child after the adoption order had been completed.

Each of these groups has relinquished under different social, moral, religious, legal and policy contexts. An understanding of these changing contexts is important for those who deliver birth records counselling. These sentiments were also reflected by agency practitioners who attended either the ESRC Knowledge Transfer event or one of the dissemination events held in collaboration with the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (see pp.115 -116). Many of those who attended these events have working knowledge of how contexts have changed over time, some through first-hand knowledge (i.e. have lived through and witnessed the changes), and others through their knowledge of working with archival materials when delivering birth records counselling. Many of these social workers are in the latter stages of their career and soon will be retiring. What we are seeing now is a new generation of social workers who do not have first-hand knowledge or even working knowledge of these changes. It seems that there is a gap in training provisions for this group, as many social work degrees do not cover this specialised field. Many of the new social workers tasked with the responsibilities of delivering birth records counselling have not received specialized training, most learning on the job. It seems that there is a real need to provide specialised training for newly qualified social workers, specific to understanding the changing contexts in which women have relinquished their children to adoption, especially since a whole generation of social workers (with specialised knowledge of working with birth mothers relinquishing between 1950 and 1975) are nearing retirement age.

Findings from this PhD provide a model by which changes in contexts and birth mothers' experiences and motives can be understood. These findings can be used to provide newly qualified social workers with detailed knowledge of how changing contexts have influenced birth mothers' experiences and motives for adoption. There is significant importance for adoption support workers to understand the context in which mothers relinquished their children, especially in providing post-adoption support services for birth mothers and birth records counselling for adopted adults. Knowledge generated by this PhD will be especially useful for social workers helping



birth mothers understand the deeper reasons for the choices that they made in deciding to relinquish their children, and helping adopted adults in understanding the choices their birth mothers were presented with, and the wider context in which their adoption took place. For example, the knowledge generated in understanding the limited choices birth mothers had before the 1980s will be especially important in helping birth mothers understand the feelings of guilt (Bouchier, Lambert, and Triseliotis, 1991) generated by the act of relinquishing their children to adoption.

#### **8.4 Closing comments**

This PhD has built on previous research carried out by authors such as Howe, Sawbridge and Hinnings (1992), Elliot (2005), Wells (1994), Hughes and Logan (1993) and others (Kelly, 1999; Triseliotis and Hall, 1971; Raynor, 1971; Pannor, Baran and Sorosky, 1978; Bouchier, Lambert & Triseliotis, 1991) to understand changes in birth mothers' reasons and experiences of adoption. In empirically evidencing the reasons for changes in birth mothers' options, motives and experiences of adoption throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this thesis has made an incremental contribution to knowledge. This thesis has made important contributions to understanding the constraints posed by birth mothers' gendered and socio-economic identities on their options and motives for adoption. This study also provides a theoretical framework to understand the evolution of child adoption in terms of historic periods, characterised by differing social, moral, religious and legal contexts. This theoretical framework (depicted in Figure 4.1, p110 and 4.2, p.113) has been important in developing a holistic understanding of how different factors came together in the lives, choices and experiences of birth mothers, through the mediating influence of adoption agencies policies and practices. The theoretical framework has been important in clarifying the role of adoption agencies and adoption social workers in shaping the choices and options available to birth mothers. In doing so, it has been possible to map and evidence the influence of changing ideological and professional discourses, changes in agency religious affiliations and moral agendas, and changes in the external policy environment on birth mothers' options and experiences of adoption. Findings show that these factors have collectively been responsible for birth mothers' changing experiences and motives for adoption.

The main limitation of this thesis stems from the lack of evidence from birth mothers themselves. As a result, it has not been possible to validate the findings from this source of direct evidence. It is important to note that findings relating to birth mothers' changing motives and experiences of adoption are largely derived from documentation written by adoption or social workers at the time. Therefore, birth mothers' motives and experiences of adoption are examined and presented through the prism of the adoption agency, which has acted as the instrument of adoption policy, the agents of the adoption process and the witness of shifts and changes in the policy environment. It would be important for future research to verify these findings with relinquishing birth mothers. In addition, a lack of documentary evidence prior to 1944 has meant that sources from the beginnings of the statutory adoption service in 1926 could not be used. Therefore, it has not been possible to make inferences about birth mothers' motives and experiences of adoption prior to this date.

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# Appendices

## **Appendix 1: Composition and functions of Family Care's General Committee (From 1947 – 1962)**

### III- General Committee

6. The General Committee, eligible for re-election, shall consist of: -

- (a) Not more than 20 subscribing members to be elected annually at a General Meeting of subscribers.
- (b) Two representatives appointed by the Southwell Diocesan Board of Moral Welfare, one of whom shall be the organising secretary
- (c) Not more than five persons co-opted annually by Generally Committee.
- (d) Together with the President, the Vice – Presidents, Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer, Chaplains and Medical Advisors.

7. The functions of the General Committee shall include the following:-

- (a) To meet quarterly
- (b) To decide all matters of General Policy
- (c) To appoint Honorary Advisors and Trustees
- (d) To collect and expend funds in a manner which they shall consider beneficial and to invest in the names of the Trustees any part of such funds.
- (e) To acquire, sell, improve, or otherwise deal with any real of personal property with concurrence of the Trustees.
- (f) To receive reports from the Superintendents and Wardens
- (g) To make and from time to time repeal or alter bye-laws for the management of the charity and the affairs thereof and as to the conduct of business by the Committee or any Sub –Committee provided that the same shall not be inconsistent with these regulations or any regulations for the time being in force governing the affairs of the Charity.
- (h) To fill any vacancy caused by death or resignation of any member of the Committee.

Adapted from: The Report of Bishop's Commission on the Work of Moral Welfare in the Diocese of Southwell (Watson, 1962, p.120)

## **Appendix 2: Composition and functions of Family Care's Executive Committee (From 1947 – 1962)**

### IV – Executive Committee

8. An executive committee shall be elected annually by the General Committee and shall consist of: - The Chairman; Secretary; Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer of the General Committee, together from six members to be elected from the General Committee. The Executive Committee shall meet twice monthly.

9. The functions of the Executive Committee shall include the following:

- (a) To ensure that the policy outlined by the General Committee is duly carried out.
- (b) To authorise expenditure of money for routine purposes.
- (c) To appoint or discharge workers with the approval of the General Committee and to the knowledge of the Southwell Diocesan Board of Moral Welfare and to fix the salaried of Workers.
- (d) To consider detailed reports from the Superintendents and Wardens.

Adapted from: The Report of Bishop's Commission on the Work of Moral Welfare in the Diocese of Southwell (Watson, 1962, 120 - 121)

## Appendix 3: Coding Framework for Quantitative and Qualitative data

### 3.1. Quantitative Coding Framework

Source: Adoption case files

#### Age:

- Under 16
- 16 – 19
- 19 – 21
- 21 – 5
- 26 – 30
- 31 – 35
- 36 – 40
- 41 – 45
- 45 +

#### Religious Affiliation

- Baptist
- CoE
- Christian Scientist
- Roman Catholic
- Non Conformist
- Protestant
- Presbyterian
- Methodist
- Elim Church Incorporated
- Wesleyan
- Congregationists
- Jehovah Witness
- No Info

#### Ethnicity

- White – English
- White – Irish
- White – Welsh
- White – Scottish
- White - European
- Asian
- Black
- Dual Heritage
- No info

#### Marital Status

- Married
- Single
- Widowed
- Separated – living with husband/wife
- Separated – not living with husband/wife
- Divorced
- With partner
- No Info

**Occupation**

- I - Professional etc occupations
- II - Managerial and technical occupations
- III - N Skilled non-manual occupations
- III - M Skilled manual occupations
- IV - Partly-skilled occupations
- V - Unskilled occupations
- VI - Armed forces

**Tenure (PI)**

- No of rooms
- If info code as below

**Tenure (PII and III)**

- Living with parents
- Own home
- With Husband/ Marital Home
- With relatives
- In Lodgings
- With Friends
- No Info

**Type of School**

- Secondary Modern
- Grammar
- Technical
- Other
- Comprehensive
- Private
- Grant Maintained
- No info

**Age left School**

- under 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 16+

**Further qualifications**

- Yes
- No
- No information

**Highest Held Qualification**

- CSE's
- O' Levels
- A' Levels
- Work based training
- Post A' level



**How many children adopted/how many children?**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6+
- Not applicable/ no info

**No of References**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6+
- Not applicable/ no info

**Referees**

- Dr
- Friends/neighbour
- Relative
- Employer
- Other professional – solicitor, teacher
- Other

**Correspondence**

- Yes
- No
- No Info

**Date Applied for Adoption**

Code as per year

**Date Placement Made**

Code as per year

**Date of Adoption Order**

Code as per year

## 3.2. Qualitative Data Coding

### Sources:

Family Care's Adoption Panel Meeting Minutes  
Annual Reports  
Social Worker Case Notes  
Correspondence Documents

### Key:

BM – Birth Mother  
AP – Adoptive Parents  
FC – Family Care

### Method

All the data was first coded according to which research question it applied to.

