The Career of the Transracially Adoptive Parent: An Exploration of Identity

by

M. Christine Gillis, B.A. Hons.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

April 17, 2001

## Abstract

This study explores the career of the transracially adoptive parent. It focuses on how the parents make the transition to the identity of transracially adoptive parent and maintain that identity. The parents' experiences are explored in two rounds of interviews approximately one year apart.

The theoretical orientation is symbolic interactionist, and the main concepts used to understand and frame the parents' experiences are the **career** and the **role-identity**. As for the methodology, the main data-gathering technique is the semi-structured interview.

This research reveals that when the participants decided to adopt, they began a process of resocialization whereby they unlearned elements of biological parenthood and learned the aspects of parenthood associated with being a transracially adoptive parent. Moreover, because there is no cultural script for transracially adoptive parenting, these parents are continuously learning how to parent their children and carve out a niche for their unique family form.

**Acknowledgements**

I am indebted to the people who participated in the research. They shared with me their experiences, many of them very personal and emotional. I thank them for their time and trust.

There are several other people who were instrumental in the completion of this thesis. Karen March was a truly wonderful supervisor because she struck a balance between guiding me and giving me the room to work independently. I am grateful for her expertise, her constructive suggestions, and her encouragement. Her experience in the field of adoption was invaluable. Karen was more than just a supervisor though; she is a great teacher whose love for her work inspires me.

Will van den Hoonaard guided me at the very beginning of this project. He encouraged me to approach the world with a sociological imagination and to tackle research with zeal.

Finally, I thank my husband Kim for his patience and support along the way. He was always there to give me a gentle push when I needed one. I am also grateful for all of the encouragement I received from the rest of my family.

## Table of Contents

## Introduction

This research was conducted as a follow-up study to research completed during 1999 for my undergraduate honours thesis. The study explores the career of the transracially adoptive parent. It focuses on how the parents make the transition to the identity of transracially adoptive parent and maintain that identity. In this study, the transracial adoptions (transracial adoption herein referred to as TRA) were international[1] rather than domestic.

It is significant that this research explores the parents' experiences in two rounds of interviews approximately one year apart because the follow-up to the initial study provided an opportunity to discover whether and how the parents' identity of transracially adoptive parent had changed over time. As a result, the study contains a dynamic view of the process of identity change rather than the 'one shot' perspective typically offered in the analysis of adoptive parenting and identity transition.

### Historical Context

At first the practice of intercountry adoption was restricted to the placement of children within countries on the same continent. Following World War II, which left many children orphaned, most Western countries either passed adoption laws for the first time, or where they already existed, revised them. By the time World War II ended, France, Britain, and the former USSR were prepared to find homes for the displaced and orphaned children of the occupied countries of Japan, Greece, Italy, and Germany. The only exception to this intracontinental placement of children was the adoption of

[1] International adoption is also referred to as intercountry adoption.

approximately 500 children per year by people in the United States during the immediate post-war period.

According to Westhues and Cohen (1994), in Canada, intercountry adoption occurred in two waves. The first wave of children were orphans of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War or children fathered by soldiers of occupying forces during these wars. The second wave began in 1975 and was triggered by a change in immigration policy which allowed children whose adoptions had been finalized in their country of origin to enter Canada.

During the first wave of intercountry adoption, the motivation behind the adoptions was largely humanitarian in nature. At that time, many of the people who adopted had biological children and many Canadian-born children were available for adoption. By the 1970s the situation had changed. According to Triseliotis, Shireman, and Hundleby (1997), the number of infants available for adoption in Western countries has been on the decline since the mid-1960s to 1970s thus making availability of children the primary reason for intercountry adoption. The reduction in the number of children available for adoption in Canada can be explained by the legalization of abortion, the availability of effective methods of birth control, and an increase in the proportion of single mothers who choose to raise their children (McDade 1991).

## Intercountry Adoption in Context

Those who adopt from other countries are at the centre of a debate over what Triseliotis (1991) has called the "morality" of intercountry adoptions. Some critics of intercountry adoption consider it a form of exploitation of the poor by wealthy

Westerners (Altstein and Simon 1991; Ngabonziza 1991). Tizard (1991: 746) observes that Western countries are charged with carrying out a "new form of colonialism." In response to these viewpoints, Bartholet (1993: 100) argues, "...restricting international adoption does not put poor countries in a better economic position or a better power position with respect to foreign governments. It is simply a symbolic gesture 'for' the nation and 'against' the foreigners that is easy and cheap to make. The children themselves have no political influence, and their voices are not heard."

Transracially adoptive parents (most of whom are Caucasian) are also at the centre of a debate over whether minority children can develop a healthy sense of racial and ethnic identification in white families. There is also a debate over whether the children will experience more racism and discrimination. Altstein and Simon (1991) found that the intercountry adoptees were overall well-adjusted, but did experience racism and discrimination.[2] Feigelman and Silverman (1984) found that Korean adoptees living in the United States felt uncomfortable about their appearance, but this did not

[2] Altstein and Simon interviewed families belonging to two different adoptive parent groups—the Stars of David (SOD) and Families Adopting Children Everywhere (FACE). From SOD, Altstein and Simon interviewed 37 adopted children and 23 biological children. In regard to the FACE respondents, 36 children—31 adopted and 5 birth children—were interviewed. When asked whether they were bothered by the fact that they look different from their parents, most of the adopted children indicated that the physical difference neither bothered them nor did it cause any problems. Many of the children, however, recalled times when they were ridiculed by other children because of their racial backgrounds. Furthermore, using the Self-Esteem Scale developed by Rosenberg and Simmons in 1968, Altstein and Simon found that in regard to the SOD respondents, the adopted children were more likely than the birth children to assert their self-esteem in response to negative assessments such as "I feel I do not have much to be proud of." The birth children scored higher when making an assessment based on a positive statement. A comparison of the scores for birth and adopted children in FACE was not provided, probably because of the very small number of birth children in the group. The self-esteem scores for the SOD and FACE adopted children were high and very similar with the FACE children showing higher scores on some items. Finally, using the "family integration scale" used in the British Adoption Project (BAP), Altstein and Simon found that about 40% of both SOD and FACE adoptees indicated that they expected to have "very close" ties with their parents in the future and almost all of the others expected to have "close" ties.

affect their overall adjustment and self-esteem.[3] Saetersdal (1981 quoted in Triseliotis, Shireman, and Hundleby 1997: 192) found in follow-up studies that Vietnamese children raised in Norway did not "mention their ethnic background when asked to describe themselves."[4]

The results, then, are mixed and must be considered in light of such contexts as the age of the children being studied, their age at the time of adoption, the composition of the population where they live, and the attitudes toward race and ethnicity among that population.

## Significance of this Study

Given that internationally adoptive parents are at the heart of a hotly-contested practice which is becoming ever more common, it seems almost negligent not to examine their lives more closely. However, research on the internationally adoptive parent is

---

[3] Feigelman and Silverman studied 372 adoptees across the United States. The children and their parents were initially interviewed in 1975 and then again in 1981 by which time the children were adolescents. The sample included white, black, Korean, and Colombian children. The differential levels of adjustment indicated in the 1981 follow-up were very similar to those found in 1975. The follow-up indicated that Korean and Columbian adoptees were the best adjusted and highest achievers of all the children followed by white children and then black children. More than half of the black children were described as maladjusted during adolescence compared with a third of white children and a quarter of the Korean and Columbian children. On the basis of their regression analysis, Feigelman and Silverman propose two reasons for the differences: (1) later age at placement (which was more common for black children) was related to maladjustment and (2) opposition by family and friends to the adoption was related to maladjustment (this opposition was most common in the case of the adoption of black children).

[4] Saetersdal's and Dalen's findings are based on a survey of 182 Norwegian parents of children under age 17 adopted from Vietnam and India and in-depth interviews with another group of 98 people composed of Vietnamese-born adopted children aged 17-22 years and their parents. Parents of children were asked to indicate areas of difficulty at the time of arrival and the time of the study on the basis of a list which included such items as sleep, eating, bowel/bladder control, language development, clinging, and contact with children. Parents were also asked about academic performance, educational attainment, and personality while the adoptees were asked to describe themselves and to explain their attitudes toward ethnic minority groups, migrants, and refugees.

noticeably absent. Moreover, research on the experiences of these adoptive parents addresses several important areas of concern in the family literature: the meaning of parenthood, the social construction of the family, the significance of consanguinity, and the negotiation of infertility through adoption. The research also addresses issues of race and ethnicity such as how race and ethnicity are conceptualized by the parents and whether and how parents attempt to recognize their children's birth culture.

## The Organization of the Thesis

In chapter one, I will review the relevant literature on TRA and other adoption literature which is important to the research. Following that, I will introduce the theory used in this research. In chapter two, I will discuss the methodology used as well as specific methodological issues concerning this study. In chapters three and four, the data and analysis will be presented. Finally, I will offer a conclusion and directions for future research.

# Chapter 1

## Review of Literature

### Review of the Literature

TRA is a neglected topic in sociological literature. The majority of the literature comes from the fields of social work, psychology, and law. There is, however, a growing body of sociological literature on the topic of same-race adoptions. This research is instructive in regard to this study because it reveals the social construction of adoption.

### Adoption

In North American culture, consanguinal ties are the foundation for the formation and perpetuation of family kinship systems. Consequently, the adoptive family has been relegated to second place (Kirk 1964, 1981; Modell 1994). The societal preference for biological ties is reflected in efforts to make the adoptive family seem like a biological one. Modell and Dambacher (1997) examine how in confidential adoptions parents and children are paired according to the principle of "matching" which holds that the adoption is more likely to be successful if the children are like their parents in regard to intelligence, appearance, and personality. The goal of the practice is to enable the families to "pass" as biological ones. Kirk (1964) refers to this type of activity as the "rejection-of-difference" coping mechanism. He argues that instead of rejecting what makes adoption different from biological kinship (such as feelings of loss and lack of full social acceptance), adoptive parents and adoption professionals should acknowledge the differences.

Adoptive parents and adopted children alike have described their experiences of being socially stigmatized by those who devalue the strength of the bond they share with their families. Miall (1987) found that infertile women who adopt believe that others consider their adoptive parent status a discreditable attribute which results in informal social sanctioning. March (1995) explored how some adoptees use contact with their birth mothers to manage the discreditable status which results from attempting to present a convincing presentation of self without key biographical information. These sociological analyses are valuable to this study of transracially adoptive parents because they provide a reference point for the consideration of how social attitudes toward adoption impact on the adoptive parent's identity and role performance.

The literature on the process of becoming an adoptive parent is also important to this research, specifically in terms of identity transformation. Daly (1992) argues that the transition from expecting to be a biological parent to becoming an adoptive parent involves a process of resocialization in which the prospective adoptive parents unlearn elements of biological parenthood and learn the aspects of parenthood associated with adoption. Once individuals decide to adopt, they must cope with the waiting period that exists between the decision to adopt and the placement of the child. Sandelowski, Harris, and Holditch-Davis (1993) describe the process of "parental claiming" or emotional and intellectual work that adopting couples do as they wait for their child who is "somewhere out there." This study is important to an understanding of the identity transformation which occurs during the career of the transracially adoptive parent because it considers how parents act during the waiting period between the decision to adopt and the arrival of the child.

Domestic TRA

There is a considerable body of literature on domestic TRA. Most of it revolves around the following issues: (1) the adopted child's ability to form an individual and a group identity, (2) the best interest of the adopted child, (3) whether the requirements to adopt are such that prospective parents of colour are "screened out," and (4) long-term foster care by families of colour versus adoption by white families. Issues one and two are particularly relevant to international TRA because they also arise in the debates surrounding this form of adoption. Some of the research on domestic TRA will be considered here.

The bulk of research on domestic TRA comes from the United States and Britain and addresses the placement of black children with white families. On one side of the debate there are those who argue that placing a black child in a white family psychologically damages the child (Chestang 1972; Ladner 1977; Kim 1978; Small 1984, 1986; Maxime 1986, 1993). A related argument is that white families cannot prepare their children to deal with racism because they are themselves racist (Chestang 1972; Chimezie 1975; Hill and Peltzer 1982; Small 1986). On the other side of the debate there are those who argue that TRA is not damaging to the child and is, in fact, generally successful by the standards of the adoptees and their families (Simon and Altstein 1977, 1981, 1987; Gill and Jackson 1983; Grow and Shapiro 1974, 1975; Silverman and Feigelman 1990; Hayes 1993; Tizard and Phoenix 1993). These debates emerge in any discussion of TRA and, as such, must be given consideration in any study of transracially adoptive parents.

## International Adoption

International adoptions are becoming a very common practice now that in the Western nations there is a decline in the number of children available for adoption (Bagley, Young, and Scully 1993; Westhues and Cohen 1995). Despite this increase in adoptions, there still exists a paucity of sociological research on this form of adoption. As previously mentioned, of the research that does exist, a focus on the internationally adoptive parent is noticeably absent.

An outline of the literature on the debate over international adoption from both sides is an essential component of this review because this literature contributes to the social context surrounding the families in this study. This debate focuses mainly on how the family affects the adopted child. There are many studies which conclude that transracial adoption is as successful as in-racial adoption and that transracially adopted children are as well-adjusted, successful, and socially integrated as other adopted children (Simon and Altstein 1977, 1981, 1987; Altstein and Simon 1991; Gill and Jackson 1983; Feigelman and Silverman 1984; Silverman 1993). Many of these studies, however, do mention some difficulties faced by the adoptees although overall adjustment was found to be positive. Altstein and Simon (1991) report that the adoptees experienced racism and discrimination. Feigelman and Silverman (1984) noted that Korean adoptees living in the United States felt uncomfortable about their appearance.

The results regarding the adjustment of intercountry adoptees are inconclusive (Tizard 1991). Some studies indicate that intercountry adoptees are likely to have adjustment problems (Kim et al. 1979; Saetersdal and Dalen 1991). Other research indicates that these adjustment difficulties are likely to occur during the initial adjustment

phase (Cederblad 1982). There are those who contend that adjustment difficulties are associated with the older age of the child at the time of placement (Gardell 1979; Cederblad 1982) while others did not find evidence of such an association (Pruzan 1979; Bagley and Young 1980). Part of the reason for the differences in findings is the variability of the research designs. For example, the data collection methods varied as did the measures used to assess adjustment.

Intercountry Adopters

Though there is a lack of research on intercountry adoptive parents, some studies have shed light on the characteristics of these parents. Approximately 95% of these families consist of two parents and they have lower divorce rates than average in their respective countries before and after adoption (Hoksbergen 1981; Saetersdal and Dalen 1991; Textor 1991). At the time of the adoption, the parents in Saetersdal's and Dalen's (1991) study were married for several years, half of them for more than ten years. In regard to their income, the majority of the parents belong to the middle and upper-middle classes (Feigelman and Silverman 1983; Altstein and Simon 1991; Westhues and Cohen 1994). Approximately 25% of the parents adopt for humanitarian reasons and because of concerns about world overpopulation (Feigelman and Silverman 1983; Hoksbergen 1981; 1991). However, there is evidence that the number of people adopting for these reasons is declining and that infertile couples (whose opportunity to adopt within their home country is very limited) are the largest group of people adopting internationally (Textor 1991; Triseliotis 1991).

In Westhues' and Cohen's (1991) study of 126 Canadian families[5], the profile of the parents is as follows: the majority were middle-aged (63.6% of mothers and 62.8% of fathers were between the ages of 55-64), married (87.8% of mothers and 95.6% of fathers), college or university educated (51.2% of mothers and 63.7% of fathers), employed full-time (70.8% of fathers and 43.8% of mothers), had a family income of $70,000 or more (49.6%), of British origin (55.3% of mothers and 44.2% of fathers), and chose to adopt because they were drawn to children in need (62.7% of couples). The proportion of people adopting because they were drawn to a child in need is not typical today. Most of the couples in Westhues' and Cohen's study adopted between the 1960s and 1970s when humanitarian motivations behind adoption were typical for that time. Today, infertility is the main reason cited for international adoption (Daly and Sobol 1993).

The Families

Several studies of intercountry adoption have indicated that in response to general questions about their relationship, adoptees and parents reported that they had a good relationship (Feigelman and Silverman 1983; Kuhl 1985; Simon and Altstein 1987, 1992; Wilkinson 1985). Bagley (1991) found that when asked to evaluate the extent to which they had problems in their relationship with their child, 65% of mothers of intercountry adoptees reported no problems in comparison to 70% of biological mothers. Rorbech (1991) asked 455 adoptees aged 18-25 who were raised in Denmark about the amount of

[5] Within these 126 families, the researchers interviewed 123 mothers, 113 fathers, 155 intercountry adoptees, and 121 of their siblings, sixteen of whom were adopted domestically.

contact they had with their families. Approximately 20-25% reported that they contact members of their immediate family about once per month. The problem in making comparisons across these studies is that the wording of the questions varied and some studies used control groups while others did not. Generally, though, relationships between parents and children were found to be positive.

