

Their Stories: The Experiences of Non-Native Adoptive Parents

Who Adopted

Native Children During the 1960s through 1980s

By:

Leona Huntinghawk

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

Faculty of Social Work

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

Copyright @ 2012 by Leona Huntinghawk

Abstract

In recent literature, it has been stated that Native children adopted into non-Native homes do not fare well emotionally or culturally (Carriere, 2007; Richard, 2004). But to place ourselves in another era; the decades of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, where the child welfare systems were overrun with Native children needing to be placed in long term homes, begs us to examine the systemic and political structures at play. Also, to examine the homes that these children were placed in and embrace a different perspective: the stories of the non-Native adoptive parents.

This research study delves into the adoption experiences of eight non-Native adoptive parents and empirically examines their stories, resulting in many significant similarities and common themes with the main one being, the situation that these families found themselves in at times was not ideal but they transcended adversity to the best degree they could.

Native children are no longer adopted out to non-Native families at the high rate as they once were. The political atmosphere of today differs significantly from the era that became known as the ‘Sixties Scoop’. However, this study may contribute to the body of literature surrounding Native/non-Native adoption and could impact long term fostering policy and practice if the data were to be extrapolated into today’s context.

Acknowledgements

One does not complete accomplishments such as this alone so I wish to acknowledge the individuals whose unconditional support allowed me to write this piece of research.

To my thesis committee members: Corbin Shangreaux, Eveline Milliken and most recent addition, Laurie Anne Johnson. Your unwavering support and unlimited belief allowed this graduate student to put one foot in front of the other. Your incredible research knowledge and skills, combined with your teaching experience benefitted me greatly and for that, I am so humbled and grateful. Corbin, you are a true visionary. Learning from you, professionally and academically, has been an honor for me.

To my mentor and advisor, Dr. Kathy Jones: we started off as BSW student and Field Instructor. For the past 13 years, nobody has made an impact on this student's life as you have. To begin a career is a shaky experience but I had you in my corner. Your outlook on life and incredible resiliency are an inspiration to me. I continue to strive every day to be the social worker that you taught me to be.

To my best friend, Melanie, who I met in Grade 6 and we have been inseparable since. Thank you for the late night chats via phone or email. When I wanted to give up, you kept me going. You always see me in a different light than I see myself. Laughter is the best medicine and you are truly the funniest person that I have ever met. You are my soul sister and the greatest friend that anybody could ask for.

To my parents, Betty and Harold Nelson: I have always known how proud you are of me and it has been the foundation to my journey. Thank you for always letting me come home, no matter how old I get, and just be your girl. The five of us are a treasured unit: Mom, Dad, Justin, Leona and Lisa.

For my Uncle Delbert and Aunt Jacquie, whose love resonates with me still. You are both on the Other Side but there is not a day that I do not think of you and smile. I like to think that I would have made you proud. Our spirits will meet up again one day.

To my mother Caroline: you gave me life and I honor you for that. The adversity that you have faced throughout your lifetime has made you stronger than you know. We are *anishinaabe ikwe* carved from the same stone. Don't forget that, Mom.

To my beloved father, Douglas Neil Blackbird: I miss you Dad and I know in my heart that you would have swelled up with pride to see this day. You may have gone to the Spirit World too soon but know that I honor you by keeping your memory alive. I am forever my father's daughter.

Most importantly, for Shawn, the one who walks beside me and whose shoulder I rest upon. And for my daughters, Sierra Nitani and Emma Elizabeth: the two of you remain my greatest accomplishments and you continue to reward me every day by growing and thriving. Stay true to yourselves. Mommy is incredibly proud of the two very distinct spirits that you are.

DEDICATION:

FOR NED AND NANCY,
SARAH,
BILL AND BONNIE,
DAN AND CHARLOTTE,
AND
SHANNON

WITHOUT YOU, THIS DOCUMENT WOULD NOT HAVE COME TO
FRUITION

THANK YOU FOR SHARING YOUR FAMILIES WITH ME AND I AM
GRATEFUL FOR GETTING TO KNOW EACH AND EVERY ONE OF
YOU

YOU SHOWED ME THAT LOVE DOES INDEED TRANSCEND ALL
ADVERSITY

AND THESE CHILDREN?.....YOUR CHILDREN

ARE YOURS FOREVER

NOT TO DISREGARD THE PATH FROM WHICH THEY CAME BUT
TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE PATH THAT LED THEM TO YOU

-Leona

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Prologue.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE – Introduction.....	1
i. Research Question.....	1
ii. Location.....	2
iii. Methodology: A Brief Overview.....	3
iv. Definitions.....	5
v. Objective and Rationale of the Study.....	8
CHAPTER TWO.....	13
I. Literature Review.....	13
i. Introduction.....	13
ii. Topic of Adoption.....	14
iii. Biological Parenting vs. Adoptive Parenting.....	15
iv. Cross Cultural Adoption.....	18
v. Culture and Child Placement.....	20
vi. Bonding and Attachment.....	22
vii. Impact of Colonization.....	24
viii. Historical Context to Native Adoption.....	26
ix. Current State of Native Adoption.....	29
x. Non-Native Parent/Native Child Adoption.....	30
CHAPTER THREE - Research Methods.....	36
I. The Research Design.....	36
i. Method.....	36
ii. The Participants.....	37
iii. Locating the Participants.....	37
iv. Consent.....	38
v. The Interviews.....	38
vi. Interview Questions.....	39
vii. Transcriptions.....	42

viii. Ethics	42
ix. Analysis of Data	44
II. Summary	45
CHAPTER FOUR – Research Findings	47
Introduction.....	47
Part I. The Participants – Brief Narrative Overviews	47
i. Ned and Nancy	47
ii. Sarah.....	49
iii. Bill and Bonnie.....	52
iv. Dan and Charlotte.....	55
v. Shannon.....	57
Table 1.1 –Brief Demographic Profile of Adoptive Parents.....	62
Table 1.2-Overview of Adoption Dynamics.....	62
Part II. Major Themes of this Study.....	64
Introduction.....	64
Theme 1: Adoption – Challenges Where Challenges Were Not Expected: The Placing Agency’s Lack of Support and Resources	65
i. Lack of Emotional Support from the Placing Agency	65
ii. Lack of Connection with the Placing Agency.....	69
iii. Lack of Information and Training from the Placing Agency	70
Theme 2: Parenting – Challenges, Successes and Resiliency	71
i. Challenges: Preparation to be an Adoptive Parent.....	72
ii. Challenges: The Actuality of Being an Adoptive Parent	75
a. Self-Blaming	76
b. Racist Attitudes	79
c. Reunification	81
iii. Successes in Parenting: The Small Steps and Big Rewards.....	87
iv. Aspects of Motherhood.....	90
v. Resiliency in Adoptive Parenthood.....	92
Theme 3: Culture and Child Placement	96
i. Placement in a Non-Native Home.....	96
ii. Bonding, Attachment and Loyalty	102

iii. Summary	104
CHAPTER FIVE – Discussion Points and Conclusion	106
Introduction.....	106
Section I – Discussion Points Regarding Adoption	107
Discussion Point #1 – Ensuring That the Adoption Process, Timeframe and Post Adoption Services Are Adequate.....	107
Discussion Point #2 – Ensuring More Sensitivity and Cultural Competence Training for Social Workers.....	109
Discussion Point # 3 – Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Prevention, Diagnosis and Intervention Services to be Provided to Adoptive/Foster Parents of Children with Special Needs.....	112
Discussion Point # 4 – Child Being Given Their Own Advocacy Lawyer.....	114
Section II – Discussion Points Regarding Cross Cultural Adoption (Native Children to Non-Native Long Term Homes)	116
Discussion Point # 5 – More Support, Training and Resources to Adoptive/Foster Parents	116
Discussion Point # 6 – Why Do Adoptees Search? Consideration of the Benefits of Open Adoptions and/or Supportive Reunifications	120
Discussion Point #7 – More Culturally Appropriate Placements for Native Children Waiting to be Adopted or Placed in Long Term Foster Care	123
Appendices.....	126
Appendix I – Recruitment Poster for Study	126
Appendix II – Interview Questions	127
Appendix III – Informed Consent Form from Participants.....	128
Appendix IV-Available Resources for Participants.....	135
References.....	137

Prologue

Early in my child welfare career, I witnessed a young Native family's struggle against a mandated First Nations child welfare agency regarding their decisions about a child in the agency's care. The struggle began over their daughter who, alongside her twin, had been born six weeks premature with serious medical concerns. Because the parents were young, had three other young children and lived in a First Nation community four hours from Winnipeg, the child had to be moved to a Winnipeg hospital where she could be closely monitored and treated for her illness.

The issue that emerged early in the development of the case plan was the role of the grandparents of the child in care. A Caucasian couple had adopted the father of the child in 1976 when he was a 1 year old foster child. Both the young father and young mother required a lot of guidance. The young father, adopted very young, had never had any contact with his birth family through the years of his growing up and upon meeting once he reached the age of majority, he discovered the family dysfunction that brought him into foster care years before. In his world, his adoptive parents were his only parents and his main supports. It was a natural process in this family for his parents to assist in the role of grandparents.

The struggle began when the First Nations agency became involved. It became clear to the family that the assigned child protection worker and his supervisor (both Aboriginal) were not prepared to acknowledge the role of the non-Native grandparents in case planning for this Aboriginal child in care. Rather than seeing the grandparents as a natural support for these young parents, the assigned child protection worker dialogued directly with the parents despite the fact that he knew that both parents had cognitive delays and were young, inexperienced and overwhelmed by the situation. The worker, a middle aged Aboriginal male, insisted that the parents sign a one year Voluntary Placement Agreement (VPA), to place their daughter in temporary foster care due to medical reasons. The parents claimed later that they did not know what they were signing nor did they have the input of their family or friends at the time. The adoptive parents had seventeen years of experience working with foster children and a close family friend who was a child welfare worker. Not knowing their rights and without a concrete agency plan in place, the young parents signed the Voluntary Placement Agreement.

The agency's case plan consisted of the child being moved to a foster home once she was stabilized and it was deemed safe to do so. The agency had located a foster mother in Winnipeg who was a non-practicing licensed practical nurse (LPN) and it was felt that she could adequately care for the child's extensive medical needs.

At the expiration of the initial one year Voluntary Placement Agreement, another one year VPA was placed in front of the parents. When they resisted, they claimed that the assigned social worker told them that he would take the child permanently into foster care. They reluctantly agreed to her remaining in foster care for another year but made it clear to the social worker that they wanted their daughter returned to their care at the end of this final VPA.

The placement of the child in a foster home was in itself upsetting to the young parents. They had to visit their daughter in a strange city, far from their home community, with their three other small children in tow. Often, the visits took place in hotels and they felt uncomfortable and out of place. They persevered however, hopeful that their daughter would be returned to them soon. Their daughter, at this point, was much better but still had numerous doctor and specialist appointments. She required a carefully planned diet and needed much care and attention because of the 'slow start' that she got off to. They loved her and felt that they could not give her the attention and medical expertise that the foster parent could. Travelling to Winnipeg for her many medical appointments was beyond their financial or practical means.

Upon the expiration of the second Voluntary Placement Agreement, the social worker notified the young parents that the agency would be seeking a Permanent Order of Guardianship for their daughter,

which would keep her in foster care until she reached the age of majority. This was devastating news to the parents who did not or would not ever agree to their child being taken into permanent foster care particularly as the child was only brought into foster care because of her medical issues. However, the CFS worker assigned to the case stated that he had concerns of the couple's parenting, even though the couple had been parenting their other three children without concern from the agency or community at large.

The young couple was frightened and upset that the case plan had suddenly changed so drastically without warning or input from the CFS worker. The father contacted his adoptive parents and let them know of the situation. The parents immediately agreed with their son. There was no reason at all why their granddaughter could not be returned home. They had already waited two years while she was living with another family and they were concerned that the child would continue to bond with the foster parents making it difficult to move the child home with her family. Failing to allow the child to return to her family unit, the (non-Native) grandparents argued that the agency did not try to explore any extended family options, as is their philosophy to do. The grandparents let it be known to the CFS worker that they would be more than willing to take in their granddaughter. They would do whatever they needed to do to make this happen. Her medical issues were all in the 'follow up' stage by

then and the grandmother appealed that she would learn what she needed to in order to care properly for her grandchild. This plea fell on seemingly deaf ears. The First Nations agency denied the grandparents' request to care for their grandchild, even though their decision was in direct contrast with their claimed philosophy of 'preservation of the family unit' and their noted preference to place any foster child with members of their extended family.

The grandparents were not given any reason as to why their request was denied. They had meetings with the CFS worker and persons in management positions in the agency. Throughout that process, they came to believe that they were being discriminated against for not being Aboriginal. They felt that if they had been Aboriginal, there would have been no question about having their granddaughter placed with them.

In response to their concerns that they would lose their granddaughter to the child welfare system, the family hired a lawyer to fight the agency in court. This was a long and difficult process that ended up costing the grandparents approximately \$10,000 in legal fees. When it became clear that the agency was not prepared to find some kind of resolution, the grandparents of the child felt that they had no choice but to notify the agency that they would go to the media.

The non-Native adoptive parents were at a complete loss and had no idea as to why they were not being recognized as the grandparents of

this child in care. They had legally adopted their son, and saw him and his children (their grandchildren) as part of their family. Emotionally, they loved their granddaughter as much as any grandparents would love their grandchild. But this did not seem to be of any significance to the mandated First Nations child welfare agency involved.

In the end, the non-Native grandparents of the Aboriginal child won their court battle. The matter took months to complete but the little girl came home to live with her grandparents; her father's adoptive non-Native parents. They followed up on her medical issues and cared for her until she could be transitioned back into her parents' home which took less than six months due to the closeness of this family.

The experience of these non-Native adoptive parents raises some interesting issues regarding the changing ideology regarding the adoption of Aboriginal children. In the past, non-Aboriginal families were supported and even encouraged to consider adopting Native children. However, the environment has changed significantly as a result of a number of reports, most notably the Kimelman report which spoke of the emotional trauma facing numerous Native adoptees in non-Native homes. The result has meant that the adoption of Aboriginal children by non-Aboriginal families has trickled from many to very few adoptions. However, while many Aboriginal adoptees have spoken of their negative experiences, there remains a group of children that had positive

experiences growing up in their adoptive homes and they continue to have a strong relationship with their adoptive parents as adults. Further, as with any other parent, the commitment of adoptive parents did not end when their adoptive children grew up and they continue to treat their children (and grandchildren) as their own. As this case demonstrates, their commitment to their children may be clouded by changing ideologies about cross cultural adoptions and assumptions regarding the experiences of Aboriginal children adopted into non-Aboriginal homes.