1. How have changing religious, moral, social and policy environments impacted on adoption policy and practice? And how has changing adoption policy and practice shaped birth mothers' experiences of adoption?
2. How and why have birth mothers characteristics, motives for relinquishment and their role in the adoption process changed over time?
3. How have attitudes towards initiating or maintaining contact between birth parents and their natural children evolved and what are the implications for birth records counselling today?

The data were first broken down by which research question the data applied to and then coded.

### 1. Context

- ★ Social
- ★ Legal
- ★ Professional
- ★ Moral
- ★ National
- ★ Medical

### 1. Policy and practice

Influenced by:

- ★ Social factors:
  - ▲ ↑ in babies offered for adoption
  - ▲ ↓ in white babies offered for adoption
  - ▲ ↑ no of girls being offered 4 adoption
  - ▲ ↑ no of boys waiting for adoption
  - ▲ ↑ no of waiting harder to place children
  - ▲ ↓ referrals from hospitals
  - ▲ ↑ AP applications (baby)
  - ▲ ↑ AP applications (non baby)
  - ▲ ↓ AP applications
  - ▲ ↑ number of waiting adopters (approved)
  - ▲ ↓ AP enquiries

- ⤴ Attitudes to unmarried mothers
- ⤴ Attitudes to adoption
- ⤴ Genetic transference of mental illnesses
- ⤴ Illegitimate children seen as a dilemma
- ⤴ ↑ no of older 'looked after children'
- ⤴ Looked after children ↑ awareness
- ⤴ EM children ↑ awareness
- ⤴ City hospital referring BM's to FC
  
- ★ Legal factors:
  - ⤴ 1967 Abortion Act
  - ⤴ 1975 Children Act
    - Pressure Groups
    - Adoption and Guardianship reform Organisation
    - FC Input
    - Min age adopters 21
    - Birth Records Access
    - BM consent before 6 wks
  - ⤴ 1976 Adoption Act
  - ⤴ Adoption Regulations (1983)
    - Panel membership
    - Min of 3 years
    - Chair no reappointment
    - Chairman appointed by SDMWC and Bishop
  
  - ⤴ Private adoptions illegal
  
- ★ Professional factors:
  - ⤴ Legislative changes (see Legal factors above)
  - ⤴ Practice changes (see Changes in FC policy and practice)
  - ⤴ Influence of moral factors
  - ⤴ Introduction of SS dept
  - ⤴ Relationship with SS dept
  
- ★ Moral factors
  - ⤴ Standards/morality
  - ⤴ Role of CoE Adoption society
    - FC 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of illegitimate births in Nott
  - ⤴ role of moral welfare work
    - service for unmarried mothers and women who have had extra marital affairs
    - A advisory service
    - Moral education
    - Prevention of 2<sup>nd</sup> illegitimate child
  - ⤴ Adoption Education within schools

Children for adoption:

- ★ Only white children accepted
- ★ EM children
  - ⤴ Accepted
  - ⤴ Not accepted
- ★ Mixed heritage children:
  - ⤴ Accepted
  - ⤴ Not accepted
- ★ Physical/mental disability –
  - ⤴ Referred to Barnardo's or Children's society
  - ⤴ Accepted
  - ⤴ Not accepted

- ★ Age of child
- ★ Baby Adoptions
- ★ Older children & Looked after children
  - ▲ Recognition by professionals
  - ▲ Recognition by agencies
  - ▲ Recognition by media
  - ▲ Recognition by society
  - ▲ FC Publicity campaign
  - ▲ MW publicity campaign
- ★ Baptised RC children not accepted
- ★ Children syphilis test
- ★ Terminology – ‘perfect child’

#### Birth Parent Policy and Practice:

- ★ Divorced BM illegitimate child not accepted – Morality
- ★ Divorced BM illegitimate child accepted
- ★ Married BM with illegitimate child not accepted (for some getting around legitimate children not being accepted)
- ★ BM 2nd or more illegitimate child not accepted – linked with morality and teachings about responsibility
- ★ BM 2nd or more illegitimate child accepted (as an exception to the rule)
- ★ Legitimate children not accepted
- ★ Widowed BM illegitimate child not accepted
- ★ Child of BM or BM family with mental disability not accepted (no placement b4 18months)
- ★ Child of BM or BM family with mental disability not accepted
- ★ Acceptance of babies from American servicemen
- ★ Child of couples who refused to break their cohabitation
- ★ Counselling of alternative to adoption
- ★ NO Info on PF child not accepted
- ★ Not much info on PF children being accepted
- ★ Not accepting morally abandoned children
- ★ Mothers U16 policy: if BM refuses consent, parents responsible for child.
- ★ Acceptance of RC BM's (With consent to CoE upbringing)
- ★ Irrevocable consent before 6 weeks – 1975 Act freeing
- ★ Not place trans racially for BP wishes – BIC

#### Adoptive Parent Policy and Practice

- ★ Adopters religious affiliation
- ★ Full membership
- ★ Partial membership
- ★ No affiliation
- ★ No secular affiliation
- ★ Previously divorced adoptive parents not accepted
- ★ Previously divorced adoptive parents accepted – without Bishops consent
- ★ Evidence of sterility or infertility for AP's
- ★ Single AP's rejected – BIC
- ★ Same sex AP's rejected
  - ▲ Moral
  - ▲ Best Interests of the Child
- ★ AP references:
- ★ Minister of church attended
  - ▲ Personal
  - ▲ Professional
  - ▲ medical
- ★ Confidentiality of adopters preserved
- ★ AP with birth children not accepted.
- ★ AP with birth children accepted (as an exception to the rule)
- ★ 40+ AP's rejected

- ★ 38+ AP's rejected
- ★ Minimum age of adopters 21
- ★ Under 38 AP's considered for baby
- ★ Baptist AP's accepted
- ★ Acceptance of RC AP's
- ★ Rejection of Mormon AP's
- ★ Newly married not accepted – min 2 years
- ★ AP's not accepted – personality traits
- ★ AP's not accepted – family backgrounds
- ★ AP's not accepted – not suitable to adopt child: finance, security, immaturity, unable to meet needs of adopted children
- ★ Reason for declining AP applications stated
- ★ Geographical factors
  - ▲ AP Applications not in diocese not accepted
  - ▲ AP applications outside dioceses accepted. Prompted by:
    - Other MW agencies closing
    - Other areas LA waiting lists closing
    - Other areas VA waiting lists closing
  - ▲ AP 40 mile radius from Lincs – only for ARE children
  - ▲ AP's outside the border considered for special needs children
- ★ Second applications
  - ▲ Small written application, with original application SW written comments
  - ▲ Medical every 2 yrs
- ★ Open and closing of adoptive parent waiting lists:
  - ▲ Opening of AP lists
  - ▲ Closing of AP lists
  - ▲ restrictions on types of applications accepted:
    - Already have a child (biological or adoption- exception 2<sup>nd</sup> application\_
    - 3<sup>rd</sup> or over application
    - married 10 yrs
    - Either AP 40+
- ★ FC using LA adopters – preserving policy about placing with adopters from a different faith

#### Placing Policy:

- ★ Pre placement meeting between BP and AP's
- ★ Placement proposals: (SW Report to the panel)
- ★ BM and child discussed – whether adoption was in child's best interests
- ★ No of couples considered – SW recommendation of a couple
- ★ matching BP's wishes with AP's
  - ▲ Religious upbringing
  - ▲ Cultural upbringing
  - ▲ 2 parents (heterosexual couple)
  - ▲ Financially secure AP's
  - ▲ Emotionally secure AP's/stability of marriage
  - ▲ first time parents
  - ▲ Lots of Grandparent contact
  - ▲ Other children
  - ▲ Mature Family
- ★ Matching of similar interests
- ★ Matching of cultural/racial backgrounds
- ★ Matching of physical build and characteristics
- ★ Matching of personalities
- ★ Matching: consideration of geographical factors
  