## Summary

In summary, although there is a paucity of sociological research on TRA, there is a considerable body of work on same-race adoption. The latter research, although it does not consider transracial issues, is important in understanding the experiences of the transracially adoptive parent because it highlights how social attitudes toward adoption impact on adoptive parent identity.

Most of the research on TRA focuses on the adjustment of the adoptees, the results of which are inconclusive. Part of the reason for the differences in findings is the variability of research design. There is considerable variation among the data collection methods and the measures used to assess adjustment.

As for intercountry adoptive parents, there is little existing research, but some studies have shed light on their characteristics. Most transracially adoptive families have two parents, lower than average divorce rates, and have incomes which put them in the middle and upper-middle classes. In the past, most parents adopted for humanitarian reasons, but there is evidence that currently the main reason for international adoption is infertility combined with a lack of children from the home country available for placement.

## Examination of Theory

### Symbolic Interactionism

The theoretical orientation of this project is a symbolic interactionist approach. I chose this orientation because it enabled me to understand the lives of transracially adoptive parents from their perspective. Studies have examined who adopts transracially and what this group of people have in common. However, far less research has focused on the lived experience of these parents. Symbolic interactionism is an approach which permits such an investigation because it rests on the premise that "we can understand what is going on only if we understand what the actors themselves believe about their world" (Charon 1989: 182).

There are many theoretical and methodological varieties of symbolic interactionism. This research draws on the Blumer-Mead model in which human beings are seen as purposive actors engaged in dynamic, self-reflexive activity with other individuals. According to this approach, an individual does not simply respond to external stimuli, motives, ideas, or drives, but rather his or her action is built up through self-indication, "a moving communicative process in which the individual notes things, assesses them, gives them a meaning, and decides to act on the basis of the meaning" (Blumer 1969:81).

Blumer explains that individuals fit their lines of action to one another through a process of interpretive interaction to create a joint action. He points out that any joint action "has necessarily arisen out of a background of previous actions of the participants" (20). Joint activities, then, he argues, are not only horizontally linked, but present joint

actions are vertically linked with previous joint actions. Similarly, the activities of a single individual are linked vertically over time in what is called a "career" (Charon 1976: 177).

## Career

The focus of this research is to consider the **career** of the transracially adoptive parent. Career is defined by Goffman (1961: 127-128) as

> any social strand of any person's course through life.... One value of the concept of career is its two-sidedness. One side is linked to internal matters held dearly and closely, such as image of self and felt identity; the other side concerns public position, jural relations, and style of life, and is part of a publicly accessible institutional complex. The concept of career, then, allows one to move back and forth between the self and its significant society....

This concept is useful in looking at the experiences of the transracially adoptive parent for two reasons. First, it helps me to consider the temporal organization of the parents' experiences. Specifically, I explore this trajectory beginning with the decision to adopt, through the adoption process, and finally everyday family life. This is important to do because, although international adoptions are becoming much more common, current research does not examine the unique life trajectory of these adoptive parents. Second, the concept of career allows one to move back and forth between the personal and the public (Mills 1959), between the self and significant society. Key to understanding the

experiences of transracially adoptive parents is their interaction with the larger community, particularly in regard to societal attitudes about adoption and race, because this interaction impacts how parents define and redefine their conception of self.

## Identity and Role

The concepts of **identity** and **role** are important in this research because they are used in talking about a career. For that reason, they will be discussed in some detail. Individuals not only act toward others but they also act toward themselves. The self is a social object and like all other objects is indicated, defined, and redefined in interaction (Charon 1989). The possession of a self makes self-communication possible, and, in turn, self-communication makes possible a self-concept. Because we are able to have private conversations with the self, we can assess situations and decide how we will act toward others by first testing out the proposed course of action on the self. In the course of this process of self-communication, we are assessing the other's image of us and our actions in relation to the image. In doing this, we are building a self-concept which has been defined by Rosenberg (1979: ix) as "the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings with reference to himself as an object."

A key aspect of the self-concept is identity (Charon 1989). According to McCall and Simmons (1966: 65) there are two types of identity: personal and social. These authors point to Goffman's *Stigma* for a comprehensive explanation of these concepts. Goffman (1963: 57) explains personal identity as "positive marks or identity pegs, and the unique combination of life history items that comes to be attached to the individual with the help of these pegs for his identity." Examples of the "positive mark" or "identity

peg" include handwriting and the photographic image of an individual that people have in their minds. Personal identity, then, is built up through knowledge of one's biography and social attributes and these are organized around the pegs or marks that distinguish the individual. **Social identity**, on the other hand, encompasses the social categories to which an individual belongs such as age, sex, occupation, class, and military rank. Correspondent to these social categories are social positions such as single-parent, nurse, percussionist, and colonel. The expectations about how one in a given position will act comprise what is known as the **social role**. McCall and Simmons (1966: 66-67) argue that the expectations which make up the social role are usually too imprecise to assist one in choosing a line of action to take. What these expectations do is provide us with a wide range of behaviour which will be accepted for the position which, in turn, are met by an equally wide range of performances.

This is where the concept of **role-identity** (McCall and Simmons 1966) emerges. We construct a character and role for ourselves on the basis of the social position we occupy. The role-identity is our idealized imaginative view of our self as an occupant of the given position. On a daily basis these role-identities serve as a source of our actions in that they provide criteria for our evaluation of our performances and play a large part in determining how we will interpret our world.

We are not always able to live up to the idealized conceptions of our self, and therefore, we must find a way to maintain this view in the face of contradiction. We accomplish this by legitimating our role-identities through role-performances. Essentially, if we act in a manner that is consistent with the contents of our imagined view of self, then the view becomes legitimate.

Performances occur both in our heads and in front of audiences. The 'in our head' vicarious performances provide an opportunity to practice for the actual performance. They are, however, not enough to sustain a legitimate identity. Our performances occur before a variety of audiences and as such their reactions to our performances impact on the view we have of our self. We require role-support to provide us with a confirmation of the view we have of our self.

## Salience

An important concept in understanding the career of transracially adoptive parents, particularly in terms of how they take on and sustain the identity of the transracially adoptive parent, is **salience**. The salience hierarchy of role-identities represents an organization of the role-identities in terms of their standing as possible sources of performance in a given situation. The salience of a given role-identity is determined by the following: (1) its prominence, (2) one's desire for the types and amounts of social reward—intrinsic, extrinsic, and social support of identity—gained through the enactment of it, and (3) the opportunity for profitable enactment of it (McCall and Simmons 1966). Each of these determinants of salience will be considered below.

## Prominence

We have multiple role-identities, all of which influence one another. These various role-identities are organized into a hierarchy of **prominence** that causes some of our role-identities instead of others to be represented more saliently as possible sources of performance. The prominence of a given role-identity depends on several things. First,

prominence is determined by the extent to which we support the given role-identity. We may or may not feel that the imaginative view of our self matches up with our performances of the role. Those identities that we almost "live up to are, in their rarity, very close to our hearts" (77). Second, prominence is also determined by the degree to which our view of our self has been supported by those whose evaluations matter to us. Not all of these assessments carry equal weight and therefore a "weighted average" of them is the likely resolution (77). Third, and the most important of these three determinants, is our level of commitment to the contents of a given role-identity. The more time and material and emotional resources we invest in an identity, the more prominent it is likely to be. The prominence of an identity is important because it impacts on our choice of performance. When more prominent identities strongly suggest to us particular performances, these are the performances we are most likely to carry out.

The identity of transracially adoptive parent is a very prominent one in the identity structures of the parents in this study. International adoption requires that the parents invest much emotional and financial capital and time. Furthermore, raising a child of a different race involves incorporating into family life the birth culture of the child and helping the child to develop an identity that links his or her ethnoracial heritage and upbringing in Canadian society.

## Reward and the Enactment of Role-Identities

Prominence is not the only factor which causes some role-identities more than others to be represented more saliently as sources of suggested performances. The salience of a particular role-identity is also determined by the types and amounts of

reward associated with the enactment of a role-identity. The types of social reward are extrinsic, intrinsic, and social support of identity. Within each of these three categories of reward, the types and amounts valued by an individual vary depending on the situation in which one finds himself or herself. In essence, the role-identity which when enacted would lead to the greatest rewards is the one most likely to be acted upon. Given that adoptive parents are sometimes not perceived as "real" parents, as less legitimate than biological parents, it is likely that they will need more social support for that identity as compared to other identities which constitute the identity structure.

## Opportunity for Profitable Enactment of the Role-Identity

We choose which role-identity to enact on the basis of the opportunity structure associated with a given situation. Because the opportunity to gain a reward comes at a certain cost to us, we evaluate our choice according to a cost-reward ratio. Therefore, the role-identities whose enactments appear most profitable in the context of the opportunities are most likely to be acted upon (McCall and Simmons 1966).

## Identity of the Adoptive Parent

Being a parent was important to all of the parents in this study and as such parenthood identity ranked high in their salience hierarchy. In the case of parents who had fertility problems, their commitment to parenthood identity was strong enough that they chose to realize this identity through adoption. Making the change from expecting to be a biological parent to taking on the identity of adoptive parent involves an identity transformation. Daly (1992) suggests that this transformation involves a process of

resocialization whereby the individual must unlearn the aspects of biological parenthood learned through family socialization and learn the aspects associated with adoptive parenthood.

In this case, the transformation is somewhat different than that which Daly has proposed because the parents in this study must also learn to parent a child whose race differs from their own. The child looks Chinese and was born in China, for instance, but he or she is raised by white parents of a different cultural background. Such a complex situation raises unique challenges in terms of one's identity as a parent. Additionally, these parents must try to raise their children in a way that enables them to develop an identity which "links their upbringing, physical appearance and ethnoracial heritage" (Carstens and Juliá 2000: 63).

The application of Daly's model is also limited in regard to adoptive parents who have biological children before they adopt. Although they too must learn to parent their adopted child, they have already assumed the role of biological parent, and therefore, in their transformation of identity they are not dealing with the implications of infertility such as giving up that which is associated with the expectation of biological parenthood. In a sense, though, they are unlearning aspects of biological parenting specifically in the context of parenting their adopted child. Unlearning does not mean that these parents forget all they know about being a biological parent. It simply means that some of their expectations of parenting their adopted children are different from those associated with parenting their biological children. Transracially adopted children will likely face issues which are not a part of the biological children's reality such as developing an identity

which links upbringing, physical appearance, and ethnoracial heritage and dealing with racism and discrimination as well as the social stigma of adoptive status.

Despite these limitations of Daly's model for this research, the basic elements of it are very useful in understanding the experiences of the parents in this study.

## Summary

In summary, the symbolic interactionist approach was chosen for this project because it helped me study the lives of transracially adoptive parents from their perspective. One of the main concepts used in understanding and framing the parents' experiences is the **career**. This concept permits the examination of the life trajectory of the parents as well as their interaction with the larger community. Central to a discussion of career is the concept of **role-identity**. Role-identity, or simply identity as it is referred to by others, is our idealized imaginative view of our self as an occupant of a given social position. We have many role-identities which are ordered according to a hierarchy of salience determined by prominence, need of support, intrinsic and extrinsic gratification received, and the opportunity for that identity to be profitably enacted. In essence, the more salient the identity, the more likely that identity will be invoked in situations. In this research, the identity of transracially adoptive parent is a very salient identity in the parents' salience hierarchy.

# Chapter 2

## Methodology

In this chapter, I will describe the methodology used in this research. I will discuss how I acquired a sample, why I used a semi-structured interview format, how the interview questions were constructed, the interview process, and important methodological considerations and limitations of my study. These considerations and limitations will be discussed throughout the chapter rather than as a separate section.

Research about the lives of transracially adoptive parents is minimal. What exists usually focuses on the demographic characteristics of these parents as well as their role in and response to the adjustment difficulties of their children. Their experiences of becoming a parent and raising a multiracial family are neglected. This being the case, I did not begin this study with a set of constructs or hypotheses to test. In the first set of interviews, then, my aim was to explore their experience using an interview schedule that covered a wide range of topics such as the decision to adopt, the practical and emotional preparations involved, and everyday family life. By the second round of interviews, I was sensitized to the issues relevant to their lives. With this foundation, I focused on main themes that had not been probed as much as I would have liked during the first round of interviews. These themes included parents' views on birth culture, how life changed since the first interview, and their involvement with other adoptive parents.

This research explores the experiences of transracially adoptive parents from the parents' perspective. For this reason, I chose methodologies which enabled me to study the research participants' subjective reality based on their "definition of the situation"

(Thomas 1967). Blumer (1969: 50-51) explains the importance of understanding the participants' worlds from their point of view

> The contention that people act on the basis of the meaning of their objects has profound methodological implications. It signifies immediately that if the scholar wishes to understand the actions of people, it is necessary to see their objects as they see them. Failure to see their objects as they see them, or a substitution of meaning of the objects for their meanings, is the gravest kind of error that the social scientist can commit. Simply put, people act toward things on the basis of the meaning that these things have for them, not on the basis of the meaning that these things have for the outside scholar.

## The Research Approach

A qualitative research approach was chosen for three reasons. First, qualitative methods are quite compatible with topics that are very personal and emotional in nature because they enable the emotion of the participant to be heard in his or her own words (Rosenblatt and Fischer 1993). For example, in this study emotionally-laden topics such as infertility, becoming a parent, and feelings about the birth parents were discussed. Second, qualitative methods can be very useful in areas that are understudied and which lack the theory and literature for quantitative analysis (Rosenblatt and Fischer 1993). To my knowledge, limited substantive literature exists on the topic of transracially adoptive parenthood and what literature does exist offers no theoretical analysis of the identity issues involved for these parents. In contrast, the qualitative approach used in this study

identifies transracially adoptive parents as a group and unearths their experiences and the parenting issues that are important to them. On this basis, theory can be built. Third, in comparison to methods like the survey or questionnaire which create an atmosphere of formality, qualitative methods enable the researcher to build relationships with participants that facilitate the trust and rapport needed to understand the "private meanings of families" (Daly and Dienhart 1998: 103). For example, the use of semi-structured interview schedules in this study enabled the parents to talk about their experiences in their own words, using their own vocabulary rather than one imposed on them by the language of a questionnaire or a survey. Moreover, the parents were able to alert me when I used terminology, picked up from the literature, which does not represent their experiences (for example, a parent corrected me when I used the phrase "preservation of the birth culture," a correction discussed later in this section). Furthermore, the parents were also able to bring to my attention issues important to them that the interview schedule did not encompass. For example, in the first round of interviews, some of the parents related that they had begun to provide support and assistance to those considering and going through the process of international adoption.

## Sensitizing Oneself to the Research Topic

The aim of this research was to understand the participants' experiences as they are interpreted and defined by them. Lofland (1971) recommends that researchers "immerse" themselves in the social worlds of the participants in order to understand their experiences from their perspectives. In an effort to immerse myself in their worlds, I

attended adoption support/play groups while living in Ontario, visited many websites and newsgroups on the Internet, attended a meeting of the Adoption Council of Canada, watched films and television programs about international adoption and transracial adoptees' journeys to their birth countries, and researched the international adoption process.

## Acquiring a Sample

The participants were chosen during the course of my undergraduate research. When I began to look for parents to interview in 1998, my criteria were that the participants had to live in New Brunswick and had to have adopted at least one child internationally whose race differed from their own. My first step in locating parents was to contact the adoption division of the New Brunswick Department of Health and Community Services in the fall of 1998. This was an obvious place to start given that all parents who adopt in the province are known to the department because they have to meet criteria set out by the province before they can adopt children. I was not able to obtain any names because at that time departmental policy prohibited the release of names of individuals who had adopted. The department was not able to refer me to any individual or organization either. Unsure of how to proceed, I decided to search the Internet where I found the website of the International Adoptive Families of New Brunswick (IAFNB). I wrote an e-mail message to the website administrator in which I outlined the focus of my research and requested that she forward the message to members of the IAFNB and any other parents she knew who might be interested. I began to receive e-mail messages from parents who requested more information. I responded to

their requests by e-mail and telephone depending on the method by which they wanted to be contacted. Parents who were interested in participating offered names of other parents. Therefore, I acquired my sample though the snowball method.