CHAPTER ONE – Introduction

i. Research Question

This qualitative study examines the experiences of non-Native adoptive parents of Native¹ children, who are now grown adults. The Native children in question were adopted primarily in the decades of the 1960s through to the end of the 1980s in Manitoba. This was an important period as it encompasses major changes in the field of Aboriginal adoption practices. The central focus of this study will be an empirical examination of the experiences of non-Native adoptive parent(s) because of the unique challenges of cross cultural² adoption itself, as well as the fact that the children who were adopted are Native. This is a key factor due to the social and some would allege, *emotional* implications of these adoptions, (Carriere, 2007; Richard, 2004) and this will be explored in more detail throughout this paper. As noted in the Literature Review, the emotional implications are notably in both the adoptive child and the adoptive parent(s) in some cases (Adams, 2002). As clearly seen in the prologue, the experiences of non-Native adoptive parents can be varied and rife with questions of discrimination, identity discord and social stigmas at times, all

¹ For the purpose of this study and because this writer does not know for certain the tribal affiliations of the adopted children (now adults), the ambiguous term of ‘Native’ will be used to denote the child’s Aboriginal ancestry.

² The fact that these adopted Native children were often viewed as having lost ‘their culture’ as related to their ethnicity and tribal affiliation, the author will be using this definition of culture: the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, age or ethnic group (www.dictionary.reference.com).

areas of interest for a study of this nature. The research question, in specific terms, is: *What are the experiences of non-Native adoptive parents who adopted Native children during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s?*

ii. Location

One of the issues debated by the academy and supported by literature, is the importance of location when conducting social science research (Bracken, 2005; Strega, 2006; Absolon & Willett, 2005). As such, I am an Ojibway woman, a mother, a daughter, a social worker, a graduate student and an adoptee. I purposefully placed ‘adoptee’ last on the list because I do not feel that it is less significant or more significant than anything else on the list. Some days, it is at the beginning of the list and of the utmost importance. Other days, I forget all about it as I live life surrounded by the love and support of both of my families, adoptive and biological. My healing journey has been long and insightful and will most likely continue for the rest of my days. As an adoptee, I faced many struggles growing up stemming from racism and the constant question of “where did I come from?” But balanced to those struggles was the unconditional love and support of my adoptive parents who created a steady, loving, and cohesive unit out of our multi-cultural family: my two Caucasian parents, my older adopted brother who is Native but he and I are not biologically related, myself, and our younger Caucasian sister, the biological daughter of my adoptive parents. As I grew, I soon realized that not everybody’s family looked like ours. I felt that a lot of people

wondered why my parents chose to adopt Native children but no one ever asked them. And they felt no need to explain their choices to anybody. As I grew, I also came to realize that my brother and I were not the only adopted Native kids in the world. It fascinated me to learn that other Native kids had also been adopted into non-Native families but unfortunately, some did not have the positive and nurturing upbringing that we did. And, as valuable and significant as I found studies on the views and experiences of Native adoptees, my interest has leaned more on the side of the non-Native adoptive parent(s) because they are the ones who made the initial decision to adopt Native children; knowing or not knowing of the struggles that may lay ahead. This piece of research has helped me along the path of my own adoption story which was thankfully, a positive life path with intermittent struggles that have led to immense growth. Further, I hope to become a better practitioner and a more keenly aware academic on an issue that had a great impact on the lives of many people.

iii. Methodology: A Brief Overview

A debate exists about the role of theory in qualitative research, whereas there is very little disagreement about the role and place of theory in quantitative research (Creswell, 1994, p. 81). One has to wonder what makes a good and useful theory with respect to qualitative research studies. Anafara and Mertz (2006) assert simply that a useful theory is one that tells an enlightening story about some phenomenon. It is a story that gives you new insights and

broadens your understanding of the phenomenon (p. 5). The critical argument against the role of theory in qualitative research has its basis in the *invisibility* of theory. Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) state that many qualitative studies are conducted to actually *discover* theory. Creswell (1994) argues this same point further:

'In a qualitative study, one does not begin with a theory to test or verify. Instead, consistent with the inductive model of thinking, a theory may emerge during the data collection and analysis phase.....or be used relatively late in the research process as a basis for comparison with other theories' (p. 94-95).

The literature seems to support however, the premise that whatever role theory has in qualitative research, it is more in relation to the methodologies that are being used (Anafara & Mertz, 2006). With this premise in mind, this research study will be supported by the conceptual framework of *phenomenology*. Phenomenology is the study of the structure of experience and is a tradition that has its roots in philosophy but lends itself well to a qualitative study such as this one. It believes that conscious experiences have a unique feature – we *experience* them, we live through them or perform them. Proceeding through the first-person point of view, we allow ourselves the ability to study our experiences through *reflection* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology>). However, we do not normally characterize an experience while we are living through it; we simply do not have the capacity to do so (that is not to say that we are not aware during the experience itself). The experience is all-consuming and we often fail to see

beyond it. It is this process of reflection that as a researcher, I relied on heavily to gain insight into the lived experiences of adoptive parents of Native children. It has been many years since the adoptions took place so it is through their stories and recollections that I gathered data to actively and constructively conduct an analysis.

It is important to note that as an Aboriginal researcher, I have sought the guidance and teachings of a respected elder by the name of Frank Tacan Sr. He is originally from Sioux Valley Dakota Nation in Manitoba and after being approached with an offering and the request to oversee this piece of research, he generously agreed to do so. He is a quiet, reticent man who is well respected by the Native communities in Brandon, Sioux Valley and elsewhere. Mr. Tacan's role will be as a resource of traditional Indigenous knowledge if needed and emotional guidance for this researcher. He will also serve as a counselor to the participants of this study, in accordance with ethical guidelines. He will provide guidance and support to this writer because I walk a line of being a researcher and an *anishinaabe ikwe* (Native woman). This topic is a painful one for many First Nations communities because of the manner in which the thousands of Native children were removed. I hold the utmost level of respect for that and I wish to do no further harm with this study.

iv. Definitions

There are several acceptable terms to refer to the Indigenous or Native peoples of the Americas. Most commonly in Canada, because they have been defined by law, notably in the *Indian Act*, broad names such as ‘First Nations’ or ‘Aboriginal’ people are used. Preferably, many bands of Native people make reference to their nation affiliation while speaking of themselves ie. Cree, Dene, Sioux. More specifically, they will often refer to their tribal names: Innu, Dakota. For the purpose of this study, because this writer does not know for certain the tribal connections of the adopted children and for mere simplicity’s sake, the ambiguous term “Native” will be used to refer to cultural origin and used interchangeably with “Aboriginal”.

Throughout the course of this thesis, this writer shall refer to the adoption of Native children by non-Native parents as *cross cultural adoption*. This term gathers the essence of the adoptions crossing cultural lines, between parents and children. Much of the American and world literature (Vonk, 2001; Hayes, 1993; Silverman, 2001; Patel, 2005) speaking on the topic of cross cultural adoption commonly refers to this process as *transracial adoption (TRA)*. Transracial adoption is defined by Vonk (2001) as ‘parents (who are) European American who form their families with children who are members of a different racial or ethnic group by birth’ (p. 246). This writer is not minimizing the fact that the adoptive children in this study are from another race but I have chosen to examine the social implications of the adoptions. I believe that the difference in cultures is an important factor. Regarding the body

of literature on *transracial adoption*, those authors are examining children adoptees of other races, sometimes including Native children and sometimes not. The reason that this writer referenced the body of literature on transracial adoption is twofold: a) there are assumed parallels that one could draw between the experiences of Caucasian parents adopting a child of another race, whether the child is Native or not; b) the body of literature on Native/non-Native adoption is small and in need of contribution, leaving little choice but to draw parallels within the adoption experience itself.

During the era (1960s – 1980s) being referenced, the placement of Native children generally fell into two major categories: long-term foster care with non-Native families and/or adopted out to non-Native families. The term of ‘adopted out’ by this author makes reference to the fact that these adoptions were not always supported or condoned by the child’s community of origin. Rather, it was viewed by some as a very purposeful tool of assimilation by the federal and provincial governments (Fournier & Crey, 1997; Sinclair, 2004). I use the term ‘adoptive parent’ to refer to the non-Native parent(s) who legally adopted a Native child or children during the 1960s through to the 1980s.

This author also uses the term ‘children’ throughout the thesis to refer to the Native adoptees who are, of course, grown adults today. The importance of the usage of this term lies in the fact that these individuals were adopted as children but the *impact* of the adoptions span from childhood to adulthood and the adoptive parents in this study are sharing their experiences based on their

lifetimes. As Bacchetta (2009) observes in her book, *‘What I want my adopted child to know: An adoptive parents’ perspective’*, a compilation of adoptive parents’ experiences, “the longer I parent, the more I realize that adoption is a profound and lasting experience for parents as well as their children” (www.theadoptiveparent.com).

v. Objective and Rationale of the Study

This research study will explore into the life experiences of some non-Native adoptive parents who raised Native children, from childhood to adulthood. The perspectives of the Native adoptees have been researched (Carriere, 2007; Simon and Hernandez, 2008; Richard, 2004) but what still remains rare, in a Canadian context, is the adoption story as told by the adoptive parents themselves with respect to cross-cultural, non-Native parent/Native child adoptions.

Canada’s First Peoples have experienced global difficulties since the era of colonization. In Canada, from approximately 1960 on, a disproportionate number of Aboriginal children were apprehended from their birth parents and placed in foster care or adopted out to non-Native families. One statistic showed that in some Aboriginal communities, as many as 77% of children were removed (Mawhiney, 1995). According to Fournier and Crey (1997), up to 40% of all children in foster care were status Indian children despite the fact that these children represented less than 4% of the population. By 1983, status

Aboriginal children were vastly overrepresented in the child welfare systems across the country, making up approximately 60% of the caseload in Manitoba, 70% in Saskatchewan and 50 % in Alberta (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002).

The historical context of this study needs to be explained in order to fully understand its basis. The adoptees in this study were all adopted during an era known as the Sixties Scoop. It was a period beginning approximately during the 1960s, hence its name, where thousands of Native children in Canada and the United States were apprehended by non-Native child welfare authorities and either placed in long term foster care or adopted out to non-Native families. Many scholars in the areas of Native child welfare, Native history, Native Studies, social work and even political science will be familiar with this period. The term itself was coined by Patrick Johnson in his Canadian report on Native children and the child welfare system but it is widely used today (Johnson, 1983). This author uses this time period because of its significant impact on Native children, families and communities. This study will not examine the adoption of Native children in today's existing child welfare system because the political climate regarding the issue of Native adoption differs greatly, in both the Native and non-Native arenas.

The Sixties Scoop had a detrimental effect on Aboriginal families and communities, the results of which are still being seen today. Despite its nickname, the Sixties Scoop lasted well into the 1980s (Corrigan, 1991). The loss of children caused the familial fabric of some Native communities to

unravel. Aboriginal families and communities are still reeling from the effects of this era which stems directly from the process of colonization itself. These issues include high suicide rates, high level of involvement with the child welfare system, high infant mortality rates and high levels of drug and alcohol use. As Hart (2002) articulates, colonization has influenced all facets of Aboriginal people's lives on various levels, including the national, communal, familial and individual (p. 50). The relevance of the Sixties Scoop to this research study lies in its time in history: the adoptions of this study took place during this period.

As noted briefly above, this researcher is focusing on the specific time period of adoptions during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s because the Native political atmosphere was different than today. In large part due to the Kimelman Report³, the early 1990s began an era where the chiefs/political leaders/community members of the First Nations across Canada and the Canadian government started to take a serious look at the high numbers of Native children being adopted out to non-Native families and because of their actions on the matter, there has been a descent in numbers. The Native leaders especially were concerned that the high number of Native children

³ In the early 1980s, the Manitoba government established a Review Committee on Indian and Metis adoptions and placements which was headed by Judge Edwin Kimelman. The committee's final report, entitled "*No Quiet Place*" has been referred to as a detailed list of horrors; an exhaustive compilation which concluded that the damage to Indian children had been real, frequent and widespread. Widely known in child welfare circles as the *Kimelman Report*, it has had a profound impact on Aboriginal child protection in Canada. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edwin_Kimelman)

being adopted out would be both detrimental to the child and the families/communities of origin. Native adoptions still occur today but for the most part, the common practice in the field is to seek permission from the child's biological family unit or band prior to moving forward with an adoption. Further, it is the priority of agencies to place a child with Native adoptive parents, if at all possible (Personal communication, Rose McIvor-Girouard, West Region Child and Family Services, 2010).

The rationale for this study is also due to the limited amount of research about Native/non-Native adoptions that exists today. There is a respectable amount of research that stems from the Native adoptee's perspective but this writer feels it is relevant to also explore the experiences of the non-Native adoptive parent as they are the other half of the story. Statistics have been difficult to gather in the area of study of Native adoption but it has been reported that many adoptees suffered abuse, neglect or some form of ill-health (Carriere, 2007). This study will not disregard or contest those findings but there have also been reports of adoption experiences where the adoptive parent(s) had good intentions and believed that adopting a Native child was, in all aspects, relatively harmless or even beneficial (Fanshel, 1972; Adams, 2002).

The fact that the adoption cases being studied are cross cultural is a prominent aspect of this study. The assumption or *proposed theory* of this study has been that the adoptive parents of the adopted Native children (who are now

grown adults), will have unique experiences based on the difference of culture between themselves and their adopted children. This assumption has been proven to be correct. The main objective of this study has been to explore this uniqueness and conduct a comparative analysis of the five families in order to pinpoint similarities and common themes. Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) make note of this approach, referred to as *grounded theory* because the researcher starts by collecting data then searches for theoretical constructs, themes, and patterns that are “grounded in the theory.” Essentially, all research is “grounded” in data, but few studies produce a “grounded theory.” Grounded theory is an inductive methodology that can be used with either qualitative or quantitative data. It is viewed as the systematic generation of theory from systematic research which includes a set of rigorous research procedures leading to the emergence of conceptual categories (www.groundedtheory.com). This will be reviewed in Chapter Three which details the research methods of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

I. Literature Review

i. Introduction

There are key topics that must be reviewed while undertaking a study such as this. This study entails the issue of adoption and its dynamics. More specifically, *cross-cultural or transracial* adoption will be examined. The body of literature regarding the issue of *adoption* is immense. It condenses in size when researching *cross-cultural or transracial adoption* and even more so with respect to *Native/non-Native cross-cultural adoptions*. It is important to review the issue of adoption adequately because it is the very foundational premise to this study. And more to the objective of this study, the topic of *Culture and Child Placement* is prominent in this literature review.

Also, to fully understand the concept of how it came to be that thousands of Native children were adopted by non-Native parents, the interrelatedness of the process of colonization and its impact on the lives of Native people in Canada has to be explored as well, it is the secondary foundation to this study. This leads to a discussion of the two prominent eras of the phenomenon of Native adoption: the Sixties Scoop and the Residential School Era. They are the underlying precursors or sub-categories to this issue and help the reader understand how the Native/non-Native adoption phenomenon came to be. It is important for the reader to recognize that the phenomenon of Native/non-Native adoptions is not historical happenstance. It

is viewed by many as a result of strategically placed markers in the history of child welfare policies in this country.

ii. Topic of Adoption

Adoption, for the purpose of this study is defined by this writer as a legal process in which a child's rights and duties toward his natural parents are terminated and similar rights and duties are created toward the child's adoptive parents. Ellen Herman, a history professor at the University of Oregon states that adoption is a significant public and private issue and that adoption has been the subject of four major types of empirical research: *field studies, outcome studies, nature vs. nurture studies and psychopathology studies* (<http://www.uoregon.edu/~adoption/index/html>). This study falls within the category of outcome studies. The researcher has been primarily interested in how the adoptions in question turned out and will remain mainly focused on the perspective of the adoptive parent(s).