- ★ Location of handover:
  - ▲ Train station
  - ▲ Hospital
  - ▲ Foster home

- ▲ Family Care Offices
- ★ Adoption Panel Membership
  - ▲ Medical
  - ▲ Legal
  - ▲ SS representative
  - ▲ Probation service
  - ▲ Educationalist
  - ▲ Chairman – parish priest
  - ▲ Adoptive parent
  - ▲ EM SW

#### Decision making

- ★ Role of adoption committee in adoption decision making:
  - Minimal
  - No decision making
- ★ Delegation of adoption decisions from Management committee to Adoption panel
- ★ Role of SW's in adoption decision making:
  - Minimal
  - No decision making
- ★ Decision making hierarchy:
  - Board (Bishop)
  - ↓
  - Executive Committee
  - ↓
  - Adoption Panel
  - ↓
  - Chair overall decision maker

#### Changes in FC policy and practice:

- ★ Intro of AP's contribution to cost of adoption procedure
- ★ Adoption placements at 10 days
- ★ Beginning of use of foster parents in between placements
- ★ Adoption for illegitimate child of married couples
- ★ Pre adoption order contact between BM and AP's
- ★ Religious faith of adopters
- ★ Cases of paternity denied- referred till paternity established
- ★ Minimal long term foster care arrangements
- ★ Changes to written procedures
- ★ Changes to written constitution
- ★ Development of Post adoption services
- ★ Types of children being offered for adoption
- ★ BP Contact orders
- ★ ↑ adoption work with AP's

#### FC relationship with EM clients

- ★ ↑ number of WI foster carers for long term foster care
- ★ West Indian community & FC support
- ★ ↓ no of WI BM's
- ★ No Indian & Pakistani BMs
- ★ Problems in communication with Asian communities

#### FC relationship with:

- ★ Derby Adoption agency
- ★ Inter agency adoptions:
- ★ Placing agency:

- ★ Social services
- ★ FC using SS adopters
- ★ FC placing ARE difficult to place children
- ★ SS using FC AP's for babies FC filling in the Gaps of SS provision – formalisation
- ★ Development of post adoption services
- ★ City hospital – large referrer of BM's
- Church: See decision making above

#### Other

- ★ Informal contact between BP and AP not encouraged.
- ★ Decisions being made in the best interests of the child: PF family to adopt child – not in BIC
- ★ Evidence of private adoption
- ★ Confidentiality policy
- ★ Comparison FC policies with Derby Dioceses Adoption Agency:
- ★ BM references
- ★ AP practicing members of church
- ★ AP reference from the Church
- ★ The role of adoption staff – change in using separate SW for BM & AP's
- ★ Shortage of facilities/ accommodation in M and B homes
- ★ The role of FC once SS departments had been established
- ★ Removal of child from AP's
- ★ Consortium of VAA
- ★ Practice info exchange
- ★ Adopting common procedures
- ★ Role of Adoption resource exchange
- ★ Publicity for AP's:
- ★ Black adopters for Black children
- ★ Special needs children
- ★ White sibling groups
- ★ Children over 5
- ★ Children with disabilities
- ★ Development of post adoption services (see contact and PAS coding below)

#### 2. How and why have birth mothers characteristics, motives for relinquishment and their role in the adoption process changed over time?

- ★ Parental decision
- ★ Rape
- ★ Incest
- ★ Not ready to be a mother
- ★ Career
- ★ Studying
- ★ Extra marital affair (baby or husband)
- ★ Best interests of child
- ★ Secure home
- ★ Unmarried motherhood
- ★ 2 parent family
- ★ Lack of income
- ★ No Parental support
- ★ Parental pressure
- ★ Pressure From PF
- ★ Pressure from PF Family
- ★ PF Violent
- ★ Other children
- ★ Can't cope
- ★ Mental illness
- ★ Special needs child
- ★ Age of BP's- too young or too old
- ★ Bp's health

- ★ Number of factors
- ★ No Adequate housing/BM unable to keep child at home (parents home)
- ★ BP Relationship problems
- ★ Neglect of BM other children
- ★ Unplanned pregnancy
- ★ No maternal bond
- ★ No possibility of marriage

#### BM Experience

- ★ Illegitimate child
- ★ Legitimate child
- ★ BM One night stand
- ★ BM in relationship – broken down
- ★ BM in relationship
- ★ Shame
- ★ Stigma
- ★ Secrecy
- ★ Grief
- ★ Dirty
- ★ Degraded
- ★ Isolation
- ★ Concealed pregnancy
- ★ Acceptance of own situation and adoption
- ★ Non acceptance of own situation and adoption
- ★ Divorced BM
- ★ EM BM

#### BM support:

- ★ Adoption worker
- ★ Immediate Family
- ★ Extended family
- ★ Friends
- ★ Partner

#### Other BM Experience:

- ★ BM Mental illness
- ★ Want to keep child
- ★ Reclaimed child
- ★ Flashbacks of birth and separation from child
- ★ Blocking out experience of adoption
- ★ Knowledge of adopters
- ★ BM meeting with AP's (pre placement)
- ★ Contact with child at foster home
- ★ Lack of financial security
- ★ BM dependant on parents
- ★ Exploration of alternatives to adoption
- ★ WC BM's later on in pregnancy
- ★ Poverty

#### BM Role in the Adoption Process:

- ★ Consent Issues
- ★ Court procedure
- ★ Agency procedure (see Agency procedure BP coding above)
- ★ Handover of child
- ★ BM's contact with child up until placement with AP
- ★ None



- ★ Minimal (in hospital)
- ★ A lot (in hospital and foster home)
- ★ UP until consent
- ★ Contact after adoption (with FC) (see Contact coding below)
- ★ BM to stay in hospital and look after child for 10 days
- ★ Direct placement from hospital (10 days)
- ★ Short term foster care for child
- ★ 6 week rule of consent
- ★ GAL Visit

3. How have attitudes towards initiating or maintaining contact between birth parents and their natural children evolved and what are the implications for birth records counselling today?

#### Contact and post adoption services

- ★ BP Contact with AP
- ★ Letter
- ★ Photo
- ★ Regular
- ★ One off (after placement)

#### AP Contact with BP:

- ★ Direct contact
- ★ Indirect contact
- ★ Letter
- ★ Photo
- ★ Regular
- ★ One off (after placement)
- ★ Letterbox contact
- ★ Knowing of origins
- ★ Feelings towards BM
- ★ Details about child
- ★ Details about self

#### After adoption contact (FC with BM and vice versa):

- ★ Letter
- ★ Photo
- ★ Regular
- ★ One off

#### Negotiation of contact

- ★ Letterbox contact
- ★ Request of info about child
- ★ Details about self
- ★ Feelings about child
- ★ Reflections on decision to relinquish
- ★ Also see coding for BM experience

- ★ Development of Post adoption services
- ★ Types of children being offered for adoption
- ★ BP Contact orders
- ★ ↑ adoption work with AP's
- ★ Interagency placing agency – supporting agency
- ★ BRC
- ★ Reunions
- ★ Support groups

SW and Adoption Panel reflections:

- ★ Illegitimate pregnancy
- ★ PF info
- ★ BM parental involvement
- ★ BM Experience
- ★ Mixed heritage children
- ★ 2ce fallen women
- ★ Relationship with WI communities
- ★ Adoption trends
- ★ Types of children being accepted for adoptions

## Appendix 4: Adoption Agency Packs

### 4.1 Introductory email sent to 39 adoption agencies

Dear Sir/ Madam

I am a PHD student at Nottingham Trent University. I am currently working on a research project entitled "The birth parent and the evolution of adoption practice since 1926" and is in collaboration with Southwell Diocesan Council for Family Care. Family Care has been a voluntary sector adoption agency since the advent of legal adoption in England in 1926. As a partner with the Church of England Diocese of Southwell, Family Care provides a full range of adoption services for the whole of Nottinghamshire. This project arose from an expressed need of Family Care, to catalogue and analyse its adoption records so as to improve the quality of its post-adoption support services. It presents a unique opportunity to catalogue and examine adoption records dating from the agency's foundation and to assist today's service users to understand the context in which their adoptions took place

This project will address questions central to the historic purpose and current relevance of adoption. How have parents reached decisions about the adoption of their children, what has been their role in the adoption process and how have answers varied historically? How have changing socio-economic, legal, professional, religious and moral factors influenced decision-making and the policy and practice of adoption agencies? How have attitudes towards initiating or maintaining contact between birth parents and their natural children evolved and what are the implications for adoption support and birth records counselling today? I am aiming to use a combination of interviews (with service users and voluntary agency staff) and documentary analysis to investigate these questions further.