As with all sampling procedures, the snowball method has its strengths and weaknesses. This technique proved very useful to me because the internationally-adoptive parent population was not easily accessible given that the Department of Health and Community Services, the one organization which had all of the names of the adoptive parents in New Brunswick, was unable to release their names. On the other hand, this sampling procedure yielded a fairly homogenous sample that is not representative. All the participants have children under eight years of age with most of the children being around five years of age; most of the parents know each other to varying degrees; some socialize together; many of them are members of the same adoption groups; and some of them adopted through the same agency. This is not to say that there was no variability. The sample included parents who varied across factors such as age, religion, and their child's birth country. Ultimately, though, the findings are not widely generalizable. The aim of the research, however, was to explore the lives of a group which have not been the focus of research, and therefore, widely generalizable findings were neither expected nor considered an objective. As such, the study offers an initial step in understanding the issues involved in transracial adoptive parenting and the impact of transracial adoption on identity.

What the findings of this study do have, however, is transferability. The findings have the potential to be transferred to transracially adoptive parents living in rural and small urban areas where there is little racial and ethnic diversity in the population.

Parents living in these areas are more likely to have experiences in common with one another than with parents raising their children in large urban areas where there is much racial and ethnic diversity.

Eventually, I had telephone conversations with all participants before I interviewed them in order to establish a more personal level of contact and begin to gain their trust. In the end, my sample consisted of ten parents. Nine lived in various parts of the province of New Brunswick and the tenth resided in another province at the time of the interview but had adopted a child while living in New Brunswick. I could have interviewed more than ten people because more were interested in participating in the research. However, given the time and financial constraints associated with research at the undergraduate level, I was not able to interview all of the individuals who expressed interest in the research. Therefore, five families were eliminated mainly on the basis of scheduling conflicts and the fact that they resided at least more than one hour from me.

Of the ten participants in my study, I interviewed six mothers individually and in two cases, a mother and a father together. In two-parent families it was the parents who decided whether I would interview one of them or both. Once I began to set up interviews, a pattern developed in which the parent would inform me whether he or she would be participating alone or with his or her spouse. I did not consider this a problem because I was interested in the experiences of each parent as an individual. The symbolic interactionist perspective is based on the premise that individuals create and negotiate meaning through their interaction with others. While others are important in the interpretive process of meaning-making, they are not the focus—the individual is. When

I interviewed spouses together, I viewed them as individuals, each with his or her own story.

## Recontacting the Participants

In preparing for the follow-up research, I contacted the participants by e-mail to ask them if they were interested in participating in the current study. All but one of the original participants responded to my request for a second interview. After several attempts to make contact with this one participant from whom I did not receive a response, I concluded that she was not interested in participating.

## Characteristics of the Sample

The participants ranged in age from 34-50. All were married except for one who was widowed. Yearly household income ranged from $65,000 to $115,000. Two participants had no religious affiliation, and those who did identified the following: Baptist (1), Quaker (1), Catholic (3), and Lutheran (1). In regard to highest level of education completed, the breakdown is as follows: high school (2), undergraduate degree (3), Masters degree (3), and Ph.D. (1). The number of children in the family ranged from 1-3. The participants had ten adopted children and three birth children. Clearly, this was a middle-class, highly educated group. However, given the demographic description of transracially adoptive parents (Feigelman and Silverman 1983; Altstein and Simon 1991; Saetersdal and Dalen 1991; Westhues and Cohen 1994), they appear to be representative of the people involved in these types of adoptions.

The Interviews

In both rounds of interviews, I used semi-structured interview schedules (see appendices A and B) which include a combination of open and closed questions. The two schedules covered themes such as the decision to adopt, the adoption process, racism, birth culture, and perceptions of TRA as well as adoption in general. I chose this type of interview schedule because it offers flexibility. Core areas of interest are identified and discussed while there is the option to explore and probe other issues that arise. Given my theoretical orientation, it was particularly important to me that the parents have the opportunity to raise issues of concern to them.

Semi-structured interviews, like all data-gathering techniques which involve human participation, suffer from bias because the participants often distort reality and choose their answers according to what they think the interviewer expects to hear (Becker and Geer 1957; Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). Moreover, Denzin (1970:130) worries that participants conceal what researchers most want to know. Holstein and Gubrium (1998: 126) point out, however, that to argue that the participant's responses are tainted with bias is to imply that he or she is "a preformed, purely informational commodity" which the interview process might contaminate. Conversely, they argue that if participants' responses are viewed as products of interpretive practice[6], they cannot be seen as pure. No interpretive practice, including the interview, can be free of contamination whether it be in the form of bias, error, or misunderstanding because it always involves the reciprocal activity of meaning-making. Using Holstein's and

[6] Interpretive practice is used "to convey both the artful and substantive aspects of this process; it refers to the constellation of procedures, conditions, and resources through which reality is apprehended, understood, organized, and represented in the course of everyday life" (Gubrium and Holstein 1997: 114).

Gubrium's perspective, I recognize and accept that (1) bias is a part of the study and (2) the presence of bias is not a shortcoming because it is present in all research endeavours where there is interaction between researcher and participant.

In the first round of interviews all but two of the ten participants were interviewed face-to-face. These eight interviews were conducted at the participants' homes and places of work as well as at the University of New Brunswick campus in Fredericton. All but one of these interviews were audio taped (the equipment failed). The remaining two interviews were conducted via telephone. These telephone interviews were audio taped and prior to the interview each participant was provided with the consent form (see appendix C). The duration of the interviews ranged between forty-five minutes and three hours. All of the interviews were transcribed. In this first round, I explored such themes as the decision to adopt, the adoption process, the birth culture of the child, and how the process could be improved.

In the second round of interviews, nine people were interviewed. As previously mentioned, one of the participants from the first round did not respond to my request for a second interview. Of the nine participants, eight were interviewed face-to-face in the same locations as in the first round. The remaining participant was interviewed via telephone (one of the same people interviewed via telephone in the first round).

The duration of the second interviews ranged between one and two and a half hours. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed by me. Before the commencement of each interview, the participants and I discussed the purpose of the research and the issue of consent. We also signed the consent forms (see appendices D and E).

Before the telephone interview, I discussed the issue of consent with the participant. Then, I signed my portion of the consent form and faxed it to the participant who signed it and faxed it back to me. Although I would like to have interviewed the participant in person, this was not possible. I decided to include her despite the limitations associated with a telephone interview because I wanted to present as complete a follow-up as possible and excluding the interview would have left a significant gap in the research. Although I was not able to read the participant's body language, and the lack of my physical presence may have hampered the participant's openness, I believe that the benefits of including this interview outweigh the drawbacks because the interview generated a valuable and considerable volume of material. It is possible that the lack of my physical presence could have, in fact, made the participant more comfortable. Another reason why I included this participant is because I met her before the second interview. This opportunity to connect with the participant on a personal level enabled a more intimate exchange during the second interview. In addition to our meeting I communicated by e-mail with this participant in the period between the first and second interviews. She provided me with adoption news and publications. I believe that these contacts established a level of rapport that made a genuine and rich exchange possible.

## Coding the Data

In this research, coding involved the reading and re-reading of interview transcripts. I utilized what Strauss (1987) calls "in vivo codes" which evolve from the

terms and language used by the participants in interview transcripts or actors in the field. This approach builds codes from the bottom up starting from the interview and field data.

In my first reading of the transcripts I looked for process—Where does the adoption process start? What steps must the parents take? Who are the actors they encounter along the way? In my second reading, I looked for overarching themes such as beliefs about family and the meaning of infertility in the career of the parents. In my third reading, I sought out patterns in regard to events such as similar experiences encountered during the adoption process and interaction with people in the community. In my next reading, I looked for statements beginning with "I" to identify how the parents see themselves. To locate these perceptions of self, I looked for personal reflections and expressions of feeling. Following that, I sought out references to others with a view to identifying the parents' perceptions of how others see them.

Following this process, I organized the codes according to diagrams and lists in an effort to display the data such that I could read it easily. Then, I renamed, split, and linked some codes. Finally, I looked for events, incidents, individuals, and other pieces of information which did not fit the codes. It was my aim to highlight that data which did not "fit" and to find meaning in these irregularities and exceptions.

## References to the Participants in the Research

In the consent form which I asked the participants to sign, I stated, "The information which you share with me during the course of the interview will be kept confidential. I will not reveal your name, the names of your family members (and any other specific names you mention), your address, and any other details which could

identify you." Upholding the promise that I would not reveal any information which could identify the participants proved to be a somewhat difficult task. I realized that in this paper I could not use pseudonyms to refer to the parents because people who live in the same community as the participants could piece together biographical facts where an individual is quoted repeatedly. The participants in this study live in small communities and the number of transracial families in New Brunswick is small thereby making these parents quite visible. This being the case I decided to refer to them as "a mother" or "a father." Although these references are impersonal and monotonous, they are necessary to protect the participants' privacy.

The Researcher's Place in the Research

I think that the rich data I collected was made possible by my willingness to share information about myself with the participants. Given the very personal nature of the information they were sharing with me, I thought it only fair that they know something about me. For instance, the participants wanted to know why I decided to study transracial adoption. I explained to them that my interest was sparked by my husband who is transracially adopted. I believe that this information in particular fostered trust and rapport. Some parents explained that my connection to transracial adoption made them feel more comfortable because they had confidence that the research would remain true to their stories.

Although researchers meet with participants to conduct research, we need to attend to the "commonsense sociability" (Shaffir 1998:62) that would be expected in other social settings. Creating a sterile interview environment devoid of any giving on

the part of the researcher makes it difficult for participants to relate to us as anything other than researchers when we in fact occupy several positions at the same time. Because we occupy these various positions, our role of researcher does not always need to be at the forefront (Kleinman 1991).

## Reflexivity

Furthermore, it is important to address the issue of reflexivity in the research. Postmodernists, among others, have criticized the lack of reflexivity in research. To be reflexive means that researchers are engaged in an ongoing dialogue with the self about how they gather data—What questions did I ask? What questions did I ignore? Why did I choose this topic of research over others? In being reflexive, researchers aim to find out how they impose themselves on the research process. They consider how their gender, race, class, political ideology, and other aspects of the self permeate and transform the research process. Hertz (1997) calls reflexivity the "scrutiny of 'what I know' and 'how I know it'" because the process is basically one of self-analysis in regard to the creation of knowledge (viii).

It is here that I will address some of those concerns. First, I subscribe to what Charmaz and Mitchell (1997) refer to as "audible authorship," that is, throughout this study, I refer to myself as researcher in the first person rather than the third person. Second, I have made a concerted effort to maintain an ongoing dialogue with myself about my position in this research. For instance, throughout the research I reflected on how my being Caucasian impacted the data. I thought about how the research might have been different if I had been a member of a minority group. For example, perhaps I did

not challenge the parents' conceptions of racial and cultural identity and life as a minority as much as a member of a minority group may have. I did, however, reflect on issues of race and ethnicity and my place in the research with my husband who is a transracial adoptee. He challenged and questioned me during our discussions thereby helping me to be a more reflexive researcher. Third, I noticed that some of the concepts I learned from the existing research on transracial adoption became a part of the vocabulary I used when conducting interviews. Some of these terms and concepts, however, were not part of the way in which parents described their experiences. For example, I used the term "preservation of the birth culture" when discussing the role of birth culture in the families' lives. A few parents pointed out to me that they did not believe that "preservation" was an appropriate way to describe their attitudes toward birth culture. One father explained to me that the family did not view incorporating elements of the birth culture into the family as an act of preservation. They did it because it was just a part of acknowledging who their child is. To these parents, the meaning of the word preserve, that is, to keep or hold on to something, did not represent their experiences. Some of them preferred the word embrace.

I think that being reflexive throughout this research has enabled me to produce a more honest account of these parents' experiences. I was able to look at how I as the researcher was impacting on the research.

## Theoretical Saturation

When no more additional data are being found, theoretical saturation is said to occur (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 61). Glaser and Strauss explain theoretical saturation

> Saturation means that no more additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category. As he sees similar instances over and over again the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated. ...Saturation can never be attained by studying one incident in one group ... dozens and dozens of situations in many diverse groups must be observed and analyzed comparatively (61-62).

While other groups (such as families in which there is interracial marriage) could be studied along with transracially adoptive parents to achieve theoretical saturation, the aim of this research was to explore the experiences of transracially adoptive parents, a group which has been understudied. The creation of theory (with theoretical saturation being one of the keys to good theory) was not an objective of this research. This study gains its strength from its longitudinal nature and its transferability.

## Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is that part of it contains retrospective accounts of the parents' experiences. When I interviewed the parents the first time, they had already been parenting their children for at least two years. Therefore, their accounts of the decision to adopt, the adoption process, telling significant others about the adoption, and meeting the child for the first time were retrospective accounts. Although the symbolic interactionist approach holds that an account represents the meaning of

one's experiences for him or her at that point in time, following the parents from the beginning of their journey to the present time would inevitably have yielded different data.

Another limitation of this research is the homogeneity of the sample. All of the parents were married (except for one who was widowed) and Caucasian. In this way the sample is very traditional and represents the typical profile of the international adopter. Therefore, their experiences may be very different from those of gays, lesbians, single-parents, interracial couples, and members of minority groups who adopt. Given this homogeneity and the small sample size, the results of this study are not widely generalizable.

The Importance of the Follow-Up Interviews

The follow-up interviews constitute an important strength of this study. First, they enabled me to explore the changes that occurred in the parents' lives following the initial interview. Without the second interview, the study would have only included the parents' experience at one point in their lives. Second, the fact that all but one of the parents in the first part of the study agreed to a second interview suggests that they found the presentation of their experiences in my honours thesis to be true to their lives. Third, the latter impacted on the second interview in that the participants' and I had an even stronger foundation of trust than during our first meeting. Fourth, the participants seemed more comfortable with me during the follow-up, and I was certainly more comfortable with them. Talking with them the second time was like picking up from

where we left off during our first meeting. All of these elements are strengths of this study.

## Summary

In summary, I chose a qualitative research approach for this study because it (1) enables the participants' emotions to be heard, (2) is useful when studying topics for which there is no substantive literature or theory base as is the case here, and (3) facilitates the trust and rapport needed when studying families.

The main data-gathering technique in this research is the semi-structured interview. I chose it for its flexibility. I utilized the snowball method of sampling, and consequently, the findings of this study are not widely generalizable. However, the aim of the research was to explore the lives of a group which have not been the focus of research and as such widely generalizable findings were neither expected nor considered an objective. What this study has to offer is findings which are transferable to other transracially adoptive parents living in rural and small urban areas which lack racial and ethnic diversity.

Finally, the follow-up interviews are an important strength of this study. They enabled me to present the parents' experiences over time including how their lives changed since the first round of interviews. In addition, by the second round of interviews I had a deeper level of trust and rapport with the participants as well as the knowledge that their agreement to participate in a second interview suggests that they found the presentation of their experiences in my honours thesis to be true to their lives.

# Chapter 3

## Data and Analysis—The Career

The focus of this research has been to explore the career of the transracially adoptive parent. The framework of the career was useful in understanding the experiences of these parents because it enables one to move between the parent and his or her significant society in an effort to understand (1) how parents take on the identity of transracially adoptive parent and incorporate it into their identity structure and (2) how that identity changes throughout the career.

The first stage of the career is the pre-adoption stage wherein the parent chooses to adopt either because of fertility difficulties or to add more children to the family. The second stage of the career is the adoption process. During this stage the parent is preparing for the arrival of the child. The final stage in terms of this research is raising the child. This stage is explored only slightly because the children are quite young ranging from age two to nine. Much more exploration of this stage needs to be done.

The first stage in the career of the transracially adoptive parent is the pre-adoption stage. The parents' life situations in this stage vary. Some of the participants had biological children, others had fostered children, and several experienced fertility difficulties. Given these differences, the path to adoption varied.

### Participants Who Experienced Infertility

The seven parents who experienced fertility difficulties chose adoption as a means of adding children to the family. Of those who opted to pursue treatment for infertility,

none pursued all possible treatment options. Several of them pointed to this very fact as evidence that for them adoption was not the last resort. One mother recalled

> I just said to my doctor, I said I can't do this [fertility treatment] anymore. You know, I said I think we're going to adopt. And he recommended in vitro and different types of other procedures, but I just thought I don't want to get on this merry-go-round, you know, for the next ten years.

Another mother remarked, "The main reason we decided to adopt was because we were unable to conceive and minor fertility attempts or efforts that were made were enough. I wasn't willing to pursue all of the available treatments." The sentiment generally expressed by these parents was that given that adoption was a possible avenue, they could not see the point of enduring the stress, heartache, uncertainty, and financial cost associated with pursuing fertility treatment to its end.

While adoption was not the option of last resort, it was the second choice. After all, fertility, not adoption, is the basis of the parenthood for which our culture prepares us (Kirk 1964). Moreover, the parenthood for which individuals are socialized is distinctly biological in nature (Kirk 1981). In regard to parenthood, we are socialized to expect that there will be a consanguinal relationship between parent and child and resulting genetic similarities; that we can choose when to become a parent; that we will experience the process of being pregnant and delivering a child; and that we can begin the process of bonding and attachment directly after birth (Matthews and Matthews 1986).