Adoption is a process that most people are aware of as a means for some people to start or add to their family unit. It was an assumption of this writer that these parents who seek children through adoption share the same values, desires and hopes that birth parents have: healthy, well-adjusted children. A further assumption in this study was that the adoptive parents of children from a different racial background than their own share in this characteristic. As

reviewed in detail in Chapter Four, the results of this study have proved both of these assumptions to be correct.

The adoptive parents of Native children are often viewed in the same negative light that the ‘Sixties Scoop’ shone on the topic of adoption. This may stem from the fact that these adoptions not only crossed biological lines but cultural and racial lines. This researcher remained quite interested in finding out the ideals and values behind the adoptive parents’ decision to adopt Native children and what, if anything, did they know about the governmental policies of the day? As Adams (2002) writes in her book, *Our Son, A Stranger*, ‘accusations of genocide and racism have come to rest on the shoulders of adoptive parents [of Native children] and have filled them with feelings of guilt and isolation. Not only have the parents’ lives been thrown into chaos by the difficulties of the adoption, they have also had to face the charge that they were instruments in a government plan to destroy Native culture (p. 189).

iii. Biological Parenting vs. Adoptive Parenting

It is noted in the literature that biological parents have the nine month term of the pregnancy in order to adequately prepare themselves for parenthood or the addition of a child. Dr. Vinita Bhargava (2005), President of the Coordinating Voluntary Adoption Research Agency in New Delhi, India, has stated that adoptive parenthood gives little preparatory time and the period of search for a child is undetermined. Until the parent gets the child home there is a sense of uncertainty and this leads to a lack of preparedness for their role as

parents. This researcher tied this interesting topic into the methodology and more specifically, the data collection phase of this study by asking the interviewees the two following questions: *Did you feel fully prepared to become parents? Did you receive any information that helped you feel more prepared for adopting a child from another race?*

Dr. Bhargava, an adoptive parent herself, states that adoptive parents have the responsibility to reach out to others and provide them with a script for parenting that will instill in them the confidence and pride they have in being adoptive parents (<http://csa.org.in/articles.html>). I believe that delving into adoptive parents' views on this issue helped contribute greatly to the body of literature on these types of adoptions and give us their firsthand perspective. As Creswell states, qualitative researchers are interested in *meaning* – how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world (Creswell, 1994, p. 145).

In an article by Levy-Shiff et al (1990), the complex issues that many adoptive parents experience are explored to gain a better understanding of their adjustment and functioning. The authors found that some adoptive parents suffer through the disappointment of infertility and use adoption as a last resort to soothe their disappointment. They point out that adoptive parents can often be highly stressed and this could lead to significant psychological, emotional, marital problems if the couples are not adequately aware of their stress. However, in a comparative analysis of expectant adoptive parents and expectant

biological parents, Levy-Shiff et al. (1990) found that the adoptive parents were as psychologically well-adjusted as their non-adoptive counterparts. But the article brought up significant issues pertinent to this study. The adoptive parents in this study were asked not only of their stories of adopting Native children, but their adoption process in its entirety. Questions such as the following were asked of the adoptive parents: *Did you feel fully prepared to become parents when the decision was made that you would be receiving a child? How long did the adoption process take?*

When one thinks of adoption, it is common knowledge that an adopted child has biological parents that exist somewhere, most likely not part of the child's inner circle or 'new family'. Depending on the openness of the adoption, the biological parent(s) can be involved to any degree in their child's life: minimal, moderate or non-existent. This researcher was interested to hear the experiences of the adoptive parents in this study and if/how the biological parents were involved in their adoptive child's life. Did they have 'open' adoptions where the biological parents were involved or was there a reunion between their adoptive child and their biological parent at some point? The research of the dynamics of biological parent involvement and reunions themselves are discussed in the literature by Silverman et al. (1988):

'The birth parents studied often expressed incredulity that they entrusted their child to strangers. Many birth parents also expressed shame, not

for the untimely pregnancy, but for “having given away my child⁴.” Birth parents often suffer from an extended grief reaction, which they experience, in its mildest form, as malaise. In addition, birth parents only begin to associate these feelings with the surrender years later’ (p.523).

The issues of reunification, the birth parent(s)’ feelings, and conflict between the adoptive family unit and the biological family unit for the participants of this study are all discussed in detail in Chapters Four and Five.

iv. Cross Cultural Adoption

As stated above, the issue of cross cultural adoption or what the literature most commonly refers to as *transracial adoption*, has been debated vigorously. Mainly, however, the critics and the supporters of cross cultural or transracial adoption have agreed that the adoptive parents need to acquire the attitudes, skills and knowledge that enable them to help their children develop positive racial identities and survival skills for life in a racist society (Vonk, 2001). With respect to African American children, Vroegh (1997) writes that transracial adoption research of over 20 years duration suggests that it is better for Black children to be placed with White families than to remain without permanent homes. But the debate continues, the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) in the United States stresses that transracially adopted children will be alienated from a racially defined culture and ethnicity

⁴ It should be noted here that many of the birth parents of Native children had child welfare involvement that resulted in the apprehension of their children. Notably, the dynamics of this scenario and an untimely pregnancy could be quite different.

to which they have a right (p. 569). It postulates that, although such adoptees may be doing well at young ages, problems, particularly those of identity, are inevitable (Vroegh, 1997).

So, what was the case for adopted Native children? In speaking about the complete absence of preparation of prospective non-Native adoptive parents adopting Native children, Arthur Milner (2001) writes that there were inevitable difficulties that would arise from raising a visibly different child in a heterogeneous milieu. People adopting children from Asia or Latin America, are advised to involve their children in their cultures of origin. But through ignorance or design, Milner argues that this was not the case for Native children adopted during the 'Sixties Scoop' (p. 156).

Jeannine Carriere (2007) also writes that it is important to understand the importance of tribal identity in order to recognize the impact of separation or disconnection from tribal knowledge and connection for First Nation children (p. 49). To encompass this issue, the researcher asked the following question of the interviewees: *Did you have any help or support given to you regarding your child's culture from the adoption agency/worker? Did you think that there would be any ramifications to adopting a Native child?* As covered in Chapter Four, the answers to these questions were varied and quite interesting.

v. Culture and Child Placement

Another prominent theme of the research is culture and who the adopted child is placed with (foster care and/or adoption). As Richard (2004) states while speaking of the historical background of child welfare authorities first entering Native communities: ‘with the apprehension of Aboriginal children comes the issue of state directed care arrangements. Most children were not placed with Aboriginal families and they were least likely to be returned to their families in their home communities’ (p. 102). With respect to the adoption of Native children, from 1969 to 1979, 78% of all First Nations children who were adopted were adopted by non-Aboriginal families (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

There are writers who have declared quite openly that Native children who were adopted by non-Native parents do not fare well emotionally (Carriere, 2007; Richard, 2004; Sinclair, 2007). These studies all focused primarily on the perspectives of the adoptees themselves. Sandy White Hawk, a Lakota adoptee originally from Rosebud reservation in South Dakota was adopted into a home with an emotionally abusive adoptive mother. White Hawk says in an article for Children’s Voice, the official publication of the Child Welfare League of America (interviewed by Kristen Kreisher) that even in a stable, loving home, she would have grown up with the same feelings of ambiguity about where she came from. She says that she felt isolated, fearful,

and different as a child with no understanding of where she fit

(<http://www.cwla.org/articles/cv0203indianadopt.htm>).

Margaret Philp (1999), a journalist for the Globe and Mail wrote an article where she interviewed a non-Native adoptive father of a grown Native daughter. The daughter was in an Arizona prison at the time of the article release and the Supreme Court of Canada had just awarded custody of her son to her adoptive parents. The adoptive father stated that he had no regrets about adopting his Native daughter but raising her was 'sheer torture'. Due to her special needs stemming from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, their daughter was in trouble with the law for many years, in and out of mental institutions etc. The adoption eventually broke down which makes the court ruling of custody an area of contention. Unlike the family that was outlined in the prologue of this paper, this adoptee did not want her adoptive parents raising her son, she had rejected them completely. She feared for her son and his fate of being raised by non-Native adoptive parents (<http://www.fact.on.ca/newspaper/gm990223.htm>).

There seems to be an importance placed on the cultural context of the child placement today more than ever. Richard (2004) writes that often, the adopted child, whether Aboriginal or not, must deal with what may be viewed as a chronic doubt as to their individual worth. No matter how sensitive adoptive parents may be to the issue, the child often questions why her own family of origin let her go (p. 104). It also does not seem to matter what age the child was at the time of placement. Sinclair (2007) writes that the success rate

and outcomes in the teen years for Native adoptees are extremely poor, regardless of age of placement (p. 65). This researcher has examined the emphasis placed on cultural ties of the Native child back when these adoptions were taking place during the 1960s to 1980s by asking the following questions: *How did you come to the decision to adopt a Native child? Did you think that there would be any ramifications to that decision? How did the political atmosphere of the times affect your decision, if at all? If you thought the differences in cultures would be an issue, how did you plan (and undertake) to deal with it as your adopted child grew?*

vi. Bonding and Attachment

While exploring the issue of placement, it begs the question of how the adopted Native children bonded with their adoptive parents. As most people are aware, bonding and attachment are cornerstones of human development, essential to a child's stable functioning as he or she grows (<http://attachment.adoption.com/bonding/what-is-attachment.html>).

Bruce Perry (2004) spoke about optimal child development in his inaugural lecture in London, Ontario:

A child is most likely to reach her full potential if she experiences consistent, predictable, enriched, and stimulating interactions in a context of attentive and nurturing relationships. (Margaret McCain Lecture Series, September 23, 2004)

What happens if the adopted child is not a newborn when placed with the adoptive parent? This led to this researcher asking each family specifically how old their adopted child was when they received them and discussed supports or lack thereof, they received from their placing agency.

Hughes (1999) states that a successful adoption presupposes that the adopted child will gradually, and yet in a timely manner, develop a secure attachment with his or her new family. Most children are, in fact, able to form such bonds and the resulting attachment becomes the foundation for both their integration into the family and for their ongoing psychological development (p. 541). Attachment itself is an issue for debate. Van den Dries et al. (2008) state that for a child to have an attachment to someone means that he is strongly disposed to seek proximity to and contact with a specific figure and to do so in certain situations, notably when he is frightened, tired or ill (p. 410). This is not specified to Native children who were adopted by non-Native adoptive parents but it speaks to the issue of attachment and it relates to the issue of adopting children itself.

There exists a varying set of viewpoints when researching the concepts of bonding and attachments during non-Native/Native adoption but overall, most of the literature was strongly opposed to these types of adoptions. Sinclair (2007) sums it up succinctly by stating that although transracial adoption in general results in positive outcomes for the adoptee and their adoptive family,

for Aboriginal transracial adoptees, adoption tends to result in consistently negative outcomes (p. 65).

vii. Impact of Colonization

Another topic that needed to be explored thoroughly as a basis to the proposed research is the process of colonization. Colonization refers to the process of Europeans coming to the land that is now known as Canada and ‘taking over’ the indigenous societies that existed already. It is seen by many scholars as a destructive force to the political, economic, kinship, and religious aspects of Native societies. The importance of colonization with respect to this research topic is that one needs to remember the unique history of Canada’s Native people in order to understand all the facets of Native adoption. Kellough (1980) writes that similarities can be noted between the colonization of Native people in Canada and such culturally diverse people as those found in Africa, Latin America, Australia, New Zealand and the United States. Such similarities often go unnoticed and Canadian Indians are frequently thought of as just another ethnic minority (p. 343). It is important to note that ‘losing’ one’s culture while living in one’s homeland would be much different than what other ethnic minority groups experience; having a homeland from which they came.

It has been noted in the literature that the Canadian government’s goal from the nineteenth century seemed to be the assimilation of Native people into mainstream society. The means to achieve this goal was by training, that is, ‘civilizing,’ the Indian in European values, to make him capable of looking

after his own interests (Tobias, 1991). The values of Native people seemed to be either ignored or violated. Reserves were formed to house Native people and the church began to attempt to ‘civilize’ the Natives. When the government became frustrated with the slow-going process, Tobias (1991) went on to state that the churches formed a partnership with the federal government in order to have certain ceremonies banned. As Kellough (1980) states, “the colonizing of a people is a social process” (p. 343). This seems to be what the ‘Indian policies’ of the day were trying to achieve at the turn of the 20th century. Many would agree that Native families are still reeling from these policies and their outcomes. Fitting to this topic, Carriere (2007) cites Walters’ report, *In Need of Protection*, as stating:

....it is beyond question that historic and political conditions have contributed to the child welfare issues being experienced by today’s Aboriginal families and communities (p. 229).

It is important to note the impact of colonization on Native communities and families so one can properly contextualize Native adoption. It is also important to note the interrelatedness between the ‘Indian policies’ of the time and Native/non-Native adoption. In post-colonial Canada, it became the agenda of the Catholic Church to ‘civilize’ Native people to help assimilate them into mainstream society (Frideres, 1993). Maiter (2009) says that Indigenous people [in Canada] bore the initial brunt of inappropriate government intervention in the lives of children and families. The residential school policy was intended to

obliterate Indigenous society and culture through teaching mainstream culture while forbidding anything Indigenous (p. 68). When former Indian Affairs Minister Jane Stewart made her historic apology to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada on January 8, 1998, she singled out Native residential schools as the most reprehensible example of Canada's degrading and paternalistic Indian policies (<http://www.wrcfs.org/repatriation.htm>).

Aside from the political and sociological impacts of colonization is the key difference in worldviews between Indigenous people and the Europeans. Aboriginal values flow from a philosophy based on energy: all things are animate, imbued with spirit and in constant motion. Eurocentric values, on the other hand, are linear, singular, static and objective (Little Bear, 2000). Absolon and Herbert (1997) view the process of colonization as a deliberate act of racism driven by a difference in ideologies in that Euro-Canadians believed that they were superior to Aboriginal peoples. They assert that Euro-Canadians, upon arriving to this land, used capitalism to exploit and destroy Aboriginal social and economic systems and imposed Christianity on the Native nations in order to change or destroy cultural values and beliefs (p. 224). This difference in ideologies is a main reason of contention as to why many people are opposed to Native children being raised within the families of non-Native people.

viii. Historical Context to Native Adoption

One has to understand that before the eventual closing of the residential schools, non-Native authorities had very little jurisdiction on Native

reserves; they generally did not enter reserves to resolve child welfare issues. However, in 1951, there were revisions made to the *Indian Act* and the implementation of the Canadian Assistance Plan took place. When this change occurred, the provinces were accorded the jurisdiction to oversee child welfare matters in Native communities. As a result, child welfare authorities became more active within First Nations communities and children began to be apprehended at rates dramatically disproportionate to the size of the First Nations child population (Richard, 2004).