The research is not limited to Family Care, since the extent to which its policies and practices are typical of voluntary sector adoption agencies more generally will be tested by comparison with other adoption agencies of similar longevity. Adoption records and service user interviews will reveal the social characteristics and circumstances of birth parents and their children, and the reasons birth parents relinquished their children for adoption. How did they decide which agency to approach? How were parental rights transferred? What was the role of the adoption service in this process? Were birth parents involved in the subsequent placement of their children? Was contact maintained between birth parents, their adopted children and the adoption service? How have answers to these questions varied historically?

Agency records and staff interviews on the other hand will offer insights into the principles and policies that have governed agency practice. How have these varied historically? How have these variations reflected changes in, for instance, the influence of church affiliation, national child-care policy, professional values and standards in social work, or family norms and values? And how far has Family Care has been representative of adoption agencies generally?

I am sending this email to give you some background information on the project and to introduce myself, as I may be contacting you in the near future to request the help of your organisation. I do appreciate that it is a very busy time of year for your agency with the new legislation coming into effect, and the increased workload on your staff. However, I would greatly appreciate it if you were able to provide me with some information as currently I am working on drawing up a list of compatible voluntary agencies and would appreciate it if you could supply me with the following information:

- The date when your adoption agency was established, and
- Whether or not your agency is affiliated to a faith or church denomination.

Thank you for taking the time to read this email, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions or queries. I look forward to your reply.

Kind Regards

#### 4.2: Letter sent to the six selected adoption agencies

Jatinder Rai  
Graduate School for Business Law  
and Social Sciences.  
Nottingham Trent University,  
Burton Street,  
Nottingham,  
NG1 4BU

Date:

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a PhD student at Nottingham Trent University and have contacted you previously via email to request your help for my research project. Just to remind you of the work I am doing, I am currently working on a research project entitled "The birth parent and the evolution of adoption policy and practice in England since 1926" in partnership Family Care in Nottingham.

This piece of research is not limited to Family Care, since the extent to which its policies and practices are typical of voluntary sector adoption agencies more generally will be tested by comparison with 6 other adoption agencies of similar longevity. The six agencies which I have selected for this part of the research have been deliberately selected from different religious affiliations as this piece of research will also attempt to discover how adoption agencies have been shaped by allegiance to different Christian churches.

I would be grateful if you would consider taking part in this piece of research as I feel input from your organisation would be valuable. If you do agree to be involved, I would require your co-operation for two tasks. Firstly, I would require an interview from yourself or someone else who is able to talk about adoption policy and practice within your organisation. The types of issues I would like to address in the interview include: the changing nature of adoption policy and practice within your organisation, the role of the birth mother in the adoption process, the decision making process when deciding which child to place with which adoptive parents and finally, I would like also to address issues around contact with birth parents after the adoption order has been approved. Secondly, I would require access to any public records that you hold (e.g. annual reports). Your help would enable me both to find out how far Family Care has been typical of voluntary sector adoption agencies and to compare agencies with different Christian denominational backgrounds.

I would be extremely grateful if you would agree to take part in this research as I believe it would make an important and original contribution to knowledge in the field of adoption. For information purposes I have also enclosed a leaflet with a more detailed explanation of the project. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions or queries. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

Jatinder Rai

### 4.3. Project Leaflet

**Interviews with staff** will reinforce data from agency records. The current directors of all participating agencies will be interviewed, together with, in the case of Family Care, retired directors, adoption panel chairs and other current and past professional staff. This sample will span 40 years of practice.

Themes that will be explored with staff will include: changing reasons for children being placed for adoption; changing attitudes towards birth parents and their role in the adoption process; impact of national child care policy and practice; continuing or dwindling importance of religious affiliation; the changing purpose of adoption generally and the changing relationship between the agency and any church to which it has been affiliated. How has this relationship affected policy and practice?

**Interviews with service users** will be undertaken, including birth parents, adult adoptees and adopters, to qualify and enrich data on the adoption process revealed in the records.

The interviews will explore the following themes: reasons for entering the adoption process; experience of the adoption process; personal circumstances at the time of the adoption; significance of life style and beliefs; post-adoption experience and support; and current views on adoption.

#### CONTACT DETAILS:

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## THE BIRTH PARENT AND THE EVOLUTION OF ADOPTION POLICY AND PRACTICE IN ENGLAND SINCE 1926

In partnership with



### Project Rationale

This project arose from an expressed need of Family Care, to catalogue and analyse its adoption records so as to improve the quality of its post-adoption support services. It presents a unique opportunity to catalogue and examine adoption records dating from the agency's foundation and to assist today's service users to understand the context in which their adoptions took place.

This project will shed light on how far reforms in adoption address historical ambiguities about the purpose of adoption and who the primary beneficiary is meant to be: the child, the adopters, or the birth parents. The project will explore how far the service has varied its focus over time

Moreover, if adoption is a service for all three parties, can it really serve all in equal measure? We believe that our historical survey will make an important contribution to the current debate about the nature, purpose and desirability of child adoption as an instrument of family policy.



### Research Questions

This project will address questions central to the historic purpose and current relevance of adoption.

Some of the questions that I intend to answer include:

- How have parents reached decisions about the adoption of their children, what has been their role in the adoption process and how answers have varied historically?
- How have changing socio-economic, legal, professional, religious and moral factors influenced decision-making and the policy and practice of adoption agencies?
- And finally, how have attitudes towards initiating or maintaining contact between birth parents and their natural children evolved and what are the implications for adoption support and birth records counselling today?

### Research Methods

I am aiming to use a combination of interviews and documentary analysis to investigate the research questions further. I will investigate the research questions using the following methods:

**Agency records**, such as annual reports and other official documents of Family Care, will be studied for what they reveal about agency policy and practice.

In order to gauge how far Family Care is typical of adoption agencies, comparison with practice in other agencies of similar longevity in England and Wales will be sought. Six voluntary sector agencies will be chosen to be indicative of the main traditions in adoption work, both denominational and unaffiliated.

**Adoption records** from the Family Care archive from 1926 to the present will be investigated. The focus will be on records of adopted children and their birth parents, but will also include the minutes of adoption panel meetings in order to understand the role of birth parents in the placing of their children.

These records will yield quantitative data on birth parents, such as age, locality, occupation, marital status and religion, and the age and gender of children; and qualitative data on the reasons children were offered up for adoption, and the process involved in placing children.



#### **4.4: Interview Questions for Adoption Agency Professionals**

Primary focus of interviews: to investigate whether Family Care is typical of other agencies:

- How long has your agency been running?
- What is the main focus of your organisation?
- Could you tell me a bit about the scope of work within your organisation?
- Are you still largely an adoption agency?
- In what ways has the practice within your agency changed over the years?
- Could you tell me a bit about how public policy has affected the running of your agency?
- Can you pinpoint any other factors that may have led to changes within your agency?
- Could you please tell me why you think children were placed for adoption, and how has this varied historically?
- What type of people (BP) relinquished their children, and how has this changed historically?
- How different is your BP cliental to that of Family Care (please see attached sheet)
- What is the importance of your agency being affiliated to a faith?  
(or if now independent – why the agency felt it important to be non-aligned now?)
- In your view, what were the main reasons for adoption and how has this changed historically?
- What were the attitudes toward BP's, and how has this changed historically?
- What has been the impact of key pieces of legislation on your organisation?
- Does your organisation provide services for tracing origins?
- In your views, why do you think tracing origins has become important?
- How has after adoption support services developed within your organisation.

#### **Annual Reports**

Annual Reports and any other public material will be looked at and analysed. The purpose of this is to see if FC is typical of other agencies – to gain information on the agencies broad policy strategy and client base.