Infertility, then, represents a crucial juncture in one's life trajectory. Such a crucial juncture has been called a "turning point" in the career (Strauss 1959). The individual now knows he or she cannot assume the role of biological parent. At this point, a decision has to be made as to whether the individual will choose "nonparenthood" (Matthews and Matthews 1986) or adoptive parenthood. Each choice involves an identity transformation.

Several of the parents who experienced fertility difficulties explained that adoption was an idea that they were considering during their fertility difficulties. One father explained, "It wasn't like we just got to the end of the road and said okay there's nothing else, let's adopt. When we started having problems it was an idea that was always there. It just got closer and closer to the forefront as time went on." The relinquishment of the biological parenthood identity, then, was a gradual process for many of the parents. However, while it might have been gradual, the acceptance of infertility (in some cases through the failure of infertility treatment) was a turning point in the career in that it left only two choices—childlessness or adoption.

Participants Who Had Birth Children

Two of the three parents who already had birth children indicated that the decision to adopt was based on a desire to have more children coupled with media reports which discussed either international adoption or the plight of children without permanent families. One mother recalled, "I read this article about Chinese adoption and it just hit me like a ton of bricks." Another mother explains

> There was a newspaper article with a picture of four boys behind bars, little guys like seven, eight years old.... And the article was all about how these kids had been put in jail for their own protection to keep them off the street and so that they'd have a bed and a place to eat. ...And I just thought to myself that is absolutely, it's unacceptable. ...So, it really brought to light the adoption thing kind of to light because we were ready for a third child. And so I said to my husband, 'Why don't we adopt?'

The remaining parent explained that she and her husband decided to adopt because just after they married, they had discussed adoption as a way of "building their family" and had planned to adopt one day.

In the case of these parents who already had biological children, the decision to adopt was based on the view of adoption as a way to build a family and on a humanitarian motivation. More recently, humanitarian concerns have not been the driving force behind intercountry adoptions. According to Triseliotis, Shireman, and Hundleby (1997), the number of infants available for adoption in Western countries has been on the decline since the mid-1960s to 1970s thus making availability of children the primary reason for intercountry adoption. Adoption for humanitarian reasons was very much a pattern between the period spanning the 1950s to the 1970s during which many children were left orphaned as a result of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

In the case of these parents who already had biological children, it was more difficult to see a distinct turning point. All of the parents indicated that they considered

adoption to be a normal way to build a family and had always been comfortable with the idea of adoption. For two of the parents in this group the intersection of these attitudes about adoption and media reports about adoption and underprivileged children seems to have been the turning point. The remaining parent's situation was different because she and her husband had always planned to adopt.

The Decision to Adopt Internationally

Time was a key factor in the parents' decision to adopt internationally rather than domestically. Of the parents who considered domestic adoption first, all pointed out that to adopt a child in New Brunswick takes too much time. They reported that the waiting period can last eight to ten years and that they were not willing to wait that long in light of the fact that there are many children living in other countries who need families. Several of the parents suggested that the wait could be the result of a declining number of children available for adoption. This suggestion could very well be a reason considering that, as explained above, the number of infants available for adoption in Western countries has been on the decline since the 1970s. One mother explains, "...We just wanted to adopt a baby, but we were told eight to ten years and we just knew that we were not going to wait eight to ten years." Another mother remarked, "I wasn't interested in a nine-year waiting list. ...We wanted a baby. We wanted another child and there were zillions of children out there that wanted us."

Furthermore, the lengthy wait for a domestic adoption is particularly problematic for adoptive parents in their forties. You cannot adopt a child in New Brunswick if you are over fifty years old. Therefore, if prospective parents are forty years or more when

they decide to adopt, and ten years pass before a child is available for them, then they are already disqualified as potential parents because they will be near fifty at the time of the adoption. One mother explains this situation, "We [she and her partner] are over forty. We're not going to get a baby, and so one of the things we did was sign up for international adoption." This parent and others explained that they did not know that domestic adoptions entail such a long wait until they had decided to adopt, and as such it was a hurdle that had not been taken into consideration when deciding to build a family.

Once parents decided to adopt internationally, they began to construct international adoption as a choice which involves the "matching of complementary needs." One father described it this way, "There are children out there who need a family and can be adopted within a year, and there are families who want to build a family sooner than later." This construction of TRA as a "matching of complementary needs" is an example of the "**motive talk**" employed by the parents in this study to normalize international adoption. One of the primary ways by which people gain the social approval of others is to use motives which correspond to society's expectations and normative values. These motives can be thought of as "vocabularies" which individuals employ to justify and explain past, present, and future acts (Mills 1940: 439). The normative values of a society guide us in choosing the motives which will form the basis of acceptable accounts of social conduct. The parents, then, are using a vocabulary of motives to explain their desire to adopt internationally. In a society where the institution of adoption is still stigmatized as second best next to biological kinship (Bartholet 1993; Kirk 1964, 1981; Miall 1996; Model 1994) and racial intolerance exists, these parents are in situations where people question not just their decision to adopt, but also their decision

to adopt internationally as well as transracially. Therefore, trying to normalize transracial adoption becomes a part of parents' social accounts of their adoption experience.

This "matching of complementary needs" vocabulary is, in part, constructed in response to those who perceive adoption as an act of charity. The parents in this research did not see themselves as people who adopt to rescue needy children. One father explained, "People sometimes talk to us [he and his wife] as though we are somehow special because we have adopted internationally. We're not martyrs. Our [children] are the special ones. They are the reason we have a family." The characterization of adoption as an act of charity is found with respect to same-race adoptions as well. Such an attitude clearly reveals that the community still regards consanguinity to be the basis of a family. After all, one would never assume that a parent chose to have a birth child as an act of charity. Such a construction of TRA undermines the strength of the bond between the parents and their children because it does not recognize the paramount reason for the adoption—wanting a child to love and nurture. One father remarked, "We just wanted a child. I sometimes wonder why that is so difficult to understand."

## The Adoption Process

With the decision to adopt, the process of adoption[7] begins and this marks the beginning of the next stage of the transracially adoptive parent's career. In this stage parents go through the process of adopting the child and preparing for his or her arrival.

[7] It is important to note that the adoption process is not as linear as it appears to be here. I have highlighted various parts of the process and organized them into sections in an effort to shed light on the process. For example, parents might contact social services to arrange the homestudy after they tell their friends and family about the decision to adopt. Moreover, parts of the process also occur simultaneously.

During this stage parents will seek the advice and assistance of adoption professionals, tell family and friends about their decision, plough through the myriad of administrative details to which they must attend to facilitate the adoption (for example, completing a health exam, filing an immigration application to sponsor the child, and providing personal documents), and, most importantly, meet their child for the first time.

Learning to be a Parent

Daly (1992) has suggested that the decision to adopt marks the beginning of the reshaping of the parenthood identity. Prospective adoptive parents undergo an identity transformation wherein they go from expecting to be a biological parent to becoming an adoptive parent. One of the features of this transition involves a process of resocialization in which the prospective adoptive parents unlearned elements of biological parenthood and learned new aspects of parenthood associated with adoption.

Although Daly's work involves parents who are adopting children of the same race, none of whom have biological children, his work is instructive in regard to this research. Clearly, compared to biological parenthood, there is no role preparation for the process of adoption and the period of waiting and preparation before the placement of the child. Throughout the career of the transracially adoptive parent, he or she is learning all the time, learning from other adoptive parents, adoptees, adoption professionals, resource materials, conferences and workshops, and, of course, trial and error. Several parents indicated that one of the most valuable sources of help was other adoptive parents. One mother describes her talks with another mother who had adopted internationally, "I learned so much from her. She was a veritable fountain of knowledge. She gave me

advice about the process and other things in terms of raising my son. We've had talks about how to deal with racism and kids making fun at school ... his birth culture ... that sort of stuff. It is so nice to have someone to talk to about these things." One mother describes the value of attending conferences, "I heard about this conference and I saw in the program that there were hundreds of workshops and it covered everything having to do with adoption. Things like birth family contact, racial identity ... I mean anything and everything. I went to everything possible. There was so much valuable knowledge all in one place."

In the case of adoptive parents, the role learning is not limited to the beginning of the career. There are many other examples which will be discussed as they arise.

Making Initial Contact with Adoption Professionals

Many of the parents in this study had already been in contact with social workers at the New Brunswick Department of Health and Community Services by the time they decided to adopt internationally. As discussed earlier, initially, several of the parents considered domestic adoption, but after learning how long the wait period was they chose to pursue international adoption. The parents initiated the process in different ways: contacting the department by telephone, attending an information session sponsored by the department, contacting the National Adoption Desk in Ottawa, or contacting adoption agencies.

Those who attended the information session described it as not being as helpful as they expected it would be. One mother remarked, "I just remember feeling so depressed after they said well we're having a public information session on international adoption

and they just portrayed it to you as unattainable." A father also related that the meeting was discouraging

> I mean they just talked about the difficulties and I don't know if they picked Romania [as an example of a sending country] but let's say they picked Romania. You go there and you're not really sure if you're going to get a healthy infant. You might actually get there and you spend all your money and they have a baby for you. You don't know how they got the baby ... whether it was stolen. It [the scenario described during the information session] was a horror picture.

Parents who contacted the department reported similarly discouraging experiences. One mother explains, "I called Health and Community Services here in the province and finally got through to the social worker that was in charge of adoptions ... so she sent me four agencies and I mean how many agencies, there are hundreds of agencies in the country. One of them wasn't even doing business anymore!"

Several of the parents speculated that the social workers with whom they spoke were not helpful and were disparaging in regard to international adoption for two reasons—first, their top priority was domestic adoption matters, and second, they assumed that the parents would not want to adopt a child of colour, and if they said they did, they simply were not aware of what they were "getting into." One mother explains her experience

> The whole time I'm talking to [the social worker] ... she is telling me or discouraging me very strongly from adopting internationally. The risks and the hazards and the volatility, and, you know, the heartbreak, and you don't know what you're getting into, and you're gonna invest all this emotional commitment to this and its gonna fall through, and you have no idea of the complications of a transracial adoption. But the more [the social worker] said, the more I got my back up. And I thought who are you to tell me how to build my family?

Similarly, another mother remarked, "They [social workers] don't say to them [prospective adoptive parents], 'Did you know you can adopt internationally and you'll have a baby in your home in a year?' because they're making the judgement that these people don't want a dark-skinned baby in their house or that that's less than ideal."

On the other hand, parents who first contacted the National Adoption Desk and then the agency or contacted an agency directly reported positive experiences. One mother explained, "From the first five minutes of talking to the director I knew that these were the people ... who were going to help our family grow. I found her [the director] very honest because I found that instead of painting this really beautiful picture ... she explained to me the ups and downs of international adoption." Speaking about her experience with the various agencies she contacted, one mother recounted, "The beginning of adoption to me was a real rebirth. All of a sudden things weren't dark and not working out, like this stupid fertility clinic. Things were just starting to pick up."

The nature of these initial encounters is significant because they affect the parents' ability to "try on" the anticipated identity. The anticipatory socialization that

follows the decision to adopt (Daly 1992, 1998) unfolds in interaction with others and therefore, the nature of the interaction necessarily impacts on the socialization process. One mother comments on the ramifications of being discouraged at the beginning of the process

> ...How many people would trust the opinion of a social worker? Like some people who want to adopt internationally are just going to think okay you know I'd like to adopt a child from another country, possibly another race. What will my family think? What will my friends think? You know, will it be accepted? And then if the first call you make is to a social worker who says, 'Oh, I would never get myself into something like that,' then, you know, if you don't have the drive to follow through, you're just not going to do it.

The Homestudy

Whereas some parents had an easier time at this initial stage of the process, the next stage, working with the provincial government to fulfill the homestudy requirement, was for most of the parents a difficult, if not the most difficult, aspect of the process. All of the parents had to have a homestudy (a screening process required by the government) completed by a social worker before they could be eligible to adopt. One of the first difficulties which some parents encountered in trying to complete this requirement was the length of time they had to wait before they could have the homestudy. While some parents managed to have the homestudy done within a little more than a month after making the request, others waited several months. In the worst case, one parent waited

more than three years. Several of the parents suggested that the long wait was yet another signal to them that as adoptive parents they were second best and therefore not a priority. One mother explained

> I asked them why they hadn't phoned me and they said well you're on the waiting list. I said wonderful. What number? They said three. ...How long does that mean we have to wait? Three years. So, I just laughed. I couldn't believe that was true, that they could do that to people. ...The New Brunswick government cares that much about the welfare of adopting couples.

Another mother who had already had a homestudy completed and needed an update in order to adopt again recounts, "I asked in August could we please get an update for our homestudy and it took until the end of October for that to happen. And the government didn't have to do anything other than phone the person and say will you take care of this homestudy." At the time this parent was making her request, the provincial government had just begun to approve private social workers to carry out homestudies. Prior to this change, only department social workers could complete them.

Another difficulty parents encountered in regard to this part of the process relates to the cost and structure of the homestudy. According to some of the parents who had their homestudies completed by a private social worker, there appeared to be no strict guidelines in place regarding the duration and cost of the homestudy. One parent was visited by her social worker three times while another parent had to meet with her social

worker four hours, one day a week for six weeks. The cost of the homestudy ranged from $700 to $1000.

The parents framed all of these difficulties in two ways. First, many of the parents felt that they were at the mercy of the department in that they needed to complete this requirement in order to adopt. This is not to say that the parents did not challenge the system in place. Many of them filed complaints and pushed to move the process along as quickly as possible. However, several of them felt that they could only go so far because they did not want to jeopardize their chances of being approved, and in addition to that, those who were considering adopting again knew that in the future they might need another homestudy, or at least an update. The second way in which they framed their difficulties with the department was that as adoptive parents they were not a "priority." This suggestion of their having secondary status as adoptive parents finds support in the research literature. Policy and clinical practice have been shown to favor biological parenting over adoptive parenting (Bartholet 1993). A mother who had birth children before adopting had an experience with a local social worker which highlights this bias, " 'Well, I don't understand why you'd want to adopt. You've got children and you can have more children of your own.' And I thought ... you're a social worker?"

Moreover, the parents believed that because they were not adopting a child within the province, this fact made them a lower priority still. One father remarked, "They [the Department of Health and Community Services] were understaffed. There was no doubt about it so obviously their priority was going to be kids that they have access to everyday."

In relating these difficulties to me, some of the parents observed how much more difficult it is for them to become parents as compared to biological parents. They pointed to their dependence on the approval of others, that is, the Department of Health and Community Services as well as the government of the sending country; the financial cost of the adoption; and the lack of support from the Department of Health and Community Services as well as the federal government (as regards the time difference between parental and maternity benefits, for example). The parents argued that they have to prove themselves to be emotionally and financially fit parents whereas biological parents simply have a baby. While all of the parents supported the rationale behind the approval process, some of them indicated that the discrepancies between the process of becoming an adoptive parent versus a biological one calls into question their parental role. They identified the perceptions that others have of them such as failed biological parents, not the "real" parents, and their having a lesser degree of attachment to their child because of the absence of the blood tie. The parents went on to explain that this questioning of their adoptive parent identity often means that they receive less role support than biological parents and are subject to different role expectations than biological parents. The lack of role support was not portrayed by the parents as particularly problematic. The reason for this has to do with what McCall and Simmons (1966: 74) call the "aggregate of the role support." McCall and Simmons explain that when we consider the role-support accorded to us by relevant audiences, we find that the members of the audience respond to our performances differently. We do not, however, accord the same weight to these various reactions. Therefore, gaining support from those who matter to us most (for example, family) for the identity in question is often enough for us to legitimate our identity. In the

case of the transracially adoptive parents in this study, most of the parents gained support from family and significant others as well as other adoptive parents. From these people, the parents gained the role support they need to maintain their transracially adoptive parent identity, that is, to confirm their view of self as a transracially adoptive parent.

It is important to note here that although they were frustrated with the department, several parents liked their social workers and considered the homestudy a meaningful and necessary part of the process. One father described the homestudy in this way, "I compare it to opening an old box of photos because you're talking about things you haven't thought about and you're doing little exercises on things you haven't thought about in a long time. ...You discuss where you are and how you think and how you feel. ...You need to go through that process. They're not just checking you out; they're providing you with some food for thought."

Finally, the discouraging attitude of the Department of Health and Community Services at such an early stage of the process was difficult for the parents, especially those who had already experienced the disappointment associated with fertility difficulties. With all of these obstacles present, trying on the anticipated identity was difficult for the parents. They did, however, continue to pursue the adoption and in doing so revealed their commitment to the adoptive parent identity making it a salient identity.