Aboriginal communities soon began to identify the incompatibility between their cultural and family traditions and the prevailing child protection approaches and so advocated for restoration of First Nations' responsibility for their children. In 1981, the Kimelman Report addressed the issue of jurisdiction and responsibility for First Nations child welfare, resulting in the first agreement between an Indian band, the province and the government of Canada. It is important to note that in 1986, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (DIAND) implemented a three year moratorium on Native adoption for the creation of new First Nations Child and Family Services agencies while the issue of child welfare services provision on reserve was studied (www.hrsdc.gc.ca). This moratorium was partially in result of the increasing pressure from Aboriginal leaders across Canada and the Canadian media (Irvine, 2009).

Researching the issue of adoption regarding Native children is fairly new, based on the fact that the adoption of Native children has its place in the history of Native people in Canada and what some view as the assimilative practices of the federal government. The main period of Native children being adopted out or placed in foster care was coined 'the Sixties Scoop' by Patrick Johnson because the practice began in the 1960s after the closing of the majority of residential schools (Johnson, 1983). It was deemed inappropriate for many Native children to be returned to their families of origin by child welfare officials. The trend extended into the 1980s and 90s as many residential school survivors returned home and began their own families. Parenting and coping skills were not in place, neither were familial ties and bonds. The 'Residential School Era' was an approximate period of time where thousands of Native children were removed from their communities in order to attend government run, church valued boarding schools. Trocme et al. (2004) state that between 1874 and 1996, the federal government's residential school system detached Aboriginal children from their families, communities and cultures. At these schools, it was common that these children were forbidden to speak their language or practice ceremonies and they were exposed to neglect and abuse (p. 584). The removal of children was often done without the permission of the parents. Native children were removed from their families and communities of origin at alarming rates. As Carriere (2007) cites in her article, *Promising*

practice for maintaining identities in First Nations adoption, with respect to the

Sixties Scoop:

...big shiny cars would come onto the reserve, followed by the social worker's car.....if parents tried to keep their kids, the social worker would call the Mounties. (p. 47)

As quoted in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples report (1996), George Manuel, an Aboriginal leader wrote about the residential schools:

'...they were the laboratory and production line of the colonial system...the colonial system that was designed to make room for European expansion into a vast empty wilderness needed an Indian population that it could describe as lazy and shiftless...the colonial system required such an Indian for casual labor...' (Section 10, RCAP)

ix. Current State of Native Adoption

Some provinces vary, but for the most part, the adoption of Native children has decreased significantly in the past two decades because Native leaders have vehemently opposed the practice. For Native children in care of the child welfare system, many agencies support regular visits with their biological families to ensure that family and community bonds are respected (West Region Child and Family Services, 2010). It seems to be increasingly agreed upon that Native children, fostered or adopted, need to have their cultural identity valued. In the province of Alberta, according to existing adoption policy and practice, adoption workers from both public and private agencies, who were planning for the adoption of a First Nation child, are to consult with the Chief and Council of the child's First Nation community

(Carriere, 2007). Rose McIvor-Girouard, Policy Analyst and Child Welfare Advisor for West Region Child and Family Services, states that it has been noted that Native foster children are extremely likely to return to their families and communities of origin upon reaching age of majority, therefore it is the responsibility of the agency to nurture a child's spiritual and emotional development in order to sustain a positive cultural identity. (Personal Communication, 2010)

x. Non-Native Parent/Native Child Adoption

Interestingly, this researcher found that the literature had two different views on Native/non-Native adoptions. From a political standpoint, Justice E. Kimelman (1985) in his historic report, *No Quiet Place*, labeled the systematic apprehension of Aboriginal children by non-Aboriginal child welfare agencies as “cultural genocide.” This report was key in bringing the issue of Native/non-Native adoption to light, not to mention surround it in controversy. He was far from alone in his feelings however, Kenn Richard (2004), in his article, “A *Commentary against Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal Adoption*,” argues more of a practical side stemming from his years of experience in child welfare in Toronto stating that often adopted children struggle with chronic doubt as to their individual worth but the Aboriginal adoptee in a non-Aboriginal family is further challenged by their Aboriginal status. They often do not know what this means and relies on messages from their parents and the broader environment in which he or she lives (p. 104). This seems to be when the emerging theme of

cultural differences becomes very apparent. Warry (1998) contends that there is an intense link between cultural identity, self-esteem, and feelings of personal control. Discovery and understanding of one's culture can have an absolutely revolutionary and transformative effect on personality and, in particular, on motivation (p. 221). This led to this writer wanting to know the adoptive parents' views on such issues. *Have they experienced the effects of their adopted children's struggle for identity? Do they feel that being adopted into a family of a different culture affected their child(ren) in a profound way?*

Colloquially speaking, on the other side of the coin, David Fanshel (1972) in his book, *Far From the Reservation* stated that during his longitudinal (American) study of 97 families of the *Indian Adoption Project* it was indicated that, what he called, *transracial* adoptions could be arranged on a solid foundation of objective knowledge that they would turn out well rather than a subjective hope that they might. Without advocating for Native/non-Native adoption, he did make implications that the removal of the Native children from 'deplorable conditions' did benefit them, essentially saving them from a life of hardship. Fanshel and his researchers interviewed adoptive parents in fifteen different states at approximately one year intervals and it has been said that this study offered a wealth of narrative detail that illuminated what these adoptions meant to the (adoptive) parents involved. Fanshel was not making a declaration as strongly worded as Kimelman, nor was he outwardly condoning the practice of adopting Native children out to non-Native adoptive parents. It is

also important to note that Fanshel did not interview the adoptees themselves in his study.

In Rita J. Simon's (2000), "*Transracial Adoptees and their Families: A Study of Identity and Commitment*" the authors are reporting on the third phase of a 14 year longitudinal study on transracial adoption. It focuses on the adoption of non-white (some Native) children by white families. It includes personal interviews with 96 mothers and fathers and 218 children which helps answer questions pertaining to the long term effects of transracial adoption. Simon's book entitled, *In Their Parents' Voices* is even more pertinent to this adoption study as it directly relates to the adoptive parents' perspective. It is important to note that both Fanshel and Simon's research is American based and occurred in notably different cultural and political arenas than the adoptions in this study but relatedly, both studies had Native adopted children in them.

A few of the most prominent researchers on Native Canadian adoption all concur that the concept of Native children being adopted by non-Native parents is risky (Carriere, 2005; Sinclair, 2007; Adams, 2002; Richard, 2004). The inherent risk that has been shown is to the well-being (emotional, social, health) of both the adopted child (Carriere, 2005; Richard, 2004) and the adoptive parent in some cases (Adams, 2002). Jeannine Carriere's research (2007) provides suggestions that would help make Native/non-Native adoptions more positive such as training for the adoptive parents in their adopted child's culture (p. 60).

The adoption of Native children is still a practice that occurs today, even though at a lower rate. Equivocally, there is still a disproportionate amount of Native children in long term foster care. Surely, the effects of this are quite similar to those adopted out? As Dr. Lauri Gilchrist states in Raven Sinclair's (2007) article, '*Identity lost and found: Lessons from the Sixties Scoop:*'

...given the current child welfare statistics, the 'Sixties Scoop' has merely evolved into Millenium Scoop' and the Aboriginal social workers, recruited into the ranks of social services and operating under the umbrella of Indian Child and Family Services, are now the ones doing the 'scooping' (p. 67).

Regardless of author, the literature on Native adoptions collectively states that there is a risk to the situation; that fact is undeniable. With respect to conducting this study, the researcher is striving to give a voice to the non-Native adoptive parents of Native children, as it has been done so very little. What are their stories and are they consistent with the literature that currently exists? And as stated in the abstract of this paper, if the data collected in this study were to be extrapolated carefully into today's context of many Native children still being placed in non-Native homes (under the guise of long term foster care and not adoption), it could be quite beneficial.

Continuing with the literature, in her book, "*Our Son, A Stranger,*" Marie Adams (2002) writes of her and her husband's experience of adopting a Cree toddler who began to show serious behavioral issues as he grew. Their adopted son eventually died on the streets at the age of 21 years. Adams has

gathered the experiences of other non-Native adoptive parents who also endured “adoption breakdown” that they were not expecting. The adoptive parents in Adams’ book report persistent encouragement of the adoption of Native children by the governments at the time (1960s – 1980s). Marie Adams and her husband felt that they were doing something right by adopting a Native child. It was never their intention to hurt him or have him hurt. Undoubtedly, Adams’ research has been invaluable to this study. Unbeknownst to her, she is quite aligned with these interviewed adoptive parents in terms of their adoption experiences.

The research that speaks to the disadvantages of Native adoption outweighs the neutral or positive outcome research of these adoptions. Most of the literature is told from the perspective of the adoptee and speaks to how adoptees fare worse than non-adoptees on variables such as self-esteem, depression and anxiety stemming from an unhealthy development process beginning in childhood (Feeney et al. 2007; Richard, 2004; Carriere, 2007). However, it remained interesting to this researcher as to how this negative stigma affected the adoptive parents of Native children. As parents, it was assumed that they would have loved their children as much as anybody else and strived to provide them with all of the care that biological parents do for their children. This was another assumption that proved to be correct, as outlined in Chapter Four (study results).

In her thesis about the socially constructed perceptions on adoption, Barbara Callum (1999) tells of the interviewed adoptees' statements of how families are not about biological lineage, but are instead about relationship ties, bonds, commitment, love and support. This is quite evident in the adoption stories heard in this study. Further to this, Shandra Spears (2003) writes about her own experiences as an Ojibway woman who was adopted by non-Native adoptive parents:

“As human beings, white parents can of course love a Native child. White skin does not convey a lesser ability to love, sacrifice and struggle as parents. White skin does not cause child abuse or racism. Adoption is one of the most beautiful manifestations of the human capacity to love and nurture. My parents love me, and they have remained a constant, active presence in my life. Love is a powerful force that can transcend differences of race and culture.” (p. 82)

The concept of the negative stigma of cross-cultural adoption, especially within non-Native/Native adoptions, has been explored much more throughout this research process. This research may contribute significantly to the adoptive parents' views on the full scope of the adoption process by giving another perspective and could be effective in examining the placement of Native children in long term non-Native foster homes as well.

CHAPTER THREE - Research Methods

I. The Research Design

i. Method

To reiterate, the research question is “*what are the experiences of non-Native adoptive parents who adopted Native children during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s*”. Creswell believes that the characteristics of a qualitative research question are: a) the concept is immature due to a conspicuous lack of theory and previous research; b) a notion that the available theory may be inaccurate, inappropriate, incorrect, or biased; c) a need exists to explore and describe the phenomena and to develop theory; or d) the nature of the phenomenon may not be suited to quantitative measures (1994, p. 146). I believe that the research question for this particular study meets not only one of those defining points but all of them.

This study will use a qualitative approach to collect, analyze and report data for several reasons. Firstly, the basis of qualitative research is the empiricist commitment to the production of truth in terms of the accurate representation of the social world as it appears to those who are part of it (Bracken, 2005). The exploration into the experiences of adoptive parents of Aboriginal adoptees is fairly new territory, research-wise and it should be conducted with the pursuance of truth as a mainstay. Qualitative research lends itself well to exploratory studies (Bracken, 2005).

ii. The Participants

The participants that were invited to take part in this study were all non-Native adoptive parents who had adopted a child or children during the decades of the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s. These decades were specifically chosen due to the fact that they encapsulate an era known as the ‘Sixties Scoop’ (Chapter One). There were thousands of Native children apprehended and placed in the foster care system and this study chose to select a small sample of those adoptive parents to speak about their experiences as related to this phenomenon. The participants included three married couples and two single, post-divorce mothers for a total of eight interviewees.

iii. Locating the Participants

A research recruitment poster was approved by the University of Manitoba’s Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (P/SREB) and designed (see Appendix I) for the purpose of being displayed in the community in the hopes of recruiting suitable participants that fit the criteria of this study. The poster was hung in public places such as community centers, University campuses, to advise the public that the study was taking place. This researcher received phone calls from the participants outlining their desire to be in the study. After a brief conversation that ascertained that they fit the criteria, a time and date was agreed upon for the interviews. Please see Table 1.1 in Chapter Four for an overall Demographic Profile of the participants.

iv. Consent

This researcher reviewed a detailed Consent Form prior to the interview commencing (See Appendix III) and after verbally consenting to the study, the participants signed said form. The Consent Form reviewed pertinent information that the participants needed to know about the interview process and academic procedures, it was read point by point and the participants were allowed to ask questions. The Consent Form was reviewed and approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (P/SREB) of the University of Manitoba. The participants were given a copy of the Consent Form to reference and to keep for their records.

v. The Interviews

Data collection took place over a period of ten weeks and consisted of five semi-structured interviews. All of the interviews stayed within a 60 to 90 minute timeframe and these interviews were the only data collection tool used in this study. The respective agency files of these adoptions are sealed and were not accessed by this researcher. Each interview was recorded with an audiotape recorder that was visible to both the researcher and participants. The researcher also maintained reflective field notes throughout the entire interviewing process to ensure accountability and accuracy. It is important to note that four of the interviews took place in the participants' home and one took place at the participant's workplace, after hours. This researcher can assure that both privacy and confidentiality was maintained throughout all five

interviews, despite their not taking place at the location stated on the Consent Form and all of the participants agreed to the settings of their respective interviews. Bein and Allen (1999) allude that an effective qualitative researcher will create an environment that is warm and trusting, and he or she enters the interviewee's world in a manner in which the interviewee is most likely to "give voice" to his or her experiences (p. 275).

To respect confidentiality, the recordings of the interviews were kept in a locked cabinet throughout the research and writing stage and will be destroyed after this study is completed. The researcher has typed versions of the interviews that were dispersed to each interviewee for errors or omissions before the final draft of the thesis paper was written.

vi. Interview Questions

The interviews were loosely guided by a set of interview questions (see Appendix II) developed to inquire about the participants' adoption process and their family's experience with adoption. The interview questions were designed to motivate the participants to speak easily about their experiences and sub-questions were asked as the interviews continued to draw out more details. Creswell (1994) states that 'devising relevant and provocative questions is vital to the success of a project and deserves significant attention from the researcher' (p. 99).

The interview questions began with general introductory questions that allowed this researcher to get a sense of their overall family dynamic and if it was a couple that I was interviewing at the time, the first few questions gave me a sense of the dynamics of the marriage. The questions were included for this purpose. This researcher was well aware that effective assessments can be made based on how parents recollect their parenting experiences, notably the well-being of their children. They were asked to provide details on the ages of their children, how many biological children they had, who the adopted child was in the family and were probed to give age range, personality descriptions of their children and the like. This researcher had to seek some clarification at times about details that were skimmed over but for the most part, as I assumed they would be, the participants spoke fondly about their children. It was also asked during this preliminary stage about how they came to the decision to adopt. This researcher was interested in knowing the reasons behind this decision and any other secondary information such as the reactions of their extended family and circle of friends.

The first domain in which this researcher wanted to gain specifics from the participants was the adoption process itself: how long did it take? How prepared did they feel? How did their respective agencies help? Based on the literature that was referenced, this was a significant area to focus on. It was deemed that the recollections of their experiences would provide ample data into what adoption was like during those decades. They had valuable firsthand

accounts of how the agencies dealt with adoption and how much support and resources or lack thereof, they received from their adopting agency.