## Appendix 4.5: Summary of Documentary Analysis Pilot Study

### BIRTH MOTHER

- AGE: 4 in 5 under the age of 25
- Religious Affiliation: 9/10 affiliated to C of E
- Ethnicity: 100% White
- Marital Status:
  - 8/10 single
  - 1/10 separated
  
- Occupation:
  - More likely to be in lower manual occupations
  - 3/10 Other (Student, Housewives)

### BIRTH FATHER:

- AGE: 7 in 10 under the age of 25  
1 in 10 over the age of 40
- Religious Affiliation: All affiliated to Christianity
- Ethnicity: 90% White  
Evidence of other ethnic groups (Blacks and Europeans -10%)
- Marital Status: Largely single (64%) but higher representation of married/separated BF's than BM's).
- Occupation:
  - 4/5 in skilled trades occupations
  - Others evenly distributed amongst other SOC



## Appendix 5: Adoption Agency questionnaire

This questionnaire is based from Sider and Unruh's (2004) typology of faith based organisations. The purpose of this questionnaire is to determine whether your adoption agency can be attributed to a faith based agency, and if so has this varied historically.

- 1) To what extent is religious language used to describe the agencies mission and purpose? And how has this varied historically?
- 2) To what extent is a religious foundation still acknowledged as a guiding force in the agencies activities? And how has this varied historically?
- 3) What is the strength of any affiliation to a parent religious body, e.g. Church of England? To what extent does this amount to accountability for policy decisions? How has this varied historically?
- 4) To what extent are key personnel required to belong to a particular faith tradition? How has this varied historically?

Key personnel:

- a) Members of board of trustees
  - b) Members of adoption panels
  - c) Staff, both senior and junior
  - d) Service users, especially adoptive parents
  - e) Similarly, to what extent are influential positions reserved for key figures from the faith tradition, e.g. bishop, clergy. How has this varied historically?
- 5) To what extent does the agency derive support in money, volunteers and in kind donations from a faith community? E.g. Local Churches. How has this varied historically?
  - 6) To what extent are religious practices – prayer, worship, festivals – integrated into the life of the agency? How has this varied historically?
  - 7) To what extent will service users encounter religious artefacts – crosses, statues, pictures of religious figures or events – through their association with the agency? How has this varied historically?

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Organisation :** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 6: ADOPTION AGENCY CLASSIFICATIONS (BASED ON SIDER AND UNRAH'S TYPOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS)

	<b>Family Care</b>	<b>Agency 1 (CoE)</b>	<b>Agency 2 (CoE)</b>	<b>Agency 3 (Independent)</b>	<b>Agency 4 (Independent)</b>	<b>Agency 5 (Catholic)</b>	<b>Agency 6 (Catholic)</b>
<b>Mission Statement</b>	No explicit reference to religion in mission statement of the partnership or the secular partner, but religion may be explicit in the mission of faith partners.	No explicit reference to religion in mission statement of the partnership or the secular partner, but religion may be explicit in the mission of faith partners.	No explicit reference to religion in mission statement of the partnership or the secular partner, but religion may be explicit in the mission of faith partners.	No religious content	No religious content	Includes explicitly religious references	Includes explicitly religious references
<b>Founding</b>	May have historic tie to religious group, but connection is no longer strong.	May have historic tie to religious group, but connection is no longer strong.	May have historic tie to religious group, but connection is no longer strong.	May have historic tie to religious group, but connection is no longer strong.	May have historic tie to religious group, but connection is no longer strong.	By religious group of for religious purpose	By religious group of for religious purpose
<b>Affiliation with external religious entity</b>	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	No	No	Often	Often
<b>Selection of controlling board</b>	Board might have been explicitly religious at one time but is now selected with little or no consideration of members' faith	Some but not all board members may be required or expected to have a particular faith or ecclesiastical commitment.	Some but not all board members may be required or expected to have a particular faith or ecclesiastical commitment.	Faith commitment of board members not a factor	Faith commitment of board members not a factor	Explicitly or implicitly religious; maybe (a) self perpetuating board with explicit religious criteria or (b) board elected by a religious body.	Explicitly or implicitly religious; maybe (a) self perpetuating board with explicit religious criteria or (b) board elected by a religious body.

<b>Selection of senior management</b>	religious criteria is considered irrelevant or improper	religious criteria is considered irrelevant or improper	religious criteria is considered irrelevant or improper	Religious criteria considered improper	Religious criteria considered improper	religious criteria is considered irrelevant or improper	religious criteria is considered irrelevant or improper
<b>Selection of other staff</b>	Religious criteria for any staff considered improper.	Religious criteria for any staff considered improper.	Religious criteria for any staff considered improper.	Religious criteria for any staff considered improper.	Religious criteria for any staff considered improper.	Staff expected to respect faith of religious partners;	Staff expected to respect faith of religious partners;
<b>Financial support and non-financial resources</b>	May or may not cultivate support from religious community	May or may not cultivate support from religious community	May or may not cultivate support from religious community	Little cultivation of support from religious community	Little cultivation of support from religious community	May cultivate volunteer and in kind support from religious community	May cultivate volunteer and in kind support from religious community
<b>Organised religious practices of personnel (such as prayers or devotion).</b>	No organised religious practices	No organised religious practices	No organised religious practices	No organised religious practices	No organised religious practices	Religious practices are optional and not extensive	Religious practices are optional and not extensive
<b>Overall Classifications</b>	<i>Faith-background</i> organizations tend to look and act secular, although they may have a historical tie to a faith tradition. Although religious beliefs may motivate some personnel, faith commitments are not considered in the selection of the staff or board.	<i>Faith-background</i> organizations tend to look and act secular, although they may have a historical tie to a faith tradition. Although religious beliefs may motivate some personnel, faith commitments are not considered in the selection of the staff or board.	<i>Faith-background</i> organizations tend to look and act secular, although they may have a historical tie to a faith tradition. Although religious beliefs may motivate some personnel, faith commitments are not considered in the selection of the staff or board.	<i>Secular</i> organizations have no reference to religion in their mission or founding history, and they regard it as improper to consider religious commitments as a factor in hiring and governance.	<i>Secular</i> organizations have no reference to religion in their mission or founding history, and they regard it as improper to consider religious commitments as a factor in hiring and governance.	<i>Faith-affiliated</i> organizations retain some of the influence of their religious founders (such as in their mission statement) but do not require staff to affirm religious beliefs or practices, with the possible exception of some board and executive leaders.	<i>Faith-affiliated</i> organizations retain some of the influence of their religious founders (such as in their mission statement) but do not require staff to affirm religious beliefs or practices, with the possible exception of some board and executive leaders.

## **Appendix 7: Family Care Focus Group Questions**

### **Preparation:**

Nametags  
Tape recorder (3 tapes)  
Spare batteries  
Pre – prepared question sheets  
Pens

### **Introduction**

Welcome to everyone, thank you for agreeing to take part in the focus group, your contribution is greatly valued.

You have been selected to participate in this focus group as you all have one thing in common – a social workers perspective on the role, purpose and practice of adoption. And I am aware that some of you in the room will have a wealth of information and knowledge to share.

### **Ground Rules**

I appreciate that you all may have a valuable contribution to make to the discussions; however I can request that you speak one at a time, the reason being that the tape recorder will not handle lots of voices at once.

Please speak loudly and clearly for the purpose of the tape recording

I want everyone to be able to have their say on the questions we are going to cover so please do not take offence if I move on and bring the rest of the group in to the discussion. (I will play the referee).

The session is about uncovering views and perceptions, feel free to elaborate, give examples, contradict the views and thoughts of others. There are no right or wrong answers but rather differing points of view.

My (assistant) here will not be taking part in the discussion but will be taking notes.

Please if you notice the tape recorder clicking could you please just alert me or (assistant) so we don't miss any info.

The session will last no longer than 1 hour and half.

If you would like a break half way through at approx 45 mins (5 mins) we can stop the recording and have a 5 min breather/comfort break. I will check about half way through.

Please turn off mobile phones

Please begin by introductions and some info on how long you have been with FC and what your role is within Family Care's Adoption Team.

### **Questions**

#### ***Agency Questions:***

- How do you define your role?
  - What is the purpose of your role? (Personally and professionally)?
- Go round individually*

- What do the staff of FC trying to do for the service users who come to FC and how has this varied historically?
- What is the relevance for yourselves in working for an independent Anglican rooted agency

***Adoption Questions:***

- What are the main reasons (in your opinion):
  - why the BM requested the relinquishment of their child
  - And how has this varied historically?