Telling Family and Friends

Most of the parents in this study did not encounter any negative responses from friends and family. Several parents reported that all of their family members and friends responded to the news of the adoption in a very positive and encouraging way, while

some other parents framed the comments they received as "concerns." As one mother put it

> I knew that if I was asking his [her father's] opinion before the fact, he would have had a lot more to say about it only because of concerns about social repercussions, how the children [her birth children] would feel, you know. And he said things to me like you know that your family is now transracial. ...Your grandchildren will be transracial. I said, yes, I know all this. You have changed the shape of your family forever. I said, yes, I know that. And he said, you know, good. ...I'm sure that you're doing this for all the right reasons. God bless what you're going to be doing.

On the other hand, a few parents encountered negative responses from family and friends. They reported feeling very wounded and disappointed by these experiences. They lamented that these comments hurt them in a way that those of an acquaintance or stranger never could. Once again, these parents remained committed to realizing the adoptive parent identity thereby revealing the salience of that identity for them. One mother explained

> ...You know my kids have the best grandparents in the world who so totally adore them and can't imagine life without them, but even they had a couple of remarks that I certainly have forgiven, but will probably never forget--you know, because it hurt at the time--but totally forgiven because once again, you know, they just

> needed time to like have it digest. Like wow these grandchildren that we had always dreamed about are you know we have to kind of change the looks of them a little bit.

She offered this by way of explanation for some of the disappointing and hurtful comments which family and friends sometimes make

> ...What we do as pre-adoptive parents is we sit our families down and say, 'Guess what? We're going to adopt!' They're surprised. You know, you haven't given them time to digest this and then you say and we're going to adopt from another country. And what happens to a lot of us? We are then surprised and disappointed by our, usually our parents or family, friends, their reactions because in a way we weren't fair to them because ... a lot of times we don't let them in on the process until, until we're ready. ...They're like deer caught in the headlights.

Many of the parents explained that when they told their families and friends the objective was to let them in on the news rather than seek their approval. Moreover, the parents added that they would have followed through with their plans despite any opposition. One mother commented, "And so we talked to them about it in a little bit of detail. We weren't asking for permission or blessings. We just said this is what we're doing. We had already committed to it and watched for some reactions. And you can't expect people to embrace everything right away."

While the parents did not seek the approval of family and friends, it was important to them. According to Cooley's concept of the "looking-glass self" (1902) our perception of others' judgements of us produce feelings which affect our view of self much more than others' behaviour toward us. Of course, the degree to which others' approval matters to us varies according to who those others are. Our perception of our significant others' and reference groups' judgements of us is most important to us. The parents' perception of their families' and friends' reaction to the news of the adoption is an important element in the transition to adoptive parenthood. Perceived judgements of approval provide role support to the parents.

Finally, having someone in the family who was of another race seemed to have an impact on how the news of transracial adoption would be received by family members. One mother explained, "My older brother is married to a Japanese woman ... and he has two children so that [a multiracial character] was already in the family. That was completely accepted." Moreover, having someone in the family who is adopted, regardless of whether it is same-race or transracial, seemed to play a role in positive responses from family. The presence of adoption or a multi-racial element in the family engendered these positive responses because when the parents informed the family about the coming adoption, the focus became the arrival of the child rather than the child's race or the fact that he or she was coming into the family by adoption. This being the case, excitement and anticipation were the responses to the news—the kind of responses every expectant parent wants to receive.

Preparing and Waiting

The sections devoted to initiating contact, the homestudy, and telling family and friends are certainly a part of this section because they are elements of the preparation. However, I chose to separate them because there was enough data to discuss them individually. This section, preparing and waiting, will focus on the myriad of administrative matters to which the parents have to attend, preparing for the child's arrival, receiving a picture of their child, and, once all that they can do is done, the waiting.

Once the parents selected an agency and a country from which to adopt, they had to attend to many details. These included filing an immigration application to sponsor the child, obtaining copies of birth and marriage certificates and divorce decrees, being fingerprinted, completing a health exam, providing financial information, being immunized before travel to the birth country, and many other things. These arrangements highlight the lack of "role autonomy" which adoptive parents experience (Kirk 1964). Biological parents are basically independent in having their children because they technically do not need to use the services of a hospital or a doctor. While biological parents could have the child on their own, the adoptive parent depends on a host of people. Social workers, adoption agency personnel, doctors, lawyers, and bureaucrats—all have a stake in bringing the process to fruition.

Eventually, the parents receive news that a child is available for them. At that point, if they decide to adopt that child, they must confirm their decision with the agency. At this time they usually receive a picture of their child and information about him or her. Of those parents who received pictures, some explained that receiving the picture was an

important event in the adoption process because at that point they really began to "allow" themselves to feel that the adoption was going to happen. Prior to that point, they did not want to get too excited in case of a delay or a mistake. One mother explained, "We'd received some pictures of our son and we were just beside ourselves you know. Pictures were all over the kitchen and ... I blabbed to everybody the first day." The decision to avoid getting their hopes up too early in the process is a way in which parents cope with their lack of role autonomy.

Because of the lack of autonomy, the adoption process is truly a "waiting game." When parents make requests for documents, tests, and homestudies, they must wait, but at least they are actively involved in the process. However, once they completed all of the tasks expected of them, the process was, as one father put it, "out of our hands." According to several parents this was a very difficult stage of the process.

## The Trip

Not all of the parents interviewed traveled to the sending country to meet their children for the first time. Some traveled to destinations in Canada and the United States where they met agency workers who traveled with the child from the sending country to North America. Of the parents who traveled to the sending country, one traveled alone and the others went as members of a group. Preparing for the trip involved packing items for the baby such as clothes, diapers, bottles, and the like. Some parents learned the language of the country and read books about the country to minimize the culture shock and to become acquainted with the country's customs.

All of the parents who traveled to the sending country in groups described the experience as a very exciting and positive one. One father commented, "In regard to the culture it's really a different world and so we [he and his wife] thoroughly enjoyed that and we are both excited about going back to China someday. We were in a group and there was a guide and a translator ... so we were well taken care of." Another parent remarked, "It was exciting for me ... going to China for the first time. I was fascinated by their society. ...As it turns out, they [the Chinese] learn English in school so lots of people talked to us. They were so friendly and warm."

The parents also described the trip as a very emotional experience. One mother recalls when she met her daughter, "She was seven months old and she had bonded to her nanny which is actually a very good sign because sometimes orphanage children don't bond as easily. ...She was crying and it was very hard in the beginning. ...But I didn't really have any concerns. I was quite sure of myself, I guess." Another mother, who traveled to the birth country alone, remembers

> I wouldn't do it again myself because it was such an emotional thing. I was having a nap ... and the lawyer called the hotel room and said that they were all here and out in the lobby. So it's a really bizarre thing that you're going out to the lobby of a hotel to pick up your son. ...So we [she, the foster parents, the lawyer, and her son] visited for a while ... and it was time to say good bye. He started to wail because here he was left with a perfect stranger. Well, the poor little guy cried for oh six hours. Just broke my heart.

As can been seen in the account of this mother, though it was a joyous occasion, the time the parents spent with their children in the birth country was an emotional roller-coaster. Spending these days in a hotel in a foreign country was not easy. One mother recalls, "I really thoroughly enjoyed it [being in China] and ... I, of course, I wanted to get home as soon as possible because it didn't feel like it was really safe and that we were going to really have our child until we were home with our child. ...Plus, taking care of a child in a hotel room and you know traveling around with backpacks and stuff is not as comfortable as being in your own home."

It is important to consider the experiences of those who met their children somewhere other than the birth country. These parents travelled to destinations in Canada and the United States to meet their children. One mother describes her experience

> When she was five months old we got a call that we could then pick her up. She was going to be escorted to New York ... and that we could fly to New York and pick her up. At the time, three other families were going to be receiving their babies so what happened was our daughter arrived with three other five-month-old baby girls. ...And when she arrived she was the healthiest, most stimulated, bright, well-adjusted five month old I'd ever seen. ...It was the foster care. It was overwhelming and wonderful all at the same time.

Clearly, traveling to a foreign country or an airport to meet your child for the first time is not part of the cultural script for parenthood. These parents meet their children in

an unfamiliar place and then have to begin the process of bonding after their children have been in foster or institutional care. In the case of parents who traveled to the birth country, the adoption agency was an important source of preparation for this stage of the adoption process. The agency informed parents what they would need to take with them for the child, explained what would take place during the trip, and provided caretakers who could stay with the children in the event that the parents wanted to go somewhere without their child. The agency also attended to administrative matters related to the finalization of the adoption and provided a translator.

One of the things that pleased parents was the reaction they received from locals when they were in public with their children. Prior to traveling to the birth country, parents were unsure about what kinds of reactions they would receive when they appeared in public with their children. One mother describes her group's outings, "It was really quite clear to us that they were smiling at us and they came over and they were extremely delighted by the babies." Another father explains

> The people were curious. If you stop for three minutes to look at something, a crowd will gather around you to look at you so you're boxed in. Now, you can't go anywhere. We brought a little, plastic laminated card ... with Chinese characters and the translation beside it. It basically told the story about what you were doing. ...So you saw the light come on every time you handed the card over and someone read it. The light would come on, they'd smile, and give you the thumbs up.

The parents' perception of these reactions as approval of what they were doing provided role support. One father remarked, "Once they realize that these children are orphans that have been abandoned, they're quite happy for them. It was comforting to see that they wanted what was best for the kids. They didn't look at us as though we were taking them away."

What ties together the experiences of the parents, regardless of whether they met their children in the birth country or at some other location, is that meeting their children for the first time marked a crucial point in their transition to adoptive parent identity. This transition can be seen as a status passage (Strauss 1959) in which meeting the children constitutes the end status in the status passage from expectant adoptive parent to adoptive parent.

## Parenting the Child

The next stage of the career, parenting the child, begins once the parents have met their children and returned home with them. In this section, discussing adoption with the child, birth culture, the family's interaction with the community, and participation in adoption groups will be discussed.

### Discussing Adoption with the Child

Because the racial difference between the parents and their children is visible, their status as an adoptive family is publicly known. Unlike the case of same-race adoption, they cannot "pass" as a biological family. Therefore, they have no choice but to be open about adoption. Kirk (1964) argued that adoptive parents cope with their role

handicap by one of two types of behaviour pattern—"rejection-of-difference" or "acknowledgement-of-difference." Examples of the first types include the following: getting upset or angry when people ask about the adoption, trying to adopt as young an infant as possible, and denying the existence of the birth parents. Examples of the other pattern, acknowledgement-of-difference, include adopting older children, openly discussing adoption in and outside of the family, and encouraging others to adopt. Although Kirk discussed transracial adoption as an example of acknowledgement-of-difference, the dichotomous model he presents is not particularly useful in understanding transracial adoption because in this type of adoption the rejection-of-difference pattern is not optional.

From the very beginning, parents were very open with their children about the adoption. The parents began to discuss the adoption by telling the children the "story" of how they came to be adopted. One mother remarked, "She knows she's from China. She wants to hear the story all the time. So whenever she wants I tell her the story. And she loves to look at the pictures from when we were in China." In addition to telling the child the "adoption story," the parents also used books and videotapes to address the issue of adoption and some parents celebrated the day when they met their children for the first time.

Many of the parents explained that their children had not yet asked questions about their birth parents or about why they looked different from their adoptive parents. It is important to note here that the children vary in maturity as well as in their curiosity about their adoption. However, most parents expected that more questions as well as more complex ones would be coming soon because the children would be exposed to

societal views on family now that they were attending school. One father explained, "that [questions from his daughter about why she looks different from her parents] hasn't come up yet but I anticipate that pretty soon because the subject material in schools tends to be a little one-sided in regard to birth families. If they do a family tree or who do you look like--that's all pretty standard stuff for kids that age--that could probably bring some things up."

Most of the parents in this study did not have any information about their child's birth parents and their children had not yet asked about them. Most of the parents believed that their children were still too young to be able to completely grasp such a discussion. The parents though were preparing for this discussion, particularly those who adopted from China because in China there is seldom any information about the child's birth parents. Any discussion of Chinese adoption inevitably involves China's one-child policy and the policy certainly puts the birth details—or lack of them—into context. However, this is not something the parents believed they could discuss with their young children. Therefore, discussing in a truthful way why the birth parents did not keep the child while still avoiding mention of the one-child policy was perceived to be a potential area of difficulty. Ultimately, though, the parents resolved to be truthful and provide an age-appropriate explanation.

Two of the parents knew information about their children's birth parents and shared it with their children. One mother describes her surprise at meeting with her son's birth mother

> My brain's just totally gone mush now. I thought okay don't get flipped out. This is an opportunity that you would just have loved to have and it's happening. ...So the guy at the hotel desk translated for us. I said to myself, I have to ask this woman a lifetime of questions. ...I asked her permission [to ask personal questions] knowing how rude it might be. ...So I just wrote notes like crazy. ...I took a bunch of pictures. ...I don't know if she thought maybe she wasn't going to see me, if she'd just end up dropping off the file. ...It was so intense.

This mother tried to learn as much information as possible about her son's birth family and plans to share it with him when he is older. This mother welcomed a more open model of adoption. She sends letters and pictures of her son to his birth mother and foster parents in the birth country. This mother's willingness to include the birth mother suggests that she feels very secure in her role as adoptive parent.

Another one of the participants discusses the importance of discussing the child's birth family

> ...I think when it comes to a child thinking about the birth family, I think that a lot of times the reality is much easier than your imagination. I mean I've even watched [my daughter] a few times when she was younger start to cry because she had this big fear that her birth mother was going to die before she'd ever meet her. ...So if she had kept that inside because she felt like her mommy couldn't handle a conversation about that ... I think of the anxiety she might have had spending the time worrying about her birth mother.

It is not enough, then, for children to know that they are adopted. They need to know about the circumstances of their adoption, their genealogy, and cultural heritage (Triseliotis, Shireman, and Hundleby 1997). The knowledge of this information and the way it is made available impact on the formation of identity (Triseliotis 1973; Brodzinsky, Schecter, and Henig 1992). There is research which suggests that adoptive parents favour the disclosure of identifying information about the birth parents (Feigelman and Silverman 1986; Sachdev 1989). In this study, the parents who had information about their children's birth parents felt fortunate to have it and those who had no information regretted that they would not be able to tell their children much about their background. One mother who has no information explains her desire for more

> Now, I think they give out what they call an abandonment record or an abandonment certificate which would say where the child was found, what the child was maybe wearing, or maybe there was a note or something. We're working on maybe getting something like that. There might still be a possibility that it might be in a file some place. It would be nice I think later on to have something like that but we have nothing at all. Nothing.

## Birth Culture

Compared to parents who have adopted children of the same race or ethnic group as themselves, transracially adoptive parents are in a unique situation in regard to the

birth culture of their children. Acknowledgement of the child's birth culture is key to the child's self-acceptance and self-worth (Trolley, Wallin, and Hansen 1995). Such acknowledgement enables them to develop an identity which "links their upbringing, physical appearance and ethnoracial heritage" (Carstens and Juliá 2000: 63). Parents have to try to do this in such a way that the difference is acknowledged and not stressed or overemphasized (Trolley, Wallin, and Hansen 1995). This is an easy mistake to make when following the advice of adoption professionals because the very nature of their role is to focus on adoption issues.

The parents in this study indicated that they felt the pressure to accomplish contradictory tasks—to incorporate their children into Canadian society and simultaneously instil a sense of cultural heritage. They expressed a desire to raise their children such that they would feel at home in Canada and yet be aware and proud of their birth culture. One father remarked, "We strongly believe that it is important to acknowledge our child's birth culture, but we also have to recognize too that she is a Canadian living in Canadian society. We want her to feel like she is a part of it."

Parents also expressed their belief that building self-esteem in their children involves acknowledging and embracing the birth culture. One mother remarked

> Well people have told me that it's important for a child's self-esteem to know where they come from and to know something about it and to feel pride in it. It's really clear to me that this is a really homogenous part of the world and even if she doesn't come in contact with racism per se for many years of her life, she will know that she is different or seen as different on the basis of her racial origins. So

> I want to help her in any way that I can to feel good about coming from China and that includes learning the language if that's possible.

Some parents added that another aspect of building self-esteem involves giving the children the opportunity to spend time with other people of the same race so that they have positive ideas about them. One mother explains, "...I want her to have enough positive associations with people she identifies as like her so that she will have self-acceptance regardless of what is said to her."

While all of the parents acknowledged and embraced the birth cultures of their children, they recognized that there are limits to how much they can accomplish. Consequently, they turn to others for help. One father remarked, "We certainly don't see ourselves as really the best teachers of our daughter's birth culture and so we don't pretend to be Chinese. So I think that as parents we need to accept that there's a real need to seek help from others so that the parent doesn't try to be the sole provider of that child's culture." Seeking help from others included participating in events and celebrations with local groups who share the child's birth culture as well as enrolling the children in activities that relate to their birth culture.