The next domain covered the adoption of a Native child: how did they come to the decision to adopt a Native child? It is noted in the literature that the movement of Native adoptions was intentional governmental maneuvering. As Adams (2002) writes, ‘in the 1960s and 1970s, these children were marketed in local newspapers and on television, but it was done in a way that did not draw attention to the government policy of assimilation: for the parents, the thought was of “providing a loving home for one single disadvantaged child” (p. 186). Were these adoptive parents aware of such policies? Was it encouraged from the adopting agency? Why not a child of another race? I was also quite interested to know if they felt that there would any ramifications to this decision and what the driving force behind the adoptions were. I inquired about the political atmosphere of the times and asked them their recollections and reflections on this subject. Further, once they decided on adopting a Native child or were notified that they would be receiving a Native child to adopt, I inquired about their plan for this child; did it differ in any way from the way they had planned to raise their children generally, how did they plan, if it all, to deal with the adoption and the differences in cultures.

And lastly, this researcher covered the aftermath of the adoption, this many years later. I asked the adoptive parents to reflect on their experience as a

whole. I requested details about how old their adopted child is today and information about the relationship that they share, if any.

vii. Transcriptions

Taking the time to transcribe the data allowed this researcher to become very familiar and accustomed with the participants' stories and it was quickly evident that there were common themes throughout. During the transcription of the third interview, I began making notes on the similarities that would later be presented because their prominence was undeniable. The stories quickly took on a 'pulse' of their own. Data analysis began shortly after the third interview was completely transcribed.

viii. Ethics

Ethical dilemmas may be more readily apparent in qualitative research because of the more intimate nature of the relationship between the researcher and the study participants. These include the effect of the research process on the participants, the impact of the research product on these same participants and others who are similarly situated, and the nature of power in the relationship itself (McCoyd & Shdaimah, 2007).

While I was in the role of researcher, even though I am a trained social worker, I could not be the 'helper' nor, could it have even been considered. Padgett (1998) believes that if the researcher were to wear the 'helper' hat during the interview, this would contaminate the qualitative research being

done. She continues to say that the qualitative interview bears a strong resemblance to a therapeutic interview and warns against the researcher confusing the roles or the goals of research with those of social work practice:

“I believe that qualitative research is most effective when the helping mandate is suspended until the study is completed so that rigorous findings can be obtained and their implications made known.” (p. 380)

As Bein and Allen (1999) point out, the goal of the research endeavor is not the socio-emotional health of the interviewee (p. 276). However, throughout the interviews for this study, it was made clear to the participants that there are resources available to them to ensure that no ill health come to them and a handout was given to them outlining said resources before the interviews commenced (see Appendix IV). They were also told that if the interview became difficult and if they became distraught and upset at any time, they held the prerogative to stop the interview altogether. The participants were notified that Frank Tacan Sr., a traditional Native counselor would also be available as a source of Indigenous knowledge and support.

This researcher worked hard at keeping subjective opinions and self-biases from impacting the research study. One risk of a qualitative study is that the researcher will impose their own social reality on the participants (Bracken, 2005). This stems from the idea that while looking at a topic and asking what it is all about invariably leads to people lending their own thoughts and ideas. More often than not, researchers tend to ‘study their own’ (Padgett, 1998) and

may find it essential to share their common status with their respondents in explaining the purpose of the study. This should be monitored carefully to avoid tipping the balance away from the respondent (p. 378). With respect to this study, I self-disclosed about my own adoption when asked directly but did not elaborate into great detail as it was not necessary to my role as a researcher and it could have impacted the interviewees in a negative or influential way. I did, however, always make reference to my interest in the area of adoption and my hopes to fill a gap in the research literature about non-Native/Native adoption.

Within the ethical guidelines of a research study of this nature, the participation of the interviewees has to be taken from the standpoint of “where they are at.” Because the role of the participants differs from the interviewer (they are adoptive parents, not adoptees), the interviewer attempted to always remain objective. There is also the fact that my adoption story is a positive one, I never intend to conflict or contradict the adoptions stories that exist where the adoptees have experienced difficulty; they are my allies in adoption and I view their stories with respect and reverence.

ix. Analysis of Data

Analyzing the immense amount of data began with a reflective journal that allowed this researcher to document any personal biases that I had, allowing me to remain fully aware of them throughout the research process. The journal also allowed this researcher to chronicle my experience with this process: what I was thinking and feeling at different points.

Grounded Theory is explained in Chapter One as being the qualitative method for this study. Gall, Borg & Gall (1996) make note of this approach because the researcher starts by collecting data then searches for theoretical constructs, themes and patterns that are ‘grounded in the theory’. One of the first steps of this process, after the interviews were transcribed, was coding. Creswell (1994) states that qualitative data analysis primarily entails classifying things, persons, and events and the properties which characterize them (p. 166) and this process is generally known as ‘coding’ or ‘tagging’. The coding helped greatly in identifying the major themes and categories that were emerging by dividing the large amount of data into simple and recognizable blips of information. Also, quotes that lent themselves well to themes were highlighted and included in the coding process.

Comparative analysis was done by reviewing the transcribed interviews and this researcher’s reflective field notes. This contributed to the internal validity of this study because the data was consistently compared and contrasted. Creswell (1994) refers to this process as the ‘triangulation of data’ (p. 167). Diagramming was used as a visual tool to help this researcher literally not lose sight of the significant themes and patterns.

II. Summary

To sum it up, the overall objective for this study was to examine the lived experiences of eight non-Native adoptive parents who adopted Native children during the decades of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The data was

collected and carefully analyzed to allow these stories to show their similarities and commonalities and for major themes to emerge. The next chapter will explore the stories in more detail, provide more information on the participants themselves and discuss the results of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR – Research Findings

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two sections that present the findings of this study: the first section provides brief narrative overviews of the participants, giving an overall, at-a-glance demographic profile (see Table 1.1) and the adoption dynamics (see Table 1.2). The second section describes the three major themes that emerged from the data: 1.) Adoption – Challenges Where Challenges Were Not Expected – The Placing Agency 2.) Parenting Within the Adoptive Family – Challenges, Successes and Resilience and 3.) Culture and Child Placement. These themes are identified as the most significant from analyzing and interpreting the participants’ interviews. The three themes also have several subsidiary or ‘sub-themes’ within their respective realms that will also be discussed.

Part I. The Participants – Brief Narrative Overviews

i. Ned and Nancy

“Ned and Nancy” are the aliases given to the first two participants that were interviewed. They are a married couple who reside in an urban setting in Manitoba who adopted a Native baby girl when she was 6 weeks old. Ned and Nancy have been married for 52 years and this is quite apparent in speaking to them; they had the habit of finishing each other’s sentences and thoughts. They appeared throughout the interview to have a strong, stable, loving marriage. In the mid-1960s, they decided to expand their family of three

biological children: two sons and a daughter by “evening out” the numbers and adopt a daughter. Working in child welfare, Nancy was witness to the plight of many Native families and communities and saw firsthand the large numbers of Native children coming into foster care. Nancy’s words to Ned on the issue of adoption were:

How about adopting someone who needs adopting? Instead of having another biological child, why don't we adopt a Native child?
(Adoptive mother, Nancy)

Ned agreed to this and their adoption process began shortly thereafter. They recalled the home study being very “quick and easy” and within a year, were invited to a ‘viewing’ at the agency that they were working with. There was a six week old Native baby girl who was in a foster placement where the foster mother felt that she could not keep her. Ned’s recollection of that day is as follows:

Beautiful! That was our child. I have to emphasize this point, from the moment we saw her, we were committed. (Adoptive father, Ned)

Their biological children responded well to the adoption of ‘Anne’ (alias) and their only biological daughter actually named the baby. They changed her name from her name on the birth records. As Anne grew however, she went through many struggles, especially throughout her teenage years. Ned and Nancy supported her through these difficulties and today, with matters coming full circle, Anne is a social worker in child welfare. She is married and has three daughters. Anne is very close to her adoptive parents

whom she refers to as ‘Mom and Dad’ and she now has occasional contact with her biological family.

ii. Sarah

Sarah is a 53 year old Caucasian woman who was single and in her twenties when she applied to become a foster parent. She was given Larissa, a five month old Native girl as a foster child. She met her husband shortly after Larissa was placed with her and she had two more biological children, a boy and a girl. When Larissa was three years old, her birth mother wanted her returned to her care. The agency complied because the birth mother was doing well and appeared to be able to care for Larissa. Sarah was devastated. After Larissa was returned to her care, Larissa’s birth mother did not have her for a long period of time; she could not care for her high needs or behavioral issues. Larissa’s birth mother chose to have Larissa returned to Sarah. As it turned out, it was only for the time being. When Larissa was five years old and had begun Kindergarten, the birth mother devised a plan with her sister that her sister would take Larissa as her biological aunt. By this time, Sarah and her husband had had enough. They felt that Larissa needed stability and security and ‘bouncing around’ from home to home was too disruptive for the little girl. But they were instantly challenged by the birth mother who claimed that she did not want her child in a ‘white’ home. Sarah’s husband at the time was Metis and they were living in a Metis community. Sarah and her husband debated this fact with the agency and eventually the birth mother’s lawyers

when the matter was brought to the courts. Over a two year period, the family became overwrought with the legal proceedings but the judge eventually decided in favor of Larissa remaining with Sarah and her husband. This decision was made with the condition of the biological family being able to begin contact with Larissa after her twelfth birthday. The judge felt that she would be old enough to understand her adoption by the age of 12. Sarah and her husband were in agreement with this condition. However, when Larissa's 12th birthday came and for years afterwards, there was no contact from her biological family. This seemed to set Larissa off onto a self-destructive path, feeling rejected and ignored by her biological family.

In the meantime, Sarah had had her two other biological children, her marriage dissolved and Larissa's acting out behavior became more than she could bear. She was single and working at night as a nurse to support her children. When Larissa's behavior in her adolescent years got to the point of putting the other children at risk, Sarah felt that she had no choice but to place Larissa into foster care.

I had to make this huge decision and that was.....I put her back into care. And I did that because I just couldn't have the other two children following down the same road as she was choosing. I remember it just like it's happening now.....the day I had to do that. (Adoptive mother, Sarah)

As stated, it was not an easy decision for Sarah to make and Larissa remained in foster care until she reached the age of majority. Larissa

continued to perceive Sarah as her mother and Sarah stated that Larissa will always be her daughter. There is still an undeniable bond between mother and daughter despite the friction that exists currently in their relationship.

Today, Sarah is remarried and she and her husband are the guardians to Larissa's firstborn, a girl named Nena who is now 13 years old. It is an interesting dynamic because Sarah relayed during the interview that the 'gift' of raising Nena means so much to her and it appears that Sarah is looking at it as a 'second chance.' She is going to raise Nena how she wished she raised Larissa. Meaning simply, that she wishes she had the experience and wisdom that she has now as a grandmother during the time when she really needed it with Larissa:

“Nena is an awesome kid, we just have extremely high hopes for her. I have had an opportunity to do things “over again” and that hardly seems fair but I have.....but I can only sum up Nena as a huge comfort, accomplishment, reward, maybe the things that her mom, the things that I was never able to help her achieve, maybe those things are going to come through in Nena. Because I am wiser, there's no two ways about that, I'm far wiser now. (Adoptive mother, Sarah)

Sarah still loves Larissa very much but cannot support her lifestyle which can be at the point of unhealthy sometimes, mainly due to addictions. Larissa has contact with her daughter sporadically but Sarah says that the door is always open to her. Sarah hopes to one day, have her family back to a healthy level of communication.

iii. Bill and Bonnie

Bill and Bonnie are a Caucasian couple that have been married for 41 years and live in rural Manitoba. They adopted Allison in 1980, a Native girl when she was 13 months old. They had already had one son, Jack and he was 5 years old when they adopted Ally. They laughingly referred to Jack as their ‘homemade’ child. Bill and Bonnie are from a Mennonite background where large families are common. Bonnie wanted to have at least half a dozen children. But after Jack was born, due to health complications, Bill and Bonnie were told that one biological child was all they were going to have and they then began the adoption process. After a lengthy waiting period, they were told by the social worker that if they changed their application to include “any race” that more than likely they would receive a Native child. Bill and Bonnie were in agreement to this and it was shortly afterwards that they were offered Allison.

Bonnie had made it quite clear, or so she thought, to her adopting agency that she would not be able ‘to handle’ a child with special needs, she was aware that these children required special supports and intensive work. As Allison grew however, it became quite apparent that she had Fetal Alcohol Syndrome⁵, a condition that very little was known about in the 1980s in the

⁵More commonly referred to as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder today, FAS is a term that describes a condition affecting children that have been prenatally exposed to alcohol resulting in a spectrum of disabilities that will follow the child throughout her life. This definition is not

general community. Bill and Bonnie were, as a result, given no resources from the adopting agency to address Allison's development delays. There was no information given to them as support which is understandable because the agency did not disclose that Allison had FAS in the first place. Bill and Bonnie, to this day, do not know if this was intentional on behalf of the agency or if they as well, lacked the information at the time of the adoption. While speaking of Ally's special needs, both parents grew stressed throughout the interview, it was evident that raising Ally had been a challenge for much of her life. But they also demonstrated an avid resiliency as Bill shows in this quote from the interview:

See, we're people of faith. And your faith will determine to a large degree how you're going to handle things. Yeah, it's difficult right now but if we persist and do the right thing, things are going to work out. And that's how you go from day to day. And there's been some very difficult days, right from the outset and there were some good days too. It wasn't all bad so we persisted and we carried on and here we are today. (Adoptive father, Bill)

Bill and Bonnie also appeared to have a strong marriage and this undoubtedly, assisted them in raising a child with special needs. Bonnie spoke of long hours trying to help Allison understand what she was learning in school. Bill spoke of the hardship of watching Allison as she grew into a

exhaustive as FAS is a medical term that encompasses many differentiating and complex factors and definitions. It is deeply based in the scientific realm but for the purposes of this study, it is being related from a social perspective, describing the struggles of parenting a child with FAS and how overwhelming it can be at times.

teenager and eventually a woman, making mistakes and choosing unhealthy partners for herself. Allison became a very young mother at the age of eighteen years and if it was not for Bill and Bonnie's support, she would have lost her children to the child welfare system at times. In fact, the oldest granddaughter was in her grandparents care for extended periods of time because of Allison's unhealthy relationships. To her credit however, she ended her first marriage which was fraught with abuse and is in a better relationship today. Allison still struggles with basic living skills such as budgeting, cleaning, self-hygiene and parenting is still a challenge for her on a day to day basis. She lives in the same town as her adoptive brother, in another province and Bill and Bonnie visit as often as they can. Allison relies on her adoptive brother and his wife for day to day support.

Allison refers to Bill and Bonnie as 'Mom and Dad'. She has had contact with her biological family but the relationship is unhealthy to a degree, Allison is often taken advantage of for what she can provide for members of her biological unit, be it money or a place to stay. This pains Bill and Bonnie as they can see that Ally wants to know her biological family and because of her special needs, does not always recognize when she is being used or mistreated.