*Prepare question on paper and give 3/4 mins – then ask individually and then group discussion.*

- Would you construct a typical BM from the 1960's, 70's, 80's, and 90's onwards (use the prompts below to help you)?

*Prompts:*

- *Age,*
- *social background,*
- *Married/ single,*
- *affiliated to CoE,*
- *education,*
- *any other children,*
- *tenure*
- *income*
- *support networks*

- Please look at the findings sheet, these are just some vague statements generated from the findings, do these statements surprise you in any way, or do they confirm what you have always thought?
- What can you tell me about the adoption process (in relation to this agency only) and how this has varied over time?

*Prompts:*

- *acceptance of applications – who was accepted, who wasn't*
- *How long before accepted by panel*
- *How long after the birth was the child placed*
- *Where would the BM stay during the time of her pregnancy*
- *How long after was the adoption order placed*
- *After adoption contact and support*

- I want to home in on those clients who come back to family care for after adoption support. Can you give me some information on what Family Care's after adoption support involves for those who come back to FC to retrace their origins.
- Can any of you give insights into the thoughts and feelings why either the BP or the child decided to retrace their origins?
- From all your work with birth parents and adoptive parents, did you get any sense of how they perceived the whole adoption process? (Bear in mind adoptions which you have dealt with in the past and any cases of after adoption support you may have dealt with).

*Thank you.*

## **Appendix 8: Packs sent to birth mothers for interview recruitment**

### **8.1 Letter sent to birth mothers**

Dear Madam,

I am a PHD student at Nottingham Trent University and my research is in partnership with the Southwell Diocese Council for Family Care. I am writing to you to request some of your time to participate in an interview for my project. Please refer to the pamphlet enclosed for further information on the project.

Although I did not know much about adoption policy and practice before I started the project, I have developed a real passion for the topic. Even more so as my project is looking at adoption from the perspective of the birth parent, which has been largely ignored. I feel that this piece of work will not only make an original contribution to knowledge but also hopefully help adopted adults and birth parents place their relinquishment/adoption in some type of social and cultural context.

I would be grateful if you would consider taking part in this piece of research as I feel your experiences and knowledge as a birth mother will be valuable to the research. If you agreed to participate in the research I would require 1 – 2 hours of your time to interview you. I will be aiming to explore the following topics in the interviews:

- Reasons for placing the child for adoption
- Your role in the adoption process
- Societal attitudes toward relinquishing birth mothers
- Your experiences of Family Care's Post adoption services

Please find enclosed some information regarding the project and a consent form for you to sign and send back if you would like to participate in the research.

If you have any further questions or queries, please do not hesitate to contact either Sue Jones (Family Care's Adoption Services Manager) on 0115 960 3010 or myself on the above contact details. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

Jatinder Rai

## 8.2: Contact Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

How would you like to be contacted? (Please provide contact details)

By Post:  Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

By Phone:  Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

By Email:  Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I would not like to be contacted

## **8.3: Birth Mother Participant Information Sheet**

### **What is this piece of research about?**

This project is examining how changing socio-economic, legal, professional, religious and moral factors have influenced decision-making and the policy and practice of voluntary adoption agencies. Moreover, I am examining how parents reached decisions about the adoption of their children and their role and experiences in the adoption process and how these answers have varied historically. Furthermore, I am exploring how attitudes towards initiating or maintaining contact between birth parents and their natural children evolved and what the implications are for birth records counselling today.

### **Project Rationale**

This project arose from an expressed need of Family Care, to catalogue and analyse its adoption records so as to improve the quality of its post-adoption support services. It presents a unique opportunity to catalogue and examine adoption records dating from the agency's foundation and to assist today's service users to understand the context in which their adoptions took place.

This project will shed light on how far reforms in adoption address historical ambiguities about the purpose of adoption and who the primary beneficiary is meant to be: the child, the adopters, or the birth parents. The project will explore how far the service has varied its focus over time.

Moreover, if adoption is a service for all three parties, can it really serve all in equal measure? We believe that our historical survey will make an important contribution to the current debate about the nature, purpose and desirability of child adoption as an instrument of family policy.

### **Methods of Investigation**

I am using a combination of interviews and documentary analysis to investigate the research questions outlined above further. Documentary analysis includes looking and analysing data collected from adoption records and other agency records. Interviews will be carried out with the past and present staff of Family care, adoption managers of six other voluntary adoption agencies and with birth parents.

### **Your involvement**

Your participation in this research would involve an hour to two hours of your time to discuss your role and experiences of the adoption process. Your consenting to an interview will allow me to gather information on your experiences of relinquishment, and also your experiences of post adoption services which have been provided by Family Care.

### **Where will the interview be conducted?**

The interview will be conducted somewhere where you will feel relaxed and at ease to talk about your experiences of adoption, whether that is in your own home, at the Family Care offices or some other place where you feel is relaxed environment.

### **What will happen with the interview data?**

Confidentiality is a paramount consideration in this piece of research. Interviews will be recorded on to a digital Dictaphone so the interview can be transcribed. The data from the Dictaphone will be transferred on to a secured computer (which only I have access to).

Once the data has been transferred, a back-up copy of the recording will be made on to a memory stick and will be kept in a locked drawer at university. Additionally, all identifying information will be removed from the transcripts and the write up. All participants' names will be removed from the transcript and will be assigned a code. The list of codes and names of participants will be rerecorded on to a separate document and kept securely on an encrypted laptop.

All interview data will be analysed and split up into themes. The write up of the information will be based upon themes which have been identified. In the write up, all identifying information (names and places) will be removed so the information cannot be traced back to you. The only identifying information that will be evident in the write up will be that you had your child's adoption arranged by Family care.



**What are your rights as a participant?**

I recognise that your experiences of relinquishment and re-contact with your adopted child may be a difficult topic for you to talk about; the emotional well-being of all participating in this research is paramount.

Therefore you have the right to withdraw your consent at any point during the interview. You also have the right to refuse to answer any questions and the right to request a break throughout the interview. Additionally, I will be happy to provide a copy of the transcript of your interview should you request it. If you feel you would like to change something or withdraw something you have said, I will be happy to oblige.

**Follow up support?**

After the interview you will receive a follow up telephone call from Family Care, here you will have the opportunity to talk about any issues or feelings the interview may have brought up. Additionally, Family Care and I will provide you with a list of support resources which you will be able to utilise should you want any further support.

**What happens now?**

If you would like to participate in this research all you have to do is fill out the attached form and post it back to me. Alternatively, you can email me or call me on the details provided below. Once I have received your confirmation, I shall contact you and arrange an interview date and time and we can also arrange where we can carry out the interview.

In the meantime if you have any further questions regarding the research, please do not hesitate to contact either Sue Jones (Adoption Manager from Family Care) or myself on the contact details below. We will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Jatinder Rai  
Post-Graduate Researcher  
Graduate School for Business, Law  
and Social Sciences (Rm 310 York House)  
Nottingham Trent University  
Burton Street  
Nottingham  
NG1 4BU

Tel: 0115 848 5638  
Mobile: 07809505640

Email: [Jatinder.rai@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:Jatinder.rai@ntu.ac.uk)

Sue Jones  
Southwell Diocesan Council for Family ,  
Warren House  
2 Pelham Court,  
Pelham Road,  
Nottingham,  
NG5 1AP

Tel: 0115 9603010

Email : [sue.jones@familycare-nottingham.org.uk](mailto:sue.jones@familycare-nottingham.org.uk)

## 8.4: Birth Mother Interview Questions

- Could you tell me a bit about the circumstances surrounding your pregnancy, the birth father and your relationship with him?
  - Age
  - Where living
  - Occupation
  - Support networks
  - Income
- How did you hear about family care? What made you choose this Church of England affiliated agency as oppose to another agency or the local authority (if relevant)
- Could you tell me about the first time you came to Family Care and met the adoption worker :
  - What did you discuss? Were your options explored?
  - How much of the adoption process was explained to you?
  - Was the potential pool of adopters explained to you?
  - How much personal information about yourself and the PF disclosed.
  - What were your feelings about adoption after meeting
- What happened after your initial meeting with the adoption worker?
  - Did you go to a mother and baby home?
  - What were your experiences of the Mother and Baby home?
- How much contact did you have with the adoption workers between the time you approached Family Care and until the adoption order was made?
- If contact was made (re question above) what was the nature of the contact and what did it concern?
- What happened after you had the child – did you stay in hospital with the child – for how long?
- Did the child go into temporary fostering, if so for how long?
- What were societal attitudes like towards unmarried mothers when you were pregnant? Did these attitudes inform your decision to relinquish?
  - The social workers/ staff of mother and baby home
  - Friends and family
  - And the state
- What factors did influence your decision to relinquish?
- How much information did you have about the adopters?
- What length of time after the birth of your child was the child placed with adopters?
- What did you have to do in order for the adoption order to be completed?
- What forms did you have to sign?
- What information regarding yourself and the PF did you have to provide in order for the adoption to go ahead?
- Did you have any criteria in regards to the type of adoptive parents your child was placed with? If so were these expectations matched? Did Family Care match these expectations?
- How much support did you receive from Family care both whilst the adoption was being carried out and after the adoption order had been completed?