On their own, parents did a number of things to acknowledge and celebrate their child's birth culture. Those who traveled to their child's birth country bought books, pictures, toys, ornaments and other items while visiting the country. They also celebrate festivals and holidays specific to their child's birth culture. Moreover, several parents expressed a desire to go back to the birth country as a family.

What was noticeable in the discussion of birth culture is the fact that the parents have had no real preparation for this element of their role as transracially adoptive parent. There is no real guidance as to how a parent should incorporate the birth culture into the family and no preparation for such a task. What if children are not interested in learning about the birth culture? What if it makes them uncomfortable? When there are birth and adopted children in the family, how does a parent balance introducing the child and the rest of the family to the birth culture without making the adopted child stand out and the birth child feel left out? These are all important questions which have not been the focus of research. The parents in this study were doing what they felt was appropriate for their child.

It is important to remember here that the children in this study are young and as such the complex identity issues of adolescence are still relatively far away. This is not to say, however, that the parents have not looked toward the future because all of them to some extent mentioned that they are aware that later on the children will have to deal with complex identity issues.

## The Family's Interaction with the Larger Community

In the following four sections, the transracially adoptive family's interaction with the larger community will be discussed.

### "Fortunate" Children

All of the parents reported that people are generally friendly and curious about their families, but that occasionally strangers ask very direct, personal questions. They

believe that most people who make these comments are ignorant rather than malicious. The comments are organized around two themes in particular: (1) the idea that the adopted children are fortunate to be adopted, and (2) the primacy of the blood tie in the social construction of the family. Comments motivated by these beliefs are common to all types adoption. What is different in the case of the transracially adoptive family though is that they cannot avoid these questions because of the sheer visibility of the adoption. In the company of strangers and those who don't know about the adoption, same-race families can "pass" for biological ones. One mother recounts a family outing

> ...There was a lady and I could see that she was watching us and she was smiling and finally she came over to us and she said to us—now keep in mind my kids are totally listening to this—she said, '...these children you would never know they're not yours. You treat them just like they were your own.' And she had the biggest smile on her face because she really thought she was giving us the biggest compliment.

Another mother recounts an incident in a grocery store when her daughter was eighteen months old, "[A stranger] said, 'So are you happy with her? And I, I was just taken aback. ...It was like some product that we had purchased, but anyway obviously she probably didn't quite mean it that way." These comments are not just insulting to the children, but also to the parents because they undermine the bond that they have with their children--as if being very close to one's adopted child is unexpected--and thereby threaten the parents' status and identity as parent.

Such demeaning references to the children in their presence upset the parents, especially as the children were getting older. By the second round of interviews, almost all of the children had started school and parents were concerned about their children being at an age where they can understand the negative comments people make and the personal questions they ask. Several parents highlighted the importance of "not making too big of a deal of it" because they did not want their children to think that something was wrong with them or the family. They advocated handling these matters calmly and positively or at least with civility.

### How Can People Abandon Their Children?

Another comment highlighting the primacy of the blood tie has to do with people's perception of the birth parents' decision to choose adoption for their child. Several parents reported that people made comments which imply that it is wrong to let your "flesh and blood" be raised by someone else. One mother explains

> People will be talking about someone's daughter who had a baby and they'll say, 'Of course, they're going to look after the baby. They have limited resources, but they're going to look after the baby,' because that's the right thing to do ... because adoption is the wrong thing to do. That stuff just totally negates my family, you know. It also tells you how much value our society places on blood ties.

Another mother remarked, "Sometimes I just want to shake people. A lot of people say, 'How could she give him up? He's so beautiful.' They don't realize that some people can't be mothers. They're too poor or too unprepared or maybe they just don't want to be a mother or whatever. There are lots of reasons. If these people think that mothers should always keep their babies, then where does that leave my family?" The comments above threaten the adoptive parent identity by suggesting that children belong with their birth parents and are not meant to be raised by people outside of the family.

### Are They Real Siblings?

Another type of comment which highlights the primacy of the blood tie in the construction of the family has to do with the bond between siblings. Parents indicated that people made a distinction between "real" siblings meaning those who were biologically related and those who are siblings by virtue of the fact that they are adopted by the same family. Regarding the question "Are they real siblings?" one father remarked, "That's one we get. That's a common one. The answer depends on whether they're [the children are] there or not. There are a lot of times when you know what the person is trying to say even though they're tripping over the words a little bit. They're not trying to be mean or anything." Another mother explained, "The fact that we have a family and that we live as a family makes them brother and sister. But just like that people will—sometimes in front of my children—make my children feel less connected than what they really are."

This distinction is also made in reference to families made of birth and adopted children. One mother recounts a family outing, "She [a woman from the neighbourhood]

said, 'Does he have any brothers and sisters?' I said, yes. That's Terry and that's Leslie.[8] ...She knows perfectly well they're my other children. She said, 'You know what I mean.'"

One parent offered an explanation for why people take such liberties with adoptive parents, "People ... get very permissive when it comes to a situation like this. And it seems to me that there is an equation between because that kid in our minds isn't really yours, therefore we're allowed to ask a lot of questions." Other parents have speculated that it is the visible racial difference and *then* the adoption which makes them stand out and draw questions. One father explains, "When people see a family and there is a child adopted in that family who is the same race, people don't know about the adoption. When you are an interracial family, they [people] think they [the members of the transracial family] look different, the kids must be adopted and then they approach you and ask questions. It's like their curiosity overwhelms their sense of what is appropriate to ask you or anyone for that matter."

These parents and their children experience a lack of privacy. People intrude on what Goffman (1971) calls the "information preserve" which he defines as the "set of facts about himself to which an individual expects to control access while in the presence of others" (39). Not only do people ask personal questions but they have access to the biographical fact of adoption. The racial difference makes the adoption apparent in all situations. This fact is so obvious to people that being a transracially adoptive parent becomes the parent's "master status" (Becker 1963). The parent, for example, becomes

---

[8] Both names are pseudonyms.

"the person who adopted the Korean kids." The concept could be extended to the children ("the baby they adopted from China") and even the family as a unit ("the family down the street with the Guatemalan kids"). Many parents explained that they had become tired of this master status and just wanted to be seen as a family. None of the parents made attempts to fight the status because as one father explains, "Everybody knows as soon as they look at you that you're an adoptive family. There's nothing you can do about that. The people who matter to me and my family know that we're more than just parents who adopted interracially and adopted Chinese kids."

Strategies for Dealing With Comments and Questions

The parents indicated that responding to comments and questions, whether malicious or ignorant, depends on the situation. Some parents indicated that if the children are present, a response is definitely required. Others said that they decide on a case-by-case basis. Several variables affect whether and how they handle comments and questions. One of those variables is whether the person is someone they are likely to interact with again. One father explains

> I had a call from a man the other day. His brother was looking into international adoption and the words he used were all negative ... you know he might have to *resort to* international adoption. ...My daughter wasn't there and I knew what he meant and I don't think he was trying to be negative, but if she had been there I would have corrected him and tried to positively correct him. You know things like that people pick it up. It's just whether it's worth educating that person or

> not. If someone is just passing through and you're not going to see them again it's just not worth the effort because you know it's not going to stick. But if it's somebody who's in your life, then you've got to work on it.

Several parents commented that as their children aged they were finding it increasingly less appropriate for people to ask personal questions about them while they are present, especially since they understand many of the questions and may not like the idea of strangers asking them. One father explained that as his children get older, he plans to let them decide whether or not they want to discuss their story, "When the kids are there you have to respond positively without just letting it go and as they get older I think it's going to lean toward whether they want to talk about it or not because it's their story."

Another issue which arose was that of educating people. Some parents felt that people say and ask inappropriate things because they "don't know any better" and possibly no one has ever corrected them. These parents make attempts to correct people and educate them, particularly when the possibility exists that the parents and their children might have continued contact with these people. One parent explains, "When people ask the 'Are they really siblings?' question most of them haven't even stopped to think about what they've said and most of them don't have a clue about what it means on a deeper level. So sometimes I enlighten them. How else are they going to know?"

### Interaction with Other Adoptive Families

All of the parents participated in activities and groups for internationally adoptive parents. Their level of involvement varied. Some participated in activities while others

were also involved in the organization and planning of groups and newsletters. Not only did parents meet with other adoptive families, but they also met with people considering adoption to answer their questions and provide advice.

All of the parents agreed that their interaction with adoptive families was different than with non-adoptive ones because of their shared experience of adoption and living as a multiracial family. One mother explains why it is important to her to spend time with other adoptive parents

> Well for me part of it is to be in contact with other parents who have adopted. It's this wonderful convenient little reference group. ...So it's partly that and it's partly that our experiences in becoming a family have been quite similar so that I and my child are not constantly sitting in the middle of a conversation about going to the hospital to give birth or you know those kinds of things which were not part of our beginning. So it's the shared experience and on top of that--and its becoming more so now as the children become more aware of the race issue--what kinds of situations they're going to have.

In her study of infertile women who had adopted or were in the process of adoption, Miall (1987) found that 70% of the participants said that they behaved or talked differently with other adoptive parents and in all cases the difference was positive. The participants reported that other adoptive parents were more understanding about the experience of adoption and could share mutual concerns and provide advice about adoption.

Parents also commented on the ease and comfort that comes with being surrounded by people who are like you. One father explained

> I mean looking down the street you're always a little bit on guard because you know that you stand out and you're a visible minority. Right away I mean there's no question that something's different about your family. So you're a little bit on guard. I mean it's not something I notice, but in the background it's always there. If somebody says something stupid you gotta be ready whether they're aggressive, passive, or whatever. So when you go to an event and everybody there is in the same situation you are as far as interracial families, you don't have to think about those things anymore. It's just pleasure. It's just fun time.

Because the parents know the social situation and the identities of the others before they interact with them, they can achieve a strong presentation of self and in turn the other adoptive parents at these events are likely to affirm their personal identities. Goffman's *Stigma* (1963) is instructive here. He reasons that those who live with a stigma will meet sympathetic others, some of whom share the stigma. Goffman explains, "Knowing from their own experience what it is like to have this particular stigma, some of them can provide the individual ... with a circle of lament to which he can withdraw for moral support and for the comfort of feeling at home, at ease, accepted as a person..." (20).

While the idea of a circle of lament is not really appropriate here[9], the transracially adoptive parents in this study reported that other adoptive parents affirm and support their adoptive parent identity.

The parents also mentioned that their children benefit from spending time with other adoptive families. For example, one mother remarked, "We realize that this helps [our daughter] locate herself in a community of people who have gone through similar processes to her." Another mother explained, "After we adopted we were looking to have groups where our children could have Christmas parties and different things so that our children could be around families that are made the same way as ours, you know, that are built by adoption." Some parents indicated that their children know so many people who are adopted that adoption is very normal to them.

For some parents, their involvement in adoption groups extends to offering support and advice to other adoptive parents and prospective adoptive parents. One mother explains, "...At the very beginning I joined these groups looking for support, looking for resources, and then very very quickly realized that I had a knack for giving support, finding resources, and sharing resources. So ... I very quickly became a support-giver. But at the beginning it was probably support for ourselves and our

---

[9] It is important to note here that the choice of the word lament has much to do with the types of stigma discussed in the book and the time at which the book was written. First, Goffman refers to stigmas such as blindness, deafness, bodily disfigurement, and mental disorder. Whereas none of the people with these conditions chose them, the parents in this study chose to become transracially adoptive parents (they could have adopted a child of the same race and "passed" as a biological family but they chose not to do so) and therefore, they likely do not lament their situation. Second, *Stigma*, published in 1963, reflects how people at that time in history acted toward people with stigmas. At that time, people knew little about the stigmas Goffman discussed in the book and as such this lack of knowledge led to much fear which manifested itself in overt prejudice and rejection forcing many stigmatized people to live on the fringes of society. Although discrimination against many kinds of stigmatized people still exists today, the current climate is probably different from that which existed in the 1960s because today we know more about stigmatized conditions and life choices (such as homosexuality, adoption, and childlessness).

decision to adopt internationally and transracially." Parents who were not formally involved in offering support to others were always willing to talk with people who are considering adoption. They reflected on how helpful other adoptive parents had been to them when they were considering adoption and preparing for it and, in turn, were willing to do the same for others. One mother remarked, "I feel a real obligation, a real drive to help other people the way people helped me."

The groups in which the parents were currently involved were not support groups per se although sharing with other adoptive parents was considered a form of social support. Several parents mentioned that they could see the need for a support group when their children enter adolescence. One father explains, "We don't really have support type sessions ... mostly I think because the kids aren't really old enough yet that it's required. I suspect that will increase [the desire to have support groups] and we'll have get-togethers of a different nature without the kids around so that you can sit and talk."

What stood out when parents talked about their experiences with other adoptive families was the opportunity for reinforcement of the adoptive parent identity as well as the transracially adoptive parent identity. Other adoptive parents treated them as equals whereas this was not always the case in interaction with biological parents.

## How Life Could Be Better

It seems fitting to end this chapter with a discussion of the parents' opinions on how life could be better. This section only scratches the surface in regard to what changes would make life better. However, it will highlight some important themes.

One issue which some parents highlighted as being important is that of parental leave. Parents who adopt are eligible for parental benefits whereas biological parents are entitled to both maternity and parental leave benefits. There are also discrepancies in terms of how the provincial governments and the private sector supplement the income of parents who take leave. Some of the parents explained that they believe that women who give birth need time to recover physically, but do not need the maximum amount of maternity leave to which they are entitled to do so. They believe that much of that time is spent bonding with their children—time which they believe adoptive parents should have as well. The parents explained that bonding time is particularly important in adoption and expressed their frustration over how the government and employers fail to recognize this, as evidenced by the lesser amount of time usually offered to adoptive parents. One father explains his views on benefits

> I see it as there's a new child in the house and the child needs a certain amount of time for bonding and to know they're secure whether they're a newborn or five years old. I sometimes think the bonding is more important because you've got a later start at it when you've adopted. ...Maternity leave is apparently for mothers to recover from childbirth and I have yet to speak to anybody whose gone through childbirth who says it takes that long to recover. And that's not what people really do. ...Depending on how your adoption took place maybe you need some recovery time too. Maybe you went to another country for two weeks and got ill when you were in the country. Maybe you need two extra weeks to get over that. But that's not taken into consideration.

A mother explains, "I certainly think that if a woman gives birth, then she needs a certain amount of time for herself as a medical leave, but six months and now up to a year—I haven't seen anyone who took that long to recover from childbirth. From my point of view, the time that families need is bonding time and that's the same and even more so in a case where there's been an adoption." Such discrepancies reflect the societal perception of adoptive parents as not "real" parents. The parents' adoptive identity then is not affirmed.

Parents also raised the issue that given New Brunswick's and Canada's low population growth rate[10], the government should be more supportive of adoption. One mother explained

> We hear a speech almost everyday by some politician saying that we don't seem to have the population base for sustainability of services and so on in New Brunswick and in Canada in general and here you have individuals who are bringing a new population into the country who are children who are not coming in as immigrants but are coming in as Canadians so there's no cultural shift. Chances are that you're going to have a decent education because the people who can afford to do this have to have a certain amount of money so they [the

[10] The 1999/2000 population growth rate for New Brunswick is 0.3% and 0.8% for the country. This information came from the Statistics Canada website. The address is:
http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/000926/d000926a.htm
The 1999/2000 birth rate for New Brunswick is 10.1 per 1000 and 10.9 for the country. This information came from the Statistics Canada website. The address is:
http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/People/Health/healthdemo04b.htm

> children] are what we think would be a good addition to the province and yet there are all kinds of hurdles and inequalities with benefits.

Finally, one question arose repeatedly, that is, "Why does the adoption process in the province have to be so difficult?" All of the parents agreed that the provincial element was the most difficult part of the process. One father summed up his thoughts, "The closer I got to home, the more difficult it was which really surprised me because when I started I expected it to be the other way around. I thought people here are going to be helping me out and as I got closer to [the sending country] things are naturally going to get more difficult. Was I wrong." Another father explained his frustration

> I should believe that they were working with me, not working on me. ...If I never have to see that office door [of the Department of Health and Community Services] again, I'll be happy because I found that they were not as helpful as they should be and it's regrettable because they should be. They're supposed to be able to help. Five years from now if I have a question, I should be able to ask them, but I don't want to see them.

Overall, all parents felt very positive about the process. All of them had good experiences with the agencies they chose. Those who traveled to the birth country enjoyed learning about their children's birth culture and did not encounter any serious problems.