Bill and Bonnie describe their daughter as having a wonderful sense of humor and they are enjoying their role of grandparents very much. They recognize that they will have to support Allison, emotionally and in large part,

financially, for many more years to come but they see it as their responsibility as parents.

iv. Dan and Charlotte

Dan and Charlotte are a married couple who live in rural Manitoba and they adopted a little Native boy named Stephen when he was just over a year old. They chose adoption because Charlotte developed diabetes after having their birth daughter and she feels strongly that it is irresponsible of parents to pass medical conditions on to their children ie. chronic diseases. They had adopted a little Caucasian girl in 1976, had a natural child in 1980 and adopted Stephen in 1983. They reported that they were told by their social worker at the time that Stephen was the very last Native child to be adopted into a non-Native home in the Province of Manitoba. This researcher has no way to verify this information (nor a need to) but it is interestingly aligned with the fact that it was during this very time period that Native run agencies were receiving their mandates to operate on reserve. Stephen was from a Northern town in Manitoba and it is quite likely that he would not have been affiliated with a Native agency. He could very well have been the last Native child to be adopted out in the Province of Manitoba.

Notwithstanding, Stephen had been in a foster home for about 6 months when they were called about taking him so they made the several hours drive to northern Manitoba to see him. They were appalled at the condition of the temporary foster home and taken aback at how Stephen was

treated in the home ie. only allowed the small living room as his play area. They felt that he was under-stimulated as a child and it was apparent in his delays in speech and fine motor skills:

Well, I tried to get him to learn (body parts) ears, eyes, nose and mouth. Then I realized that he didn't even know who 'Stephen' was! And this was deprivation from the foster home. This was the poor foster home that failed him. (Adoptive mother, Charlotte)

Dan and Charlotte also recall being made to feel as an “inconvenience” to the assigned social worker who refused to meet them as it was not her day to work. All of these negative aspects were soon forgotten when they were introduced to Stephen however. He enthralled them from the moment they met him and Dan admitted to having an easier time bonding with him as Charlotte was just healing from a miscarriage, physically and emotionally. But eventually, Charlotte took on the full time duties as Stephen's mother and the two are still very close to this day.

Dan and Charlotte were also surprised to discover that their adopted son had Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. But they took it in stride and Stephen had special supports in school during the day and Charlotte to sit with him for hours to complete homework at night. They felt that they were not going to allow their son to ‘cop out’ behind his disabilities, despite how empathetic they were towards him at times. As Charlotte stated during the interview:

One thing that Dan said, which I think is one of the wisest things that I've ever heard.....I was onto him about expecting too much from Stephen (she felt guilty) and he said, "If we don't expect nothing from him, he won't expect anything from himself!" (Adoptive mother, Charlotte)

Stephen is 30 years old today. Dan and Charlotte were quite open about Stephen's addiction issues that he struggles with currently. As parents, it is difficult to see him struggling but recognize that he is the only one that can create a significant change to addiction to alcohol and drugs, mainly marijuana. They feel that it is their role to support him unconditionally but while still trying to place down healthy boundaries for him so he cannot take advantage of them. Stephen refers to Dan and Charlotte as 'Mom and Dad' and there appears to be a strong bond between this adoptive child and his adoptive parents. Dan and Charlotte made mention of never 'seeing' Stephen's skin color and they loved and supported him as much as they did their daughters, one of which is also adopted (and Caucasian), the other being a biological child.

v. Shannon

Shannon was married when she and her husband decided to adopt a child due to her struggles with medical issues; she had suffered through many miscarriages and was told that she probably would not ever carry a child to term. They were put on an adoption waiting list with their agency and waited for two years. At the end of the two years, Shannon questioned her social worker as to what was taking so long. The social worker explained to her that

there were in fact, two waiting lists for adoption: one for Caucasian children and one for Native children. When Shannon asked what list she was on, the social worker told her that she had been put on the one for Caucasian children but there was an option to change lists, as Shannon recalls:

And there were two lists! I didn't realize that there were two lists. We had waited for two years. I was wondering why we were waiting for so long and she said, "Well, for non-Native children, it takes longer, if you want a Native child, we can set you up tomorrow." (Adoptive mother, Shannon)

Shannon and her then husband did in fact, change lists and were given John, a newborn Native baby that was 12 days old. John was the fourth baby for his biological mother and his biological father died in a car accident during the mother's second trimester and the agency worker told Shannon that the father never knew about the pregnancy. His biological mother felt that she could not handle the responsibility of a fourth child.

John had many health issues as an infant and toddler, the main one being glaucoma. He required extensive medical attention and due to this, Shannon and her husband reached out to the placing agency for assistance. Many of John's surgeries were in British Columbia and these adoptive parents lacked the financial resources to cover the travel costs on their own. During their initial contact with the agency, the social worker shocked Shannon by saying that they could return John to the agency if they no longer wanted him due to his medical concerns:

But Mark and I didn't have the money to pay for going out of province and stay out of province to get all of this done. So, we went back to Children's Aid to explain the situation and I said, "All we're looking for is help to get there and get back" and I was told, "Well, you can return him if you want." I took one look at the lady and said, "That's not why we're here! (Shannon starts to cry) It's still hard to talk about. (Adoptive mother, Shannon)

The agency did in fact, end up helping out Shannon and Mark financially but it ended up stalling the adoption process for almost two years. The agency had to keep John's legal status as a foster child in order to help Shannon and Mark financially⁶.

As John grew, he struggled academically and to a small degree, socially. John seemed to gravitate towards troubled kids. As a teenager, his best friend "Mark" murdered a friend. There was an altercation over drugs (John and his friends were abusing drugs during their adolescence) and one friend was killed by Mark because he threatened to tell authorities. This incident was very traumatic for John and Shannon is clear in her explanation that she believes this incident and their painful divorce are the reasons behind John's current drug and alcohol abuse. John was exposed to the dead body of his friend by Mark but did go to his mother with the situation out of fear and needing support. Shannon immediately told John that they need to contact the

⁶ These circumstances remain exactly the same in today's child welfare system. In speaking with Rhonda Kelly, Director of Services at Southeast Child and Family Services (2012), she reported, "Agencies are unable to provide billable services to families unless the children are legally in the agency's care and control, it is a funding prerequisite. These circumstances can be profoundly limiting to a family's right to preventative and support services." (Personal Communication)

police. They did but the incident had already been reported by other kids in the community. The police spoke to John at length about it however. Shannon reassured her son that he did the right thing but feels that John still carries the burden of this incident today. In fact, he refuses to talk about it. When she tried to get him to see a counselor, John vehemently refused to see the counselor after only a few sessions because “he didn’t want to go through it again and again,” referring to the murder.

Today, John is 34 years old and he and Shannon are still very close. She knows that he is still abusing drugs and alcohol and this is understandably very hard for her. But she feels that he needs her support and she will continue to provide it for him. John’s relationship with his adoptive father was never the same after the divorce so Shannon feels very responsible for him. And sometimes, she feels very isolated in this responsibility. But John is her son and she loves him as much as she does her biological son, whom she gave birth to when John was three years old. John is also close to his adoptive brother, Aaron but both Aaron and Shannon have to place healthy boundaries down with John. They do not want contact with him when he has been abusing drugs or alcohol.

In conclusion, the participants of this study were average people who did not think that their stories were very special. In their eyes, they wanted to expand their families and adoption was a means to carrying that task out. The fact that the children they decided to or ended up adopting were Native did not

appear to bear a huge impact on these adoptive parents after all these years. However, at the beginning of the adoption process, the child's difference in race had them facing some obstacles ie. different adoption list for Native children. But as the interviews progressed, it became quite apparent to this writer that the adoptive parents' hopes and dreams for their adopted children were quite aligned with any other parents', despite the hardship at times, they wished good health, a carefree life and the ability to live a responsible, charitable and blessed life for their children.

Table 1.1 –Brief Demographic Profile of Adoptive Parents*

	Ned and Nancy	Sarah	Bill and Bonnie	Dan and Charlotte	Shannon
Age(s)	32, 31	25	29, 26	32, 34	27
Marital Status	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married
Province	Manitoba	Manitoba	Manitoba	Manitoba	Manitoba
Income Level	\$9000	\$12-15,000	Self-employed	Ranching	Could not recall
Education Level	Bachelor degrees – Ned (graduate level)	Gr. 12 grad	Bill – Adult Ed, Bonnie – Adult Ed	Charlotte-post secondary, Doug-Gr. 8	Clerical Certificate (College)
Ethnicity	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian (raised Metis)
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual (Both)	Heterosexual	Heterosexual (Both)	Heterosexual (Both)	Heterosexual
Religious Background	Christian (United Church)	United Church	Mennonite (Both)	Evangelical (Both)	Anglican

*at the time of adoption

Table 1.2-Overview of Adoption Dynamics

	Ned and Nancy	Sarah	Bill and Bonnie	Dan and Charlotte	Shannon
1. Did you talk to your child about being adopted?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Did you change your adopted child’s birth name?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

3. Did you hide the adoption?	No	No	No	No	No
4. Did your child experience difficult teen years?	Yes	Yes	Yes, Very	Yes**	Yes
5. Did your child struggle with racism?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
6. Did your child struggle with identity issues?	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
7. Does your adopted child have Special Needs?	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
8. Did the agency tell you about Special Needs?	N/A	N/A	No	Yes***	N/A
9. Did your child express interest in meeting their biological family?	No	Yes	No*	No	Yes
10. Did your child meet their biological family?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
11. As an adoptive parent, did you receive resources from your adopting agency?	No	No	No	Yes****	Financial Only
12. Would you have benefitted from Post Adoption Services?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
13. How much notice from the agency did you receive?	2 days	N/A	1-2 weeks	10 days	1 day
14. How long were you on the adoption waiting list?	Less than 1 year	N/A	5 months +	18 months	2 years
15. Were you satisfied with the agency's services?	Yes	N/A	Yes (at the time)	Yes (One Wkr)	No
16. Did you feel supported by the placing agency?	Yes	N/A	No	Not by the Northern wkr	No

*but always showed curiosity

**more related to FAS

***but not to sufficient degree

****assessments from doctor only

Part II. Major Themes of this Study

Introduction

In 1957, Anne Leatherman stated, “any child who needs a family is adoptable if he can develop in a family setting and if a family can be found which will accept him. This presupposes that the child’s own parents are unable or unwilling to keep him, and that the child is ready and has the capacity to accept new parents and to adjust to a new home” (p. 108).

This quote from Ms. Letterman seemingly overlooks differences in race or culture between the adoptive parents and the adopted children and even minimizes the impact of attachment to a degree. It is simplistic and idealistic but somehow still manages to coincide, in an overall context with the adoption stories of this study. These families are still intact and despite troublesome childhoods or struggles through adolescence, problems with alcohol or drugs on behalf of the adoptee, problematic divorces to name a few issues, these adoptive Native children, who are now grown adults, still view these adoptive parents as *their family*. None of these adoptions have broken down to the point of complete estrangement or rejection on behalf of the adopted Native child.

This chapter will now review the three major themes that emerged from this study:

Theme 1: Adoption – Challenges Where Challenges Were Not Expected: The Placing Agency’s Lack of Support and Resources

The first theme is, as chronologically in sync with the interview questions, a review of the challenges that these adoptive parents faced with their adoption agencies of the day, namely Children’s Aide Societies in the province of Manitoba. There seemed to be a lack of support, lack of connection, lack of sensitivity on behalf of agency workers and most importantly, lack of resources provided to these adoptive parents. This reality seemed shocking to these adoptive parents who felt that the agency and its workers should have been the first place that they could have gone to for ongoing support. This turned out to be a disappointing endeavor for these adoptive parents.

i. Lack of Emotional Support from the Placing Agency

The importance of empathy in social work practice is not a new phenomenon. It is understandably an important component while working with people who are in vulnerable states. As Gerdes and Segal (2011) state, “empathy is particularly important to social work practice. Clients experiencing empathy through treatment have improved outcomes. Empathic social work practitioners are more effective and can balance their roles better” (p. 141).

As spoke about in Shannon's narrative, when she and then husband, Mark approached Children's Aid Society for financial assistance, the social worker told her that she and Mark could return John. Shannon was shocked and insulted that the worker thought that they were 'giving up' on John because of his medical issues, as if insinuating that he was defective. Shannon recalls further:

I thought, "How callous." But we got through. They ended up giving us the money. (Adoptive mother, Shannon)

As much as they appreciated the financial help, it delayed the adoption process about two years. This was quite discouraging for these adoptive parents. Also, when Shannon received the first financial assistance cheque from the agency, they had erroneously and negligently written it out in John's birth name, which Shannon was not supposed to be privy to according to the agency's own adoption policies and procedures. However, Shannon pretended not to see John's birth name:

...and they gave us a cheque with John's birth name on it! And the guy didn't even realize. But I looked at it and thought who is _____?? (protected information). I said, "I think you've given me the wrong cheque." So, he grabbed it and looked at it and went and changed it then said, "You didn't see the name did you??" and I told him, "No, I didn't see anything." (Adoptive mother, Shannon)

Later in John's life, because of the carelessness on behalf of the placing agency, Shannon had the information that she needed to help her son start his reunification process with his biological family so thankfully, the error turned out somewhat positive. As a young adult, John did end up

working for his own band (First Nation) in a construction job and the Membership Clerk and Band Chief helped him find some members of his biological family. However, these particular members were not healthy people and had been in and out of jail. Shannon recalls that her son was ‘turned off’ of the prospect of finding any further biological family members and never pursued it again.

There were some blanket statements that encapsulate Shannon’s overall with her adopting agency and they are as follows:

I got the impression that they had more Native children (than white children) and they talked about them like they were a commodity and not a child. And I didn’t like that. I would come out of there with my teeth clenched because I wouldn’t say anything. I didn’t want them to say, “She’s a nasty woman, we’re not going to put any kids with her.” But I really would have liked to rip their heads off. I would go home and say, “Those ignorant people! These are children they’re talking about!”

It just seemed kind of cold. So, Mark and I made a point of not going there unless we had to go there. (Adoptive mother, Shannon speaking about the adopting agency)

The following remark was made during the interview while speaking about how the agency worker had informed Shannon that their decision to allow the adoption to take place was partially based on the fact that she and Mark had moved out of the city when John was very young, approximately a month old. She found this very odd and questioned the reasoning behind it to Mark. She recalls:

And when he was one month old, we moved out of the city and that was one of the reasons that they allowed us to adopt John. He was slated to be moved out of the city because his biological mother was living

there. They did not want the child to be living in the same city as his biological mother and I thought that was kind of strange. Like, there's how many people living here.....what would be the odds that they'd meet?? (Adoptive mother, Shannon)

This writer found those details very interesting because it speaks to the policies and practices of the adopting agencies of the time. But to Shannon, on an emotional level, it was confusing and almost illogical. It is fair to say that Shannon did not recall the involvement with the adopting agency as a positive experience. It was almost the opposite scenario of what should have been, instead of relying on the agency for supports, information and resources, she recalled avoiding going there at all costs because of the anxiety it caused her.