- After the adoption order had been completed, how did you feel and how did these feelings change over the years?
- Were you traced by your adopted child? Or vice versa?
- What was Family care's role in the re- establishing contact with the adopted adult?
- How did you feel when you made contact/ was contacted?
- What would you change, if anything about the re-contacting process (in relation to Family Care)

## Appendix 9: Knowledge Transfer Event Materials

### 9.1: ESRC Knowledge Transfer Event Award Letter

Dear *Jatinder Rai*,

ESRC CONTRACT FOR THE ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT OF AN ESRC FUNDED ENGAGEMENT EVENT: KNOWLEDGE CAFÉ: BIRTH MOTHERS AND THE CHANGING EXPERIENCE OF ADOPTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE?

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) hereby offers a contract to *Jatinder Rai, Nottingham Trent University* to provide the services (organisation and management of the ESRC funded event) as specified in Schedule 1 at an agreed cost of £1,356.45 (including VAT).

ESRC standard terms and conditions apply as attached. Any correspondence in respect of this contract and the commencement date should be sent to the ESRC Project Manager (see Schedule 1).

Please write confirming your acceptance of this contract on the terms and conditions contained herein and that you will deliver the goods by the date specified.

Yours sincerely



Amanda Williams  
Senior Knowledge Transfer Manager  
ESRC  
Tel: 01793 413126

## 9.2: Event Programme

### **Knowledge Café: Birth mothers and the changing experience of adoption: implications for policy and practice**

**Programme:**

Bass Management Centre 320

18<sup>th</sup> February 2009

1pm – 1.45pm: Lunch

1.45pm – 1.50pm: Introduction  
Professor Patricia Higham *Nottingham Trent University*

1.50pm – 2pm: Foundations of the project  
Sue Jones *Family Care*

2pm – 2.45pm: Key Findings by Jatinder Sandhu (including 15 mins for Q&A session)

2.45pm - 3pm Coffee

3pm – 3.30pm Small Group Discussions: the birth mothers perspective in policy and practice

3.30pm – 3.55pm Group discussion and Q&A session  
Chair: Dr Graham Bowpitt *Nottingham Trent University*

3.55pm – 4pm Close

## Appendix 10: Consent form

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**By signing this consent form you will be agreeing to understand the following:**

- The purpose of this research has been explained to me and the interviewer has provided me with contact details should I need to contact her.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw my consent at any point.
- I understand that I have the right to refuse answering any questions that I feel uncomfortable answering.
- I understand any names mentioned will be anonymised and all data will be kept securely.
- I understand that I have the right to request the interview transcript and I also have the right to request the withdrawal of any information that I have given.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **(Interviewee)**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **(Interviewer)**

## Appendix 11: Analyses for socio-demographic data collected from adoption case files

### Period 1: Analysis Tables

All fifty cases were dated 1944 - 1947

➤ BM Age

No info: 23/50 – 46%

Age	No of cases – 27	Percentage
16 – 20	7	26
21 – 25	10	37
26 – 30	6	22
31 – 35	0	0
36 – 40	3	11
41 – 45	1	4

➤ BM Religious Affiliation

No Info: 9/50 – 18

Religious Affiliation	No of cases – 41	Percentage
CoE	38	93
Methodist	1	2
None	2	5

➤ BM Ethnicity

No Info: 6/50 – 12%

White – 44/44 – 100%

➤ BM Marital Status

No Info: 12/50 – 24%

Marital Status	No of cases – 38	Percentage
Single	25	66
Divorced	1	3
Married	10	26
Separated	2	5

➤ BM Occupation

All no info

➤ BM Other Children

11/50 BM's have other children – 22%

No Of Children	No of cases – 11	Percentage
1 child	5	46

2 children	4	36
3 children	1	9
4 children +	1	9

➤ BM Tenure

No info on BM tenure

➤ Correspondence:

8/50 had correspondence on files – 16%

➤ BF Age:

No info: 43/50 -

Age	No of cases – 7	Percentage
21 - 25	3	43
26 – 30	2	29
31 – 35	0	0
36 – 40	1	14
41 – 45	1	14

➤ BF Ethnicity:

No Info: 41/50 – 82%

9/9 - White

➤ BF Marital Status

No Info: 44/50 – 88%

Marital Status	No of cases – 6	Percentage
Divorced	1	17
Married	4	66
Separated	1	17

➤ BF Occupation

No info: 45/50 – 90%

Occupation	No of cases – 5	Percentage
V: unskilled	1	20
VI: Armed Forces	4	80

➤ BF Other Children

3 BF had other children – 6%

➤ BF Religious Affiliation

No Info: 44/50 – 88%

RA	No of cases – 6	Percentage
CoE	5	83
Roman Catholic	1	17



- BF Tenure:  
No info – all 50 cases

#### **4. Child:**

- Age

<b>Age</b>	<b>No of cases - 50</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Under 1	48	96
1-3 years old	1	2
3 +	1	2

- Ethnicity  
50/50 - All White

- Sex

<b>Sex</b>	<b>No of cases - 50</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Males	20	40
Females	30	60

- Retracing:  
7/50 – retraced – 14%

### **Period II: Analysis Tables**

#### **Distribution of Cases:**

<b>Decade</b>	<b>No of cases – 50</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1948 – 9	18	36
1950 -9	17	34
1960 -9	11	22
1970 - 74	4	8

- BM Age:  
No info: 37/50 – 74%  
Average Age: 23.1 Years old  
Most common: 17 years old

<b>Age</b>	<b>No of cases – 37</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
16 and under	1	3
17 - 20	15	41
21 - 25	11	30
26 – 30	6	15
31 – 35	1	3
36 – 40	2	5
41 – 45	1	3

➤ Ethnicity

All 50 cases White – 100%

➤ BM Marital Status

No Info: 3/50 – 6%

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>No of cases – 47</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Single	35	74
Divorced	1	2
Married	5	11
Separated	4	9
Widowed	2	4

➤ BM Occupation

No info: 33/50 –66%

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>No of cases – 17</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
I: Professional	0	0
II: Managerial & Technical	0	0
III: Skilled Manual	0	0
III: Skilled Non Manual	3	18
IV: Semi Skilled	8	47
V: Unskilled	6	35

➤ BM Other Children

14/50 BF's have other children – 28%

<b>No Of Children</b>	<b>No of cases – 14</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1 child	8	58
2 children	2	14
3 children	2	14
4 children +	2	14

➤ Religious Affiliation

No Info: 18/50 – 36%

<b>Religious Affiliation</b>	<b>No of cases – 32</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
CoE	26	82
Methodist	2	6
Protestant	3	9
None	1	3

➤ Tenure

No info: 37/55 – 66%

	<b>No of cases – 17</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Bed Sit	1	6
With Parents	11	64
With friends	1	6
With relatives	1	6

Lodgings	3	18
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➤ Type of School

No Info: 37/50 – 74%

Type of School	No Of Cases – 13	Percentage
Grammar	3	23
Sec Modern	9	69
Private	1	8

➤ Age Left School

No Info: 37/50: 74%

Average Age of leaving school: 15.2 years old

Most common: 15

➤ Highest Held Qualification

No Info: 45/50: 10%

CSE - 2

WBT – 3

➤ Correspondence:

11/50 had correspondence on files – 22%

➤ BF Age:

No info: 21/50 – 42

Average Age: 27.4 Years old

Most common: 21 years old

Age	No of cases – 29	Percentage
17 - 20	5	17
21 - 25	21	41
26 – 30	5	17
31 – 35	0	0
36 – 40	4	14
41 – 45	1	4
46 - 50	2	7

➤ BF Ethnicity:

No Info: 15/50 – 30%

Ethnicity	No of cases – 35	Percentage
White	33	94
White – Irish	1	3
White – Welsh	1	3

➤ BF Marital Status

No Info: 18/50 – 36%

Marital Status	No of cases – 32	Percentage
Single	12	37
Divorced	1	3
Married	14	44
Separated	5	16

➤ BF Occupation

No info: 28/50 –56%

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>No of cases – 22</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
I: Professional	2	9
II: Managerial & Technical	3	14
III: Skilled Manual	5	23
III: Skilled Non Manual	0	0
IV: Semi Skilled	5	23
V: Unskilled	2	9
VI: Armed Forces	4	18
Student	1	4

➤ BF Other Children

13/50 BF's have other children – 26%

<b>No Of Children</b>	<b>No of cases – 13</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1 child	8	62
2 children	3	23
3 children	2	15
4 children +	0	0

➤ BF Religious Affiliation

No Info: 39/50 – 78%

<b>RA</b>	<b>No of cases – 11</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
CoE	9	82
CoS	1	9
Roman Catholic	1	9

➤ BF Tenure:

No Info: 43/50 – 86%

<b>Tenure</b>	<b>No of cases – 7</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Marital Home	3	43
Lodging	1	14
Parental Home	3	43

➤ Type of School

No Info: 45/50 – 90%

<b>Type of School</b>	<b>No Of Cases – 5</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Grammar	2	40
Sec Modern	2	40
Roman Catholic	1	20

➤ Age Left School

No Info: 47/50: 94%

Average Age of leaving school: 16 years old

➤ Highest Held Qualification

No Info: 48/50: 96%

CSE - 1

Degree – 1

**Child:**

➤ Age

Age	No of cases - 50	Percentage
Under 1	43	96
1-2 years old	7	2

➤ Ethnicity

50/50 - All White

➤ Sex

Sex	No of cases - 50	Percentage
Males	28	56
Females	22	44

➤ Retracing:

8/50 – retraced – 16%

**Period III: Analysis Tables**

**Distribution of Cases:**

Decade	No of cases – 50	Percentage
1975 – 79	18	36
1980 – 89	20	40
1990 – 1999	8	16
2000 onwards	4	8

➤ BM Age:

Average Age: 20 Years old

Most common: 19 years old

Age	No of cases – 50	Percentage
16 and under	13	26
17 - 20	14	28
21 - 25	14	28
26 – 30	7	14
31 – 35	1	2
36 – 40	1	2

➤ Ethnicity

Ethnicity	No of cases – 50	Percentage
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White	42	4
White – Scottish	4	2
White – Irish	1	84
Jamaican	1	2
Indian	2	8

➤ BM Marital Status

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>No of cases –</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Single	38	76
Single – Cohabiting	2	4
Divorced	5	10
Married	3	6
Separated	2	4

➤ BM Occupation

No info: 2/50 –4%

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>No of cases –</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
III: Skilled Manual	3	6
III: Skilled Non Manual	9	19
V: Unskilled	17	35
Housewife	3	6
Student	12	25
Unemployed	4	9

➤ BM Other Children

15/50 BM's have other children – 30%

<b>No Of Children</b>	<b>No of cases – 15</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1 child	9	61
2 children	2	13
3 children	2	13
4 children +	2	13

➤ Religious Affiliation

No Info: 13/50 – 26%

<b>RA</b>	<b>No of cases – 37</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
CoE	24	64
CoE NP	1	3
Methodist	3	8
Muslim	1	3
Sikh	1	3
Roman Catholic	2	5
Roman Catholic NP	1	3
United Reform Church	1	3
None	3	8

➤ Tenure

<b>Tenure</b>	<b>No of cases – 50</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Bed Sit	2	4
Hostel	1	2
In Marital Home	3	6
With Parents	31	62
Owner Occupied	1	2
Private Rented	6	12
Social Rented	5	10
Psychiatric hosp	1	2

➤ Type of School

No Info: 8/50 – 16%

<b>Type of School</b>	<b>No Of Cases –</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Bi Lateral	1	2
Comprehensive	26	62
Convent	1	2
Grammar	2	5
Sec Modern	12	29

➤ Age Left School

No Info: 27/50: %

Average Age of leaving school: 16years old

Most common: 16

<b>School Leaving Age</b>	<b>No of Cases – 23</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
15	3	13
16	16	70
17	1	4
18	3	13

➤ Highest Held Qualification

No info: 20/30 – 40%

<b>Highest Qualification</b>	<b>No of Cases - 30</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
CSE's	5	18
O' Levels	1	3
GCSE's	5	18
Degree	1	3
NVQ/HND	1	3
Diploma	1	3
Childcare Qualification	1	3
WBT	4	13
Professional	1	3
Still at school	4	13
None	6	20

➤ Correspondence:

31/50 had correspondence on files –62%

➤ BP After Adoption Support

8/50 received after adoption support – 16%

### **Birth Father**

➤ **BF Age:**

No info: 4/50 – 8

Average Age: 21 years old

Most common: 18 years old

<b>Age</b>	<b>No of cases – 46</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
U16	3	6.5
17 - 20	15	33
21 - 25	17	37
26 – 30	7	15
31 – 35	3	6.5
36 +	1	2

➤ **BF Ethnicity:**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>No of cases – 50</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
White	46	66
White – Scottish	1	2
Black African	1	2
British Black	1	2
Jamaican	1	2
Indian	3	6

➤ **BF Marital Status**

No Info: 5/50 – 10%

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>No of cases – 45</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Single	39	87
Divorced	2	4
Married	3	6
Separated	1	2

➤ **BF Occupation**

No info: 6/50 –12%

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>No of cases - 44</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
I: Professional	1	3
II: Managerial & Technical	5	11
III: Skilled Manual	12	27
III: Skilled Non Manual	3	7
IV: Semi Skilled	4	9
V: Unskilled	11	25
VI: Armed Forces	2	4.5
Student	3	7
Unemployed	3	7

➤ **BF Other Children**

5/50 BF's have other children – 10%



No Of Children	No of cases – 5	Percentage
1 child	3	60
2 children	2	40

➤ BF Religious Affiliation

No Info: 35/50 – 70%

RA	No of cases – 15	Percentage
CoE	4	26
CoE NP	1	7
Muslim	1	7
Sikh	1	7
Roman Catholic	2	13
None	6	60

➤ BF Tenure:

No Info: 16/50 – 32%

Tenure	No of cases – 34	Percentage
Marital Home	3	9
Private Rented	4	12
Parental Home	20	58
Owner Occupied	3	9
With Friends	1	3
Other	3	9

➤ Type of School

No Info: 25/50 – 90%

Type of School	No Of Cases – 25	Percentage
Comprehensive	17	68
Grammar	1	4
Sec Modern	5	20
Roman Catholic	1	4
Private	1	4

➤ Age Left School

No Info: 37/50: 74%

Average Age of leaving school: 16 years old

Most Common: 16 years old

School Leaving Age	No of Cases - 13	Percentage
15	4	31
16	7	54
17	0	0
18	2	15

➤ Highest Held Qualification

No Info: 37/50 – 74%

Highest Qualification	No of Cases - 13	Percentage
CSE's	3	23

O' Levels	2	15
GCSE's	3	23
NVQ/HND	3	23
WBT	1	8
None	1	8

**Child:**

➤ Age

Age of Child	No of cases – 50				
	1970's	1980's	1990's	2000	Total
Under 1	18	18	4	4	44
1-2 years old	-	-	3	-	3
2 – 3 Years old	-	1	-	-	1
3 - 4 years old	-	-	1	-	1
Over 4	-	1	-	-	1

➤ Ethnicity

Ethnicity	No of cases - 50	Percentage
White	45	90
Dual Heritage	3	6
West Indian	1	2
Asian	2	4

➤ Sex

Sex	No of cases - 52	Percentage
Males	33	64
Females	18	36

Reason why more than 50 cases – 1 sibling group adoption 3 boys

➤ Retracing:

8/50 – retraced – 16%