# Chapter 4

## Data and Analysis—Outcome of the Follow-Up Interviews

In this chapter, I will discuss the outcome of the follow-up interviews. In these interviews it was my aim to find out how the parents' lives had changed since the last time I spoke to them and also to probe areas which arose in the first round of interviews (for example, views on race-matching policies in adoption). It is important to remember that only a year passed between the first and second interviews and, therefore, strong patterns of change were unlikely to occur. As such, the adoptive parents in this study focused more on the transition stages occurring in their children's lives due to their physical maturity. Thus, their discussion centred around the issues of children beginning school, questions about birth parents, and birth culture.

### Adjusting to the Children's Beginning School

In the case of those parents whose children had begun school between the first and second interviews, the most often cited change was that the children had begun to spend more time outside the home than before and were becoming involved in extra-curricular activities, or, in some cases, more involved than at the time of the first interview. The parents indicated that they were adjusting to the fact that the children were spending more time outside of the home and away from them than when I conducted the first round of interviews. They explained that they could not exert as much control as before over what the children were hearing and learning from others. Those parents whose children attended daycare prior to school explained that the children were

supervised much of the time and thus the parents likely would have been informed by daycare workers of any negative incidents. School, however, was seen as a less protective environment. One parent remarked

> School is a whole new world for my daughter. I can't be there to control what happens or at least respond to situations when they arise. I have to let her go and try to be involved by asking her about her day and getting reports from her teacher about her progress. One of my main jobs now is to build her confidence so that she can feel good about herself and stand up for herself when she faces racism or teasing because she and her family are different from most of the kids at her school.

Many of the parents were accustomed to admonishing and correcting negative questions and comments from others in the presence of their children. As the children age, however, they are not able to play this "protector" part of their role as often as they did when their children spent most of their time with them. To compensate for this change, the parents focused their attention on building their child's self-esteem thereby taking on the role of a parent who empowers. For example, whereas before the parents would have responded to negative comments about race and adoption from others in an attempt to set an example for the children and to protect the dignity of the family, now given the amount of time the children spend outside of the home without their parents, this is not always possible and as such the parents try to supply their children with the personal resources they need to stand up for themselves.

Another issue which arose in regard to the children spending more time outside of the home had to do with the questions and discussions anticipated by the parents as their children are exposed to various ideas regarding family. The parents expected that classroom discussions and projects about family and genealogy would likely spark more questions than had come up before. They anticipated that the curriculum would likely feature consanguinal ties pre-eminently in discussions about family. One father remarked

> Yeah that [questions from his daughter about why she looks different from the rest of the family] hasn't come up yet, but I anticipate that pretty soon because the subject material in schools tends to be a little one-sided in regard to birth families. A lot of the projects I think she'll be doing pretty soon--they do a family tree or who do you look like--that's all pretty standard stuff for kids that age. So that could probably bring some things up. ...We've done a lot of research and we have a lot of background material. The adoption helper newsletter publishes guides to help out with questions like that. They do have teacher's guides. So you could approach your child's teacher with the teacher's guide. It gives them exposure to the idea that it could be difficult for some kids in the class if everything is geared toward genetics.

Trying to carve out a niche for your family form, as many of the parents are doing, is not a part of the cultural script for biological parenting because the concept of family generally conjures up images of people who are biologically linked. Once again then the parents are creating their own script as they attempt to gain recognition for their family

form. This undertaking has become part of their role as transracially adoptive parent. Some of them discussed their desire to create an environment for their children which normalizes or at least includes multi-racial families formed through adoption.

Questions About Birth Parents

The first time I interviewed the parents, those with very young children identified an issue which would require discussion and work in the future, namely sharing information about the birth parents, and where there is none, helping the child adjust to this reality. When I met with the parents the second time, this issue had moved closer to the forefront. By this time, they were preparing for questions about birth parents. Those parents who had already broached the topic were expecting more detailed questions such as "Why didn't my birth mother keep me?" and in cases where the child had already been told that the birth mother could not take care of the child, "Why couldn't she take care of me?" One mother explained, "I'm waiting for the time when she's going to ask why did my birth mother give me up. That's going to be a toughie. ...That's something we don't know. I'm not ready to make up a story. And that's what I find out from people over the Internet, that it's the best thing to stick to the truth and not to embellish, just answer questions they ask." Another parent remarked

> We've told her, exposed her to the concept of a birth mother and a birth father and as I've said she's not been terribly interested in it. So she knows they exist and she knows they live in China probably, but I don't think it's that clear. I don't think it's been absorbed by her little brain yet. But she will begin to understand

more and questions will come soon. We'll be truthful of course. It's the only way to go.

It is clear that since our first meeting the parents maintained the view that the best way to answer questions about the child's origins is to be honest, albeit at an age-appropriate level. This is an important observation because I wondered after the first interview if it would be more difficult to maintain the "honesty is the best policy" view once the children began to ask more and increasingly complex questions about their adoption and birth parents. It is clear that all of the parents maintained the view. Several parents told me that it is their understanding that according to other adoptive parents and adoption publications, being truthful now rather than waiting until later is the best way to handle such a discussion.

As I stated earlier in the paper, the parents are very committed to the role of transracially adoptive parent thereby rendering that identity very salient. This being the case, the parents are more likely to perform in accordance with the expectations for their role. The parents are certainly fulfilling the expectations associated with the role of transracially adoptive parent. According to the parents, there is an expectation among adoption professionals and other adoptive parents that children be answered honestly, and this is exactly what the parents have chosen to do. Many of them indicated that being honest in such a discussion is also a matter of following their own value system.

Race-matching Policies in Adoption

In the first round of interviews, I asked the parents how they respond to those who argue that transracial adoption is unethical. However, I never asked them to describe specifically their viewpoint in regard to race-matching policies in adoption. When drafting the interview schedule for the second round of interviews, it occurred to me that seeing transracial adoption as ethical does not necessarily presuppose objection to race-matching policies and their underlying rationale. In the follow-up interviews I decided to explore this topic of race-matching. Although they believed that there was nothing inherently wrong with a multiracial family, most parents related that they understand why some people advocate race-matching. Some of the parents indicated that in an ideal situation, that being one in which there are enough parents of colour who want to adopt children, race-matching makes sense. They argued, however, that there are not enough adopters of colour and therefore the policy does not fit the reality of current adoption trends. One father explained

> I guess my view on that is all other things being equal, I would agree. If I had two sets of parents in front of me and I thought they were both going to provide safe loving homes for the children, and one of the families was the same culture or race as the child, I know it's hard thing to pin down but I would say yeah that it is in the best interest of the child to I think to be in that background.

A few explanations were offered for this view. One father stated that parents of the same racial or cultural group can impart different knowledge about heritage. He explained,

"...If [my daughter] had Chinese parents I'm sure there would be all kinds of things she would be learning about Chinese culture and heritage that I can't teach her." Another perceived benefit of placing the children with parents of the same race is the belief that the children will be better able to identify with their birth culture as well as people of their race. One father remarked, "She'd probably experience fewer identity problems as she gets older." A related comment is that because they have probably experienced racism, parents of the same race as the child could provide more comfort in the face of racism. One parent explained, "I think having the same race or culture behind you during that would tend to give her parents' advice to her a little more credit whereas I can't, you know, I can't help her that way. ... I haven't been there. I know what I think and I know how I think things are, but I'm not Chinese so I can't tell her from experience. So that's the only difference that I see that would be beneficial."

A commonly held view among the parents was that given the move toward globalization, it is inevitable that more people of different races, ethnicities, and cultures will unite and create families. One mother explained

> And as far as the race is concerned, well, the only worry and concern that I would have is the immediate one for that individual. Will they be growing up in a community where they are a minority and where people's views may not be supportive? ...So I mean we come to be a family and are from different continents and different gene pools. It may be somewhat unusual now and it might be very unusual here, but I really believe that that's the way we're going.

> ...With the Internet and the kind of communication that we have, I just see a world where it just won't matter.

A father remarked, "I think one of my favourite lines I heard came from a black woman who ... said well isn't that nice you're making the world a little more beige. I thought that was the best line. I thought that was just great. That's a good way to put it. I almost wish that--I know it's a silly idea--we could all be mixed over the next generation. I think that's [the mixing is] good. You lose those interesting pieces of culture, but eventually that stuff is going to go anyway."

It is interesting that some of the parents indicate that race-matching might be a good idea if there were more adopters of colour and simultaneously believe that there will be more multi-racial, multi-ethnic families in the future. Several of the parents then see themselves as having one foot in today's society and another in the society of tomorrow. They still maintain that parents of the same race could provide more comfort and insight in regard to racism and identity development, and yet they believe that their family will one day be more common because people of different races, ethnicities, and cultures are more often coming together because of how much smaller the world has become through technological innovation. Their identity then exists on the cusp of what they perceive as being a society of increasing numbers of interracial, intercultural, and interethnic families, a society where as a family they will be much less unique.

Birth Culture

In the first round of interviews, all of the parents reported that they believe it is important to incorporate into the family elements of the child's birth culture, and they made it a goal to do so. By the second round of interviews, all of the parents reiterated their commitment to this goal. What was different, however, was that some of the parents had done new things to accomplish this goal since the first interview. For instance, some parents had begun to introduce their children to the language or dance of the birth country while others had begun to use the Internet to purchase items such as books and videos which they probably would not otherwise be able to obtain.

Another noticeable difference among some parents was that they seemed to be more confident about their ability to incorporate the birth culture into family life. In the first round of interviews, some parents perceived themselves as having a fairly limited role in imparting birth culture given that they are not a member of the group, but by the second round, some of these parents had focused more on what they could do and directed their energy to that end. The parents, however, reiterated the importance of making contact with and enlisting the help of people of the same birth culture. Parents took the children to classes and events hosted by people from the child's birth culture. One parent explained

> At first I focused a lot on the idea oh I can't hand down the culture the way someone of that culture can. And then I thought that's right, that's a given, and I thought I'll work with that. I wanted to make efforts to introduce it but I didn't want to try to be all and everything to my child when it comes to being a source of

culture. I'm much more comfortable now. I focus on making sure the birth culture is not lost and I get help from other people who are part of that culture. Making the effort is what it's all about, letting your child know that it's important to the family. That's what matters.

The parents' commitment to incorporating their child's birth culture into the family is yet another indicator of the prominence of their transracially adoptive parent identity. McCall and Simmons (1966) assert that the more time and material and emotional resources we invest in an identity, the more prominent it is likely to be. The parents' commitment to incorporating the birth culture into the family is an important part of their transracially adoptive parent identity which involves learning the culture, observing rituals and holidays, obtaining cultural items, investing financial resources, and so forth.

One theme which featured more prominently in the second round of interviews with parents was their child's identity development, particularly during adolescence. Although the teenage years are quite some time away for most of the parents, they were already looking ahead to the challenges which might arise. Many of the parents explained that adolescence can be a difficult time for any child, but that it may present unique challenges for their children in regard to identity. Many of the parents anticipate that they will need advice and support from parents who have seen their children through adolescence. Once again the lack of a cultural script for transracially adoptive parenting becomes apparent. While there is much common wisdom available for biological parents as to how to help one's child through adolescence, there is no such resource for

transracially adoptive parents or even same-race adoptive parents. In most cases, transracially adoptive parents cannot obtain this advice from family either. As they did in the past in preparation for adoption, these parents will likely consult adoption publications and other adoptive parents. Of course, they will probably rely as well on their own experience given that they will have already been dealing with racial and adoption issues for a decade by the time their children are teenagers.

Several parents explained that they enjoyed spending time with other adoptive parents and saw those relationships as a future source of support as their children age. One parent explained

> Right now when we meet with other adoptive families it's to have fun and socialize. In years to come I imagine we'll want to spend some time with other parents without the kids being there so that we can talk about what's going on in our lives and help each other, you know, when the kids are older. Talking to other adoptive parents about family things is comfortable because they understand where you're coming from whereas biological parents just can't because it's not part of their experience. So I think that being with other adoptive parents and talking to them about various issues will be very helpful when the kids are going through the terrible teens.

A mother expressed a similar view

> The value of being in a group of other adoptive parents is the shared experience and that will become even more important as the children become more aware of the race issue and when they encounter all the different kinds of situations that will come as they get older. I think that for the kids it is also good to be with other adoptive families, especially the kids in the families because they won't feel like they're going through things alone. We're so fortunate to be friends with other adoptive families.

The parents then were looking ahead to the future, considering how they will handle the issues which they anticipate will arise during adolescence. Part of the parents' role of transracially adoptive parent involves the creation of a new script for handling those anticipated issues. In this way, the parents are once again active in determining the contents and possible performance of their role-identity.

## Conclusion

The focus of this research has been to explore the career of the transracially adoptive parent. The framework of the career was useful in understanding the experiences of these parents because it enables one to move between the parent and his or her significant society in an effort to understand how parents take on the identity of transracially adoptive parent and incorporate it into their identity structure as well as how that identity changes throughout the career.

When they chose to adopt, the parents in this study were beginning the process of resocialization whereby they unlearned the aspects of biological parenthood and learned the aspects of parenthood associated with being a transracially adoptive parent. Much of this learning involved those things that every adoptive parent learns, but the transracial element of the adoption made the learning unique. Parents had to learn—and will continue to learn given that their children are still very young—how to parent a children who can develop an identity which encompasses their upbringing, physical appearance, and ethnoracial heritage.

The career of these parents will span far beyond what is covered in this study. Their children are still very young and there will be many trials and tribulations to come. Most of the children in this study had just started to attend school and as such up until that time they had spent most of their time with parents and caretakers in the security of their homes. Many of the parents expect their family life to change as the children age. They anticipate the possibility that their children will face racism and discrimination as

they grow older especially because the area in which they live is not very ethnically or racially diverse.

Knowing this, all of the parents have committed themselves to helping their children develop self-esteem and a well-integrated identity, an ongoing job which they see as part of their role as parents. They aim to help their children feel confident enough to weather racism and discrimination. Part of the development of this positive self-concept involves acknowledging their child's birth culture and incorporating it into the family. All parents described learning about their child's birth culture as an enriching experience for the whole family.

In regard to their interaction with the community, the parents occasionally encounter people who ask personal questions and make offensive comments. All parents agreed that, in most cases, these incidents are the result of ignorance about adoption and racial issues. The parents reported that they used to receive more attention as a family when their children were younger. They attributed part of this to the fact that people are generally curious about and attracted to babies, and in their case, the racial difference made them more visible. However, as the children aged, people were approaching them less frequently.

Overall, the parents reported that they have productive and happy family lives. They also have valuable relationships with other adoptive parents. These relationships were seen as special because of the presence of shared experience and the opportunity to learn from them and share information. In addition to these relationships with other adoptive parents, the participants were willing to share their experience with people considering adoption.

## Implications of this Study for the Adoption Community

This research could be helpful to people considering transracial adoption because it explores the experiences of the parents in their own words. The parents in this study discuss the process of adopting internationally, the difficulties they encountered during the process, and their daily experiences as a transracial family. These accounts as well as the discussion of the debates surrounding transracial adoption could prove to be a valuable resource to anyone considering transracial adoption.

Moreover, parents who are not as "plugged in" to the adoption scene as the parents in this study and parents who are not in contact with other adoptive families could benefit from this research simply because they might find that they have experiences in common with the parents who participated in this study.

## Implications of this Study for the Researcher

I consider this study to have been an opportunity to gain insights about how to do research and to learn how to improve future research projects. There are four specific points I will address here. First, during the course of this research I found it daunting to interpret others' experiences and to choose which of their words would be included and which would be left out. In the future, I would include more participant observation to further support my choices and interpretations. Second, in future research I would conduct more interviews with each participant while carrying out ongoing data analysis. I would like to have interviewed each participant again. I think that in any long interview there comes a point after which the exchange becomes increasingly less fruitful. Participants become distracted, tired, and perhaps they feel begin to feel like they are

being "pumped" for information. More frequent, shorter interviews, where possible, seem more like conversations and less like interrogations. Third, if I were to conduct future research on transracially adoptive parents, I would not mix together parents with birth children and those with none. Because the parents with birth children in this study were outnumbered by those with none, parts of their stories were lost. Fourth, in future studies of transracial adoption I would explore racial issues in more depth. When the researcher and participants are white and children of colour are a subject of discussion, the researcher has to make a concerted effort to ask tough, challenging questions about race to be truly reflexive.

## Directions for Future Research

As mentioned in the section above, there is a lack of research on non-traditional international adopters such as gays, lesbians, single-parents, interracial couples, and members of minority groups. Given the variety of family forms in our society, this lack of research represents a significant gap in the current literature.

Second, there is little exploration of international adopters who already have biological children. Very often the subjects of study are infertile couples who choose adoption to build a family. In many respects, their experience cannot be generalized to people who have biological and adopted children.

Third, much could be gained from a country-wide comparative study of parents' experiences of the international adoption process. All provinces have their own regulations regarding international adoptions and as such the experiences of parents across the country are likely to be different.