Bill and Bonnie also recalled the involvement with their agency as very dispassionate, despite the fact that adopting a baby should be a very joyous occasion. Bill pointedly recalls that the agency did not seem overly interested in making a connection with them as adoptive parents or have further contact with them post-adoption:

My experience was that they were very closed. They were anxious to get the process done. (Adoptive Father, Bill)

This was an extremely disappointing account of adoption experiences and this writer holds the placing agencies responsible for the way these adoptive parents felt about their interactions with them. Child welfare workers are often trained according to policies and procedures and undertake their practice accordingly. Ortega and Coulborn (2011) state that interactions

between the worker and the client (in this case, adoptive parents) must take into account each other's "positionality" and power/authority differences (p. 36). Recommendations with respect to this theme will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

ii. Lack of Connection with the Placing Agency

Adoptive parents Dan and Charlotte also had difficulties with their placing agency. As reviewed in their brief narrative, they felt like an inconvenience to the assigned social worker whom Charlotte referred to as the 'most ridiculous social worker in the world.' They did, however, feel that the Child Development Officer within the agency was helpful. As they state:

And the Child Development officer came along so we talked to her, without the social worker. And she said, "Stephen will be alright. He needs some help, a lot of help but he'll be alright. He's better than the social worker says he is" (speaking of Stephen's lack of development). (Adoptive father, Dan)

But in speaking about the assigned social worker, who is often the main support in the placement of children, Dan had this to say:

She wasn't much good for anything. We got ahold of her and she said she couldn't do anything for us until after her lunch. (Adoptive father, Dan)

Both Dan and Charlotte would have welcomed more support and a better connection with the social worker. She made them feel that their input was not welcome or even necessary and she painted a very negative picture for them regarding Stephen's developmental delays.

iii. Lack of Information and Training from the Placing Agency

Bill and Bonnie adopted Allison when she was 13 months old, spoke of their lack of information with a slightly bitter edge. They had no idea that the child that they had adopted was affected with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and they were not prepared by the placing agency for this scenario. Bonnie states:

And we had a hard time finding resources, as a matter of fact, we felt that we were left fending for ourselves. (Adoptive mother, Bonnie)

These adoptive parents would know positive supports, they have an adult biological son who adopted a sibling group of children with his wife. Bill and Bonnie made mention of how wonderful the supports are from the agency that their son is working with. They recognized that the dynamics of their new grandchildren's adoption is much different from what they experienced as adoptive parents.

When I asked Sarah, who adopted Larissa, about any supports that she may have received from the agency, she replied, "I don't think they had any back then." And Sarah would also know positive supports. She started out as Larissa's foster mother in 1976 and eventually adopted her when she was six years old. Today, she is raising Larissa's firstborn daughter, Nena and doing it with the support of a mandated First Nations Child and Family Services agency. She spoke quite positively and openly about the abundance of supports she receives today as a foster parent grandmother:

And so far, Nena is doing so well. But we are different now. Like I said, we can attend the cultural camps, we are involved fully with the

Native agency. We've learned to have endless respect for the culture. I just can't praise it enough. We became part of the Native agency when the switchovers⁷ occurred and we have had many positive experiences, we've also had some negative ones that would be naïve to try and say otherwise. The rewards have certainly come for me with having my granddaughter. (Adoptive mother, Sarah)

But sadly, Sarah was not given these same types of supports with her own adoptive daughter.

The remaining adoptive parents did not have negative experiences with their adoption agency, they reported involvement of the agency was brief and uneventful. Ned and Nancy adopted their daughter Anne in 1968 and when they were questioned about the agency involvement, it was recalled as being very brief and almost informal. When asked if the agency provided them with any resources, Nancy replied that she 'didn't think so.' They did not elaborate any further.

Theme 2: Parenting – Challenges, Successes and Resiliency

'It is interesting that what each parent wanted in a family was created, or re-created, in his or her mind. Each parent created his or her own reality. Each parent had an image or construct of their desired family, their ideal family, the family that they would consider to be a successful family.' (Adams, 2002, p. 163)

⁷In 2005, child welfare in the province in Manitoba enacted a major structural change that encompassed the authority for mandated First Nations agencies in the province to provide direct services to their band members who lived off reserve. Prior to this, the First Nations agencies had existed since the early 1980s but only had the jurisdiction to provide services to their respective community members on reserve. This devolution was a transitional process that affected many foster and biological families throughout the province. It was a direct result of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry – Child Welfare Initiative.

This section will describe parenting in many of its capacities and the common themes that kept arising throughout the interviews pertinent to this study related to parenting and its challenges and successes.

i. Challenges: Preparation to be an Adoptive Parent

Farber et al. (2003) state that in adoptive parenting, parents face ordinary and extraordinary stresses; they deal with universal family development tasks of bonding with and raising children, achieving family unity, promoting child growth, participating in schooling, and maintaining financial security. In addition, they deal with issues specific to adoption. Last and not least, adoptive parents struggle to prepare themselves for making the final commitment to adoption (p. 177).

In the literature review, the issue of adoptive parenthood giving very little preparatory time was discussed. This issue became apparent in the adoption stories heard for this study. Even though, it has been discussed how some of these adoptive parents waited for years on an adoption waiting list, the actual time they were given once it was decided by their respective agencies that there was a prospective child for them was very minimal. In most cases, they were given notice of only a few days. Preparation was also viewed from the emotional standpoint of the adoptive parents: How ready did they feel to take on the adoptive child?

Ned and Nancy were told about Anne, who was 6 weeks old at the time of her adoption and asked to come to the agency for a 'viewing' the next

day. Upon meeting her, they were quite committed to being her adoptive parents and emotionally, felt a strong bond with her. They instantly wanted to take her home with them but she was being returned to her temporary foster home. The following day, the social worker called them and informed them that the biological mother was reconsidering the adoption and was thinking of trying to parent Anne herself. They were crushed and despite only spending an afternoon with this baby, they had connected with her. As Ned recalls:

I mean, that was our child... ..I mean, I have to emphasize this point. From the moment that we saw her, we're committed! That was our child and that was really exciting. (Adoptive father, Ned)

As much as it terrified them that this baby would not be theirs, Nancy became quite emotional during the interview when discussing those few days of not knowing whether Anne would be theirs but she was not crying for herself. Nancy, as a mother, felt what it must have been like for Anne's biological mother to give her up and she was very empathetic to the biological mother's situation. It also became a thing of beauty because Nancy felt that this was something they could share with their daughter when she was old enough to understand, that her biological mother reconsidered the adoption:

Yeah. But the thing, afterwards, that's kind of nice is that the fact that she reconsidered...um, was kind of nice (starts to cry) (Adoptive mother, Nancy)... Yeah, in terms of explaining that to Anne (daughter: alias). That was nice, instead of just hey, she just gave you up....(Adoptive father, Ned)

Ned and Nancy were not first time parents at the time of Anne's adoption so they felt quite prepared in becoming her adoptive parents. They

had already had three biological children so they felt that they were ‘old hands’ at parenting and Anne became part of the family very quickly and easily, despite the lack of notice they were given from the adopting agency:

*We took her to a barbecue the first night. (Adoptive mother, Nancy)
That’s right! We took her and everyone was ooohing and aaaahing about the new baby. (Adoptive father, Ned)*

Shannon was given two day’s notice that the agency had a baby for her, her son John. John was 6 weeks old when she got him and she too felt incredibly bonded with him after only a short time:

He was our first. Oh, he was a sweetheart. The moment that they put him in my arms and those big brown eyes looked at me, I was lost. He was mine. (Adoptive mother, Shannon)

In speaking about the preparation time, Shannon recalled that despite being on the waiting list for over two years, the call itself was a surprise and she found herself rushing around getting bottles, diapers and the supplies that she needed for this baby.

They phoned me at work and said, “Congratulations, we have a baby for you.” I’m like, “Oh”. And everyone in the office is looking at me and wondering what was going on. (Adoptive mother, Shannon)

Dan and Charlotte were also given two day’s notice from their adopting agency and Stephen was in a northern area, approximately 10 hours from their home. They took their camper however, and went on a road trip. They were very excited to get the call about a prospective adoptive child but

as stated in the narrative, they were shocked at how Stephen had been treated in his temporary foster home:

Oh, he was such a cutie. You know? He was just a bright, happy little guy. But he hadn't done well in the foster home, he was extremely inhibited. He was only allowed to be loose in a very small living room, it was only half the size of ours and that was the only place that he'd been allowed to walk. He had deformed feet with.....whether it was genetic or whether it was from the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, I didn't know and it doesn't really matter but we got him home. Two days later, he was putting his arms up wanting to be picked up. (Adoptive mother, Charlotte)

Despite the lack of preparatory time, it became evident that the above mentioned adoptive parents were still able to bond with their adoptive children. Most of the families felt that bonding with their adoptive child came very natural. But what happens when bonding proves to be a bit more difficult? Like bonding with a child with special needs, a child who refuses to sleep or cuddle like in the case of Allison, Bill and Bonnie's adoptive daughter. This will now be discussed in the following section about the challenges of adoptive parenting.

ii. Challenges: The Actuality of Being an Adoptive Parent

Farber et al. (2003) speak about the challenges of being an adoptive parent and outline them as such: what they have defined as 'successful' adoptive parents tend to develop a sense of entitlement, claiming behavior, clarity of expectations, integration of multiple family systems, and acknowledgement of differences. They quickly adapt to change as their

fantasies about the child and adoptive parenting encounter *the actualities* of the adoption process and the real child. Parents with adoptive problems, on the other hand, experience difficulties in coping with differences between biological and adoptive parenting (p. 177).

There were a number of challenges that the adoptive parents of this study experienced and this section will provide an overview of them. The challenges relate to the above reference in that it appears that the adoptive parents all struggled with *the actuality* of adoptive parenting at one point or another. Their preparatory time has been discussed, their hopes and dreams for parenting, the moments that they all met their children for the first time have all been reviewed. But what about the actual experience of raising their adopted child?

a. Self-Blaming

A significant theme that stood out to this writer was that all of the adoptive parents of this study felt very self-blaming at one time or another. There was some moments of guilt and despair experienced by these adoptive parents as their children grew and were consistently making poor decisions or as their parents felt, they did not like themselves or they were questioning themselves, especially during adolescence.

Bill and Bonnie's daughter, Allison made it clear to them as a teenager that she did not feel like she was a Native person. As the following quote demonstrates, Allison outlined her thoughts:

Mom, I look like an Indian but I'm not an Indian. (Adoptive daughter Allison as said to adoptive mother, Bonnie)

Ned and Nancy's adoptive daughter, Anne began drinking as an adolescent, they worried about her with boys, they felt that she matured much too quickly and she seemed quite confused about her ethnic identity or even ashamed as discussed in this excerpt:

....the teacher said something about the Indians on Main Street (Adoptive father, Ned) *.....the drunk Indians* (Adoptive mother, Nancy) *.....and you know what that does to you? We saw Anne dealing with that by wanting everything regarding her racial origin. 'Who is my Dad? Who is my Mom?' 'Somebody said that I look French' so one day she's French.* (Adoptive father, Ned)*.....She really wanted to be Italian.* (Adoptive mother, Nancy)

Anne loved to party, had difficulty in school at times and met and moved in with her first boyfriend at the age of 17 years. All of these struggles were incredibly hard on Ned and Nancy who had experienced none of these issues with their three older, biological children. They wondered at times what they were doing wrong and they recall having fight after painful fight with their adopted daughter. Anne did not like being compared to her adopted siblings and made this clear to her parents and they all trudged on but not without difficulty:

Yes, there was tough, some really tough years on her and on us and all particularly, for us, we have the social work background. What in the devil have we done.....so horribly wrong?? Like, really self-blaming. You go to bed at night, wondering what could be wrong and what's happening and stuff. She didn't break off contact. (Adoptive Father, Ned) No. We just had less contact with her. (Adoptive Mother, Nancy)

Sarah had to place Larissa back into foster care at the age of 13 years because Larissa's behavior was growing out of control. Sarah was post-divorce from Larissa's adoptive father at that time and found that she had no supports from anywhere to help her raise this child. It was a very difficult decision for her to make. Sarah took this decision and Larissa's behavior upon herself, feeling that she was somehow inadequate as a mother and that she was to blame somehow.

Shannon wanted the best for John but due to the unpleasant divorce that occurred between John's adoptive father and herself, Shannon felt very responsible for John and his brother, Aaron's unhappiness. She made note of how she tried to save the marriage but to no avail. John struggles with addictions issues today and Shannon feels somewhat responsible. She has, however, come a long way in her healing and can place down healthy boundaries with John while he is using or under the influence of drugs or alcohol. She used to be quite unable to do this because of the guilt and self-blame that she felt. The latest update regarding John from Shannon is that he is currently in jail. Shannon continues to hope that her son will find his path and will be able to reconcile the pain that he is feeling regarding past events. Shannon says that she will never give up on John.

b. Racist Attitudes

There were also some examples of racism experienced within these adoptive families, either from their extended family or acquaintances. This was understandably hard for these adoptive parents and their adopted children. For example, Shannon was married to Mark and Mark's brother had a very racist attitude towards Native people in general. He was John's adoptive uncle but he made sure that Shannon knew that she had "tainted the bloodline" (Shannon's words) by adopting a Native child and integrating a Native child into their extended family. This infuriated Shannon but to keep the peace in the family, she asked her then-husband to speak to his brother about his inappropriate comments about John.

Adoptive father Bill recalls a community member and close family friend making a blatant statement about their decision to adopt a Native child. The statement was profound to Bill as this was no stranger, this was a man that he trusted and respected so his friend's words cut him to the quick:

He said to me, 'Bill, do you realize what you're doing? Do you realize that you are taking a Native person into a White, Mennonite home and when you look at the way Creation came about, you do not see a swallow in a robin's nest. They don't belong there, you're going to have trouble.' (Adoptive Father, Bill)

Bill stated later in the interview that in hind sight, perhaps this man had a point. They certainly struggled with raising Allison at times and what if this was the root of it all? Bill and Bonnie do not regret the adoption but it was

undeniable at times that the adoption of this Native child provided their family with some challenges and emotional ‘hurdles’ that they needed to leap over.

Dan and Charlotte lived in a community where racist attitudes towards Native people were prevalent. This affected how they raised Stephen to a certain degree, making them conscious about his appearance at all times, especially to Charlotte, as a mother. And it was noticeable that he was treated differently from the other children in the community at times. As Charlotte remembered:

But being Native puts a little pressure on us as parents because I knew that not everybody would accept him. So, that kid, I had to make sure that his hair was cut.....he didn't..... I mean, we don't make fashion statements around here but you got to be clean and you got to be decent. I really liked him to look nice. (Adoptive Mother, Charlotte)
So, because he was visibly Native, did he have a hard time sometimes? Did he ever complain? (Leona)
No, he never complained about that but I do think that if he hadn't have been Native he would have been invited to some more birthday parties, like there is a lot of prejudice around here but Stephen kind of made his own space. (Adoptive Mother, Charlotte)

Dan and Charlotte also had a neighbor lady who made some racist comments about Native people:

And then we had a woman who lived at the end of the road and when we got Stephen, she came by with her little girls and we didn't know about Stephen's lactose intolerance problems then but he had terrible digestive problems (gas) and this neighbor woman said, "Oh, you can always tell Indians because they smell." (Adoptive Mother, Charlotte)
Oh my. (Leona)
And I don't think I ever invited her back but in the long run, that was the very best thing because at that moment is when Stephen truly became my kid and you'd better just leave him alone! (Adoptive Mother, Charlotte)

Charlotte's last statement basically sums it up for all of the adoptive parents. They all felt protective of their adoptive children and did whatever was necessary to guard them from the ignorant comments that were made with respect to their child's ethnicity.

c. Reunification

Another significant struggle that adoptive parents can face is the concept of reunification between their adoptive child and their biological parents. In her study, Depp (1982) claims that as a group, adoptive parents have felt the most threatened by reunions and so it is surprising that they perceived the reunion experience in as positive terms as they reported. Perhaps the reality of the reunion was not as bad as they imagined it to be (p. 118). Silverman et al. (1988) discovered in their study about reunions between adoptees and birth parents that both groups believed that the reunion led to a sense of release and an "opening up" of their lives (p. 523).