Fourth, although there is research on the negotiation and decision process that goes on between couples who are considering fertility treatments and same-race adoption, there is no comparable research done on parents considering international adoption.

All of these issues need to be addressed, and as they become the focus of research we will have a better understanding of adoption and the various kinds of adoptive family forms. Hopefully, future studies of adoption will illuminate the unique issues which adoptive families face and those issues will inform adoption and family policies. This study represents a small step in that direction.

# Bibliography

Altstein, H. and R.J. Simon (eds.)
1991 *Intercountry Adoption: A Multinational Perspective.* New York: Praeger.

Bagley, C. and L. Young
1980 "The Long-Term Adjustment and Identity of a Sample of Inter-Country Adopted Children." *International Social Work* 23(3): 16-22.

Bagley, C., L. Young, and A. Scully
1993 *International and Transracial Adoptions: A Mental Health Perspective.* Aldershot: Averbury.

Bartholet, E.
1993 "International Adoption: Current Status and Future Prospects." *Future of Children* 3(1): 89-103.

Becker, H. and B. Geer
1957 "Participant Observation and Interviewing: A Comparison." *Human Organization* 16: 28-32.

Berger, P. L. and H. Kellner
1970 "Marriage and the Construction of Reality: An Exercise in the Microsociology of Knowledge." Pp. 49-72 in Hans Peter Dreitzel (ed.), *Recent Sociology No. 2: Patterns of Communicative Behavior.* New York: Macmillan.

Blumer, H.
1969 *Symbolic Interactionism.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Brodzinsky, D.M., M.D. Schechter, and R.M. Henig
1992 *Being Adopted.* New York: Doubleday.

Carstens, C. and M. Juliá
2000 "Ethnoracial Awareness In Intercountry Adoption: US Experiences." *International Social Work* 43(1): 61-73.

Cederblad, M.
1982 *"Children Adopted from Abroad and Coming to Sweden After Age Three."* Stockholm: The Swedish National Board for Intercountry Adoption.

Charmaz, K. and R.G. Mitchell Jr.
1997 "The Myth of Silent Authorship: Self, Substance and Style in Ethnographic Writing." Pp. 193-215 in R. Hertz (ed.) *Reflexivity and Voice.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Charon, J. M.
1989 *Symbolic Interactionism: An Introduction, An Interpretation, An Integration.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Chestang, L.
1972 "The Dilemma of Biracial Adoption." *Social Work* 17(3): 100-105.

Chimezie, A.
1975 "Bold But Irrelevant: Grow and Shapiro on Transracial Adoption." *Child Welfare* 56(2): 75-86.

Cooley, C.H.
1902 *Human Nature and the Social Order.* New York: Scribner.

Daly, K. J.
1992 "Toward a Formal Theory of Interactive Resocialization: The Case of Adoptive Parenthood." *Qualitative Sociology* 15(4): 395-417.

1988 "Reshaped Parenthood Identity: The Transition to Adoptive Parenthood." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 17(1): 40-66.

Daly, K.J. and M. Sobol
1992 *Adoption as an Alternative for Infertile Couples: Prospects and Trends.* Ottawa: Paper Prepared for the Royal Commission on New Reproductive Technologies.

Daly, K.J. and A. Dienhart
1998 "Navigating the Family Domain: Qualitative Field Dilemmas." Pp. 97-120 in S. Grills (ed.), *Doing Ethnographic Research.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Denzin, N.
1970 *The Research Act in Sociology.* London: Butterworth.

Feigelman, W. and A. Silverman
1983 *Chosen Children: New Patterns of Adoptive Relationships.* New York: Praeger.

1984 "The Long-Term Effects of Transracial Adoption." *Social Services Review* 58: 588-662.

1986 "Adoptive Parents, Adoptees, and the Sealed Records Controversy." *Social Casework* April: 219-226.

1990 "Adjustment in Interracial Adoptees" in D. Brodzinsky and M. Schechter (eds.), *The Psychology of Adoption*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gardell, I.
1979 *A Swedish Study on International Adoptions*. Stockholm: The Swedish Council for Intercountry Adoptions.

Gill, O. and B. Jackson
1983 *Adoption and Race: Black, Asian and Mixed Race Children in White Families*. London: Batsford.

Goffman, E.
1961 *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. Chicago: Aldine.

1963 *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

1971 *Relations in Public*. New York: Harper & Row.

Grow, L. and D. Shapiro
1975 "Adoption of Black Children by White Parents." *Child Welfare* 54(1): 57-59.

Hammersley, M. and P. Atkinson
1993 *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. London: Tavistock.

Hertz, R.(ed.)
1997 *Reflexivity and Voice*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Hill, M. and J. Peltzer
1982 "A Report of Thirteen Groups for White Parents of Black Children." *Family Relations* 31(4): 557-565.

Hoksbergen, R.A.C.
1981 "Adoption of Foreign Children in the Netherlands." *International Child Welfare Review* 49(3): 28-37.

1991 "Intercountry Adoption Coming of Age in the Netherlands: Basic Issues, Trends and Developments." Pp.141-160 in H. Altstein and R.J. Simon (eds.), *Intercountry Adoption: A Multinational Perspective*. New York: Praeger.

Holstein, J.A. and J.F. Gubrium
1998 "Active Interviewing." Pp. 113-129 in D. Silverman (ed.), *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*. London: Sage.

1997 *The New Language of Qualitative Method*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kim, D.S.
1978 "Issues in Transracial and Transcultural Adoption." *Social Casework* 59(8): 477-486.

Kim, P.S., S. Hong, and B.S. Kim
1979 "Adoption of Korean Children by New York Area Couples: A Preliminary Study." *Child Welfare* 58: 419-427.

Kirk, D. H.
1964 *Shared Fate: A Theory of Adoption and Mental Health*. New York: The Free Press.

1981 *Adoptive Kinship: A Modern Institution in Need of Reform*. Toronto: Butterworth.

Kleinman, S.
1991 "Field-Workers' Feelings: What We Feel, Who We Are, How We Analyze." Pp. 184-195 in W.B. Shaffir and R.A. Stebbins (eds.), *Experiencing Fieldwork: An Inside View of Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park: Sage.

Kuhl, W.
1985 *When Adopted Children of Foreign Origin Grow Up*. Osnabruck: Terre des Hommes.

Ladner, J.A.
1977 *Mixed Families*. New York: Doubleday.

Lofland J.
1971 *Analyzing Social Settings*. Belmont: Wadsworth.

March, K
1995 *The Stranger Who Bore Me: Adoptee-Birth Mother Relationships*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Matthews, R. and A.M. Matthews
1986 "Infertility and Involuntary Childlessness: The Transition to Nonparenthood." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 48: 641-649.

Maxime, J.E.
1986 "Some Psychological Models of Black Self-Concept" in S. Ahmed, J. Cheetham, and J. Small (eds.), *Social Work with Black Children and Their Families.* London: Batsford.

1993 "The Importance of Racial Identity for the Psychological Well-Being of Black Children." *The Association of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 15.

McCall, G. J. and J. L. Simmons
1966 *Identities and Interactions.* New York: The Free Press.

McDade, K.
1991 *International Adoption in Canada: Public Policy Issues.* Ottawa: Studies in Social Policy.

Miall, C.
1996 "The Social Construction of Adoption: Clinical and Community Perspectives." *Family Relations* 45: 309-317.

1987 "The Stigma of Adoptive Parent Status: Perceptions of Community Attitudes Toward Adoption and the Experience of Informal Social Sanctioning." *Family Relations* 3: 34-39.

1989 "Authenticity and the Disclosure of Information Preserve: The Case of Adoptive Parenthood." *Qualitative Sociology* 12: 279-302.

Mills, C.W.
1959 *The Sociological Imagination.* New York: Oxford University Press.

1963 "Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive." Pp. 439-452 in I.H. Horowitz (ed.), *Power, Politics and People.* New York: Ballantine Books.

Modell, J.S.
1994 *Kinship with Strangers: Adoption and Interpretation of Kinship in American Culture.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Modell, J.S. and Dambacher, N.
1997 "Making a 'Real Family: Matching and Cultural Biologism in American Adoption." *Adoption Quarterly* 1(2): 3-33.

Ngabonziza, D.
1991 "Moral and Political Issues Facing Relinquishing Countries." *Adoption and Fostering* 15(4): 75-80.

Pruzan, V.
1977 "Born in a Foreign Country – Adopted in Denmark." *International Child Welfare Review* 36(2): 41-47.

Rorbech, M.
1991 "The Condition of 18-to-25 Year Old Foreign Born Adoptees In Denmark." Pp. 127-140 in H. Altstein and R.J. Simon (eds.), *Intercountry Adoption: A Multinational Perspective.* New York: Praeger.

Rosenberg, M.
1979 *Conceiving the Self.* New York: Basic Books.

Rosenblatt, P.C. and L.R. Fischer
1993 "Qualitative Family Research." Pp. 167-177 in P.G. Boss, W.J. Doherty, R. LaRossa, W.R. Schumm, and S.K. Steinmetz (eds.), *Sourcebook of Family Theories and Methods: A Contextual Approach.* New York: Plenum Press.

Sachdev, P.
1989 *Unlocking the Adoption Files.* Lexington: Lexington Books.

Saetersdal, B. and M. Dalen
1991 "Norway: Intercountry Adoptions in a Homogenous Country." Pp. 83-108 in H. Altstein and R.J. Simon (eds.), *Intercountry Adoption: A Multinational Perspective.* New York: Praeger.

Sandelowski, M., B.G. Harris, and D. Holditch-Davis
1993 " 'Somewhere Out There' Parental Claiming in the Preadoption Waiting Period." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 21(4): 464-486.*

Shaffir, W.
1998 "Doing Ethnographic Research in Jewish Orthodox Communities: The Neglected Role of Sociability." Pp.48-64 in S. Grills (ed.), *Doing Ethnographic Research.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Simon, R.J. and H. Altstein
1977 *Transracial Adoption.* New York: J. Wiley.

1981 *Transracial Adoption: A Follow-Up.* Lexington: D.C. Heath.

1987 *Transracial Adoptees and Their Families.* New York: Praeger.

1992 *Adoption, Race and Identity: From Infancy Through Adolescence.* New York: Praeger.

Small, J.
1984 "The Crisis in Adoption." *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 30(spring): 129-142.
1986 "Transracial Placements: Conflict and Contradictions" in S. Ahmed, J. Cheetham, and J. Small (eds.), *Social Work with Black Children and Their Families.* London: Batsford.

Strauss, A. L.
1959 *Mirrors and Masks: The Search for Identity.* Glencoe: The Free Press.

1987 *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Textor, M.R.
1991 "International Adoption in West Germany: A Private Affair." Pp. 109-126 in H. Altstein and R.J. Simon (eds.), *Intercountry Adoption: A Multinational Perspective.* New York: Praeger.

Thomas, W.I.
1967 "The Definition of the Situation." Pp. 315-341 in J.G. Manis and B.N. Meltzer (eds.), *Symbolic Interaction: A Reader in Social Psychology* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Tizard, B.
1991 "Intercountry Adoption: A Review of the Evidence." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 32(5): 743-756.

Tizard, B. and A. Phoenix
1993 *Black, White or Mixed Race? Race and Racism in the Lives of Young People of Mixed Parentage.* London: Routledge.

Triseliotis, J.
1973 *In Search of Origins.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

1991 "Intercountry Adoption: A Brief Overview of the Research Evidence." *Adoption and Fostering* 15(4): 46-52.

Triseliotis, J., J. Shireman, and M.Hundleby
1997 *Adoption: Theory, Policy, and Practice.* London: Cassell.

Trolley, C., J. Wallin, and J. Hansen
1995 "International Adoption: Issues of Acknowledgement of Adoption and Birth Culture." *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 12(6): 465-479.

Westhues, A. and J.S. Cohen
1994 *International Adoption in Canada.* Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada.

Wilkinson, H.S.P.
1985 *Birth is More Than Once: The Inner World of Adopted Korean Children.* Bloomfield Hills: Sunrise Ventures.

## Appendix A: Interview Schedule (Round One)

1. How did you arrive at the decision to adopt your child?

2. Once you decided to adopt your child, what did you do to prepare--emotionally and practically?

3. During the adoption process, what were your expectations for your new life?

4. How do those expectations compare with your experiences since the adoption?

5. How did your life change after the adoption?

6. What obstacles, if any, did you encounter?

7. When you were considering adoption and in the process of adopting, how did you respond to negative and/or discouraging comments and information? (I ask this question because most of the participants told me that they did encounter such negativity. I am not merely assuming that they encountered it.)

8. What is life like for you and your child outside of your home?

9. If you have not done so already, how do you plan to explain the circumstances of your child's birth and adoption to him or her?

10. If someone asked you for advice about transracial adoption, what would you say?

## Appendix B: Interview Schedule (Round Two)

1. Speaking as a parent, how has your life changed since we last spoke? (alternate phrasing: As a parent, what new experiences have you had since we last met?)

2. How has your child's life changed since we last spoke? (alternate phrasing: What new experiences have your child had since we last met?)

3. As a family, how has your life changed since our first interview? (alternate phrasing: What new experiences has your family had since we last met?)

4. Has your parenting changed?

    a) If so, in what way(s)?

5. Does you child ask questions about why he/she looks different from the rest of the family?

    a) If so, how do you respond to his/her questions/comments?

6. The last time we talked you told me that you were taking steps to preserve your child's birth culture.

    a) Is this still a goal of yours?

    b) If so, why is this goal important to you?

    c) How do you try to preserve your child's birth culture?

7. Has your child and/or your family experienced racism since our first interview?

    a) If so, how does this new experience/do these new experiences compare to those you had before the first interview?

    b) How did you respond to this racism?

8. Have you talked to your child about racism?

    a) If so, what did you say to him/her?

9. How do you or would you respond to those people who say that race-matching policies should be followed in adoption?

10. How do you define what a family is?

11. Are you a part of any groups of transracial parents/families?

    a) If so, why did you join this group?

    b) What do you gain by being a member of this group?

12. If you could change the adoption process, would you change it?

    a) How would you change it?

13. The last time we met, I asked you what advice you would offer to someone considering transracial adoption? What advice would you offer now?

Demographic Questions

1. What is your age?

2. What is the highest level of education which you have completed?

3. What is your yearly income?

4. If you have a religious affiliation, what is it?

5. If you are in a relationship at this time, what is the status of that relationship?

6. How many children do you have?

## Appendix C: Consent Form (Round One)

I aim to explore the experiences of parents of transracially-adopted children. I am conducting this study for my undergraduate honours thesis in the Department of Sociology, University of New Brunswick, under the supervision of Dr. W.C. van den Hoonaard. If you are a member of the group mentioned above, I would like to interview you. Participation is voluntary. Even if you decide to participate in the research, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

I promise you confidentiality. If I choose to use in my research paper the information which you share with me during the course of the interview, I will not reveal your name; he names of your family members (and any other specific names you mention); your address; and any other details which could identify you.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact me by telephone at (506) 454-5061 or by e-mail at woopoo@brunnet.net.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

## Appendix D: Consent Form (Round Two)

I am conducting research on the experiences of transracially adoptive parents. I am required by Carleton University to provide you with information about the study. Therefore, I would like you to read this form carefully, and if you agree to participate, sign below. If you have any questions about the information contained in this letter, please ask. In addition, if you have any questions at a later time, please contact me at (902) 422-5626 or by e-mail at **gillismc@hotmail.com.**

This interview has been constructed to guide our discussion of your experiences as a transracially adoptive parent. I will look for patterns in interview responses which match patterns in the responses of other transracially adoptive parents. These patterns will form the basis for my research study.

You are not required to answer any of the questions. You can end the interview at any time. You can withdraw from the study at any time whether it be during the interview or at some time after the completion of the interview. If you choose to withdraw, your interview transcript will be destroyed.

The information which you share with me during the course of the interview will be kept confidential. I will not reveal your name, the names of your family members (and any other specific names you mention), your address, and any other details which could identify you. **By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you understand the contents of the form and agree to participate in this interview.**

| Participant's Name | Participant's Signature | Date |
|---|---|---|

| Interviewer's Name | Interviewer's Signature | Date |
|---|---|---|

A copy of this consent form has been given to you for your records and reference.

## Appendix E: Sample Tape Recorder Consent Form (Round Two)

I would like to tape record this interview in order to listen to your responses in their entirety. You can, however, refuse to be recorded. Your taped responses will not be identifiable and the tape will be destroyed after it has been transcribed. **By signing this form, you are giving me permission to tape record this interview.**

| Participant's Name | Participant's Signature | Date |
|---|---|---|

| Interviewer's Name | Interviewer's Signature | Date |
|---|---|---|

A copy of this consent form has been given to you for your records and reference.