The adoptive parents in this study had experiences with reunions that were quite varied. Their experiences with reunions were mainly vicarious in nature; they experienced reunions as experienced by their adopted children. As told in the following example, only Ned and Nancy actually met the biological mother of their adopted child, Anne.

Ned and Nancy's adoptive daughter Anne decided to seek out her biological family due to her firstborn daughter being born with special needs. She felt that having her biological family's pertinent medical information

would be beneficial to her and her child so she placed her name on the Adoption Registry only to find that her biological mother had already done the same. It is important to note that before requiring the medical information, Anne never expressed any interest in locating her birth family. Anne and her biological mother met for the first time and had lunch together in the city of Winnipeg. Ned and Nancy were supportive of Anne seeking out her biological family and accompanied her on a visit to her home community:

We drove out to the reserve one time. We took Anne and the kids. Anne wanted us to go out to the reserve. So, we went out there and met Margery (alias: Anne's birth mother) out at the reserve. We had already met her at supper but we went out and saw her office.
(Adoptive Mother, Nancy)

Ned and Nancy continue to support Anne having contact with her biological family to this day. They feel it is important to Anne knowing who she is and where she came from. Anne has occasional contact and remains on friendly terms but it is Ned and Nancy who she regards as her parents. As the youngest, she is still quite attached to both of them and telephones them on a daily basis.

Bill and Bonnie's daughter Allison also met her biological family but it unfortunately, did not turn out to be a positive experience for her or for Bill and Bonnie. Letters began to arrive at Bill and Bonnie's home from Child and Family Services and Bonnie assumed that they were in regards to Allison's involvement with them as a client. However, when Allison opened the letters, they were corresponding to let her know that her biological mother was

searching for her. Bill and Bonnie did not want to discourage their daughter from finding her family but they knew their daughter very well and knew that due to her special needs, she would be unable to place healthy boundaries down. Allison made the decision to meet her family and it became obvious very soon that they did not have the best intentions. They began to come into the city and live at her place for periods of time, they borrowed money from her that was never paid back, they ate her food and never replaced it. Bill and Bonnie were nervous and somewhat indignant that their daughter was being what they perceived as “used”. They tried to place some limitations on the contact but this drew defensiveness from Allison’s biological family:

When we tried to intervene, we were told, “You White people have done enough damage.” (Adoptive Mother, Bonnie)

Eventually, it was Allison herself that had to stop what was going on and she let her biological family know that she viewed Bill and Bonnie as her ‘real’ family:

It’s interesting for Allison because obviously she had a curiosity about her background but it’s also been distressing for her. Like, she has flat out told them that when they have said negative things about her and I (motioning to Bonnie) that they are not to do that because that IS my Mom and my Dad. They’re the ones that have cared for me over the years, you see. There’s a relationship that’s built there and it’s good. (Adoptive Father, Bill)

As parents, Bill and Bonnie felt a gamut of feelings when it came to the issue of reunification: fear, apprehension, anger, indignity, and eventual relief to know that Allison was actually quite loyal to them. There was some

sadness noted in their interview as well, not for themselves but for their daughter. There was recognition that Allison may never feel completely part of either world that makes up her identity, their world and the world that she came from: her Aboriginal identity. Bill claims:

When she went and spent some time in that environment, she found out very quickly that she didn't belong. "I don't belong here." You know? So, that kind of left her in between right? (Adoptive Father, Bill)

Bill and Bonnie seemed incredibly insightful in this aspect and due to the limitations of objectivity, I was unable to share the concept of the Split Feather Syndrome with them during their interview but its framework is built on the idea that Native adoptees are affected by what Locust (1998) believes is a syndrome: a cluster of long term psychological liabilities exhibited by American Indian adults who experienced non-Native placement as children. The major contributors to this Syndrome are as follows: 1.) Loss of Indian identity 2.) Loss of family, culture, heritage, language, spiritual beliefs, tribal affiliation and tribal ceremonial experiences 3.) The experience of growing up being different 4.) The experience of discrimination from the dominant culture 5.) A cognitive difference in the way Indian children receive, process, integrate, and apply new information – in short, a difference in learning style (National Indian Child Welfare Association, Volume 13, No. 4).

What could be termed as the most 'successful' reunification occurred for Larissa, Sarah's adoptive daughter in that she went to live in her home community for a while and she reconnected with many members of her

biological family. What remains a struggle for Larissa however is the use of alcohol and drugs and the unfortunately strained relationship between her and Sarah. Without this being in place, or without Larissa taking an active role in her daughter's life (the granddaughter that Sarah is raising), one has to wonder if without a healthy balance of the other aspects of her life, if the reunification is in fact truly successful?

The two male adoptees in the study were different than the females in that they both felt quite rejected by their biological families and therefore, had very little interest in locating them. When John (adoptive mother: Shannon) went to go work for his home band, he inevitably found members of his biological family: two brothers. But both of the brothers were living unhealthy lifestyles and had both been in jail for periods of time. This was unsettling to John and he refused to find any others.

And the mother. I'd like to know if she's still around. But he says that he has no wish to know her or see her. (Adoptive Mother, Shannon)

Does he say why? (Leona)

He says "You're my Mom and you're the only Mom I want." And I says, "I've got no problem if you really want to meet her. It's not hurting me or taking anything from me. I know that you're my son and I know that you love me. But you may have questions." (Adoptive Mother, Shannon)

Regardless, John has refused to this day to continue searching for his biological family. He seems to feel no need to have them in his life.

Stephen is the only adoptee in the study that simply refused to even consider the idea of contacting his biological family at all. According to Dan

and Charlotte, he feels quite rejected by them, especially his biological mother.

He got into a tear about adoption. So we showed him the papers of the adoption and in the papers, it said that his mother abandoned him.

(Adoptive Father, Dan)

No, he found those!....he was about 18 at the time. And we'd always said to him.....Dan said to him that if he wanted to go find his family, "I'll go with you." (Adoptive Mother, Charlotte)

Yeah. (Adoptive Father, Dan)

Then Stephen found that he'd been abandoned so he said, "To heck with those people, they didn't want me then I don't need them, I'll just go on with my life." He doesn't fret about it. That's not him. They're in the past. Good-bye. (Adoptive Mother, Charlotte)

To this day, Stephen refuses to talk about his biological family and does not express a desire to know them or meet them.

But the most adversarial relationship that existed between adoptive parent and biological parent was Sarah and Larissa's biological mother. As stated in the narrative, Larissa's biological mother was reinstated as Larissa's guardian when she was three years old. This was devastating to Sarah and her husband who were very bonded with this little girl. But Larissa's biological mother did not have her in her care for long. Due to Larissa's high needs behaviors, she could not care for her and requested that the agency give her back to Sarah. But when Larissa had started Kindergarten, her biological mother wanted her back again. This time, she was going to give Larissa to her sister to raise. Sarah and her husband contacted a lawyer and fought this case to the highest level of court and won. It was overwhelmingly difficult and Sarah recalls it as being one of the most stressful and painful periods of her

life. In one encounter with Larissa's biological mother in the hallways of the Law Courts building, the following dialogue took place:

Just because you're Indian doesn't make you any better than I am. – Sarah. To which Larissa's biological mother replied, Just because you're White doesn't make YOU any better than I am!

When Sarah was asked by this researcher why the relationship was so contentious, she replied that Larissa's biological mother did not like her because of her skin color. But she was fine with Larissa's adoptive father, who was part Native (Metis) and was not opposing to his adoption of Larissa, just to Sarah. Like the adoptive non-Native grandparents in the prologue of this paper, Sarah felt very scrutinized over something that she could not control; her ethnicity. And like the adoptive non-Native grandparents, Sarah's ethnicity was being directly correlated not only to her parenting abilities but to her overall *suitability* as a placement for this child. This phenomenon will be discussed further in the section regarding Culture and Child Placement.

iii. Successes in Parenting: The Small Steps and Big Rewards

The human ecology model says that a person is constantly creating, restructuring, and adapting to the environment even as the environment affects the person (Egbert and Lamont, 2004). In an article about the factors that contribute to parents' preparation for special needs adoption, Egbert and Lamont (2004) state that within the context of special needs adoptions, the adaptation process is crucial to the success of the placement. This process encompasses all of the social systems within the adoption context: the child,

parents, siblings, extended family, community and the organizations that serve the adoptive family (p. 594).

Not all of the adopted children in this study have special needs but the dynamics are still quite similar. What makes a successful adoption? According to Egbert and Lamont (2004), it is the adaptation process. It appears that the adaptation process of these adoptions is an ongoing process, ever changing and ever evolving. Hughes (1999) also states that a successful adoption presupposes that the adopted child will gradually, and yet in a timely manner, develop a secure attachment with his or her new family. He goes on to state that most children are, in fact, able to form such bonds and the resulting attachment becomes the foundation for both their integration into the family and for their ongoing psychological development (p. 541). The challenges of the adoptions have been discussed and as a complement to the challenges, the successes will be reviewed for each family because this writer believes they are an equally important component to parenting and they contribute significantly to the issue of resiliency in parenthood, which will be discussed later.

Ned and Nancy's daughter Anne is 44 years old today and works as a professional. She struggled with her identity during adolescence, referring to herself as Italian or French. She did not want to see herself as a Native person her parents thought, perhaps because of some of the negative stereotypes that exist. But she eventually made peace with her internal conflict and today, is a

mother to three beautiful daughters. And the boyfriend that she ran away from home for as an adolescent? She is still married to him.

Sarah's adopted daughter Larissa is a student trying to better herself through programming and shared knowledge. She has reunified to her home community (First Nation) where she has met several of her biological family members and has reintegrated herself back into the family. Even though Larissa has given Nena, her firstborn daughter to Sarah to raise, she is parenting her other children at home with her. Larissa has education goals that she intends to see through.

Bill and Bonnie's daughter Allison is a mother of two children and she is parenting them every day with the support of her husband and her adoptive brother, Jack. As stated in the narrative, Jack and his wife live in the same town in rural Saskatchewan as Allison, they help her with budgeting and the day to day care of her children. Jack is one of Allison's main supports. Bill and Bonnie speak of Allison's wonderful sense of humor and her ability to see situations for what they are.

Dan and Charlotte's adopted son Stephen works full time and makes a good salary to support himself. Stephen comes home to visit with them often and is quite attached to his adoptive parents and sisters. According to his adoptive parents, Stephen has a fantastic sense of humor and he keeps them laughing constantly when he is around. His view of the world is one of fairness and equality. At his former job, when Management wanted to pass a

bill where the Native employees would receive an “Aboriginal Day” holiday once or twice a year ie. Aboriginal Solidarity Day, Aboriginal Veterans Day, Stephen was quick to pipe up and ask when “White Man’s Day” was. He believed that everybody should receive a holiday, not just the Native employees.

Shannon’s adopted son, John is a hard worker by nature and enjoys working to support himself and contributes financially to the children that he has with an ex-girlfriend. He contributes the child support money through his mother and ensures that his mother buys his children clothing and supplies that they may need. John remains very close to Shannon and likes to visit her often. He shares with her and they have a close mother/son relationship.

iv. Aspects of Motherhood

Ben-Ari and Weinberg-Kurnik (2007) state that, “Motherhood is an experience for which many women strive. It is equally associated with a sobering daily routine and a universal and powerful myth. Theories explain a woman’s wish for motherhood as a complex integration of biological, psychological, social and cultural motives. It has also been suggested that the wish for motherhood is an authentic expression of feminine identity and that the reproductive function is an essential component of a woman’s personality (p. 822). In speaking about the mother and father’s desire for parenting, Noy-Sharav (2002) states that the motivation to become a parent is multi-determined; it comprises a biological drive for genetic continuity, a need to

conform to social norms, and a combination of emotional psychological needs. The woman yearns to realize her feminine-mothering potential and the man to realize his masculine-fathering potential (p. 58).

What remains interesting about the adoptive parents in this study is that it was the wife or mother of the adoptive unit that suggested or condoned adoption as a means of these families to expand. The husbands all agreed to the prospect, it certainly turned out to be a joint venture eventually but it was always the mother that instigated the conversation about adoption itself. Using Ben-Ari and Weinberg-Kurnik's stance on the issue of motherhood, it appears that the mothers in this study all felt a deep desire to be mothers and with the exception of Nancy, when they were unable or struggling consistently to conceive naturally, they turned to adoption as an alternative that would lead them to motherhood. This is a significant finding not only because it coincides with the literature on the topic but because it speaks to the importance of the role of mothers in adoptive parenting, especially this type of cross cultural adoptive parenting. Marie Adams (2002) also found this interesting concept in her study of non-Native adoptive parents who adopted Native children during the same time period. All of the adoptions in her study were initiated by the women (mothers), a fact that she believes confirms the finding (Kirk, 1981) that women are generally more comfortable with adoption than men (p. 101).

v. Resiliency in Adoptive Parenthood

As many people are aware, parenthood itself is a spectrum of ups and downs, highs and lows. Costantino (2010) states:

My preferred metaphor for parenting is the image of a person jumping off a cliff into the darkness, not knowing the depth of the fall or the nature of the surface below. Life offers no guarantees to anyone. The potential for experiencing loss and sadness plagues every parent who has hopes and expectations for their children. To be a parent is to embrace transition, both wanted and unwanted. (p. 88)

Many people believe that those who choose adoption are a special breed of people. To care for a child that one did not bear takes a special kind of strength and fortitude. This brings up the issue of resiliency and its role in parenting and more significantly to this study, its role in *adoptive* parenting.

To fully examine resiliency, definitions of the term should be provided. Rawley (2000) defines resiliency as “successful adaptation following exposure to stressful life events” and further describes it encompassing many themes: resiliency surfaces in the face of hardship. Without struggle, resiliency does not exist. Second, it assumes the individual(s) exhibiting resilience are able to “bounce back” or “rebound” from adversity, reaching or surpassing a pre-crisis level of functioning. Finally, resilience is generally described in terms of wellness rather than pathology. Strengths, rather than deficits, are emphasized and are viewed as the resources that allow individuals to overcome adversity (p. 102).

For the purpose of this study, resiliency will be explored within the dynamics of the family unit. This is a fairly new concept in the literature but has been explored in more depth in the last two decades. McCubbin and McCubbin (1988) define family resilience as “characteristics, dimensions, and properties of families which help families be resistant to disruption in the face of change and adaptive in the face of crisis situations” (p. 247).

Bill and Bonnie’s adoptive daughter Allison was 13 months when she was given to them as an adoptive child. Bonnie believes that Allison was an abused child due to some of the odd behavior that she displayed:

The first three days that we had her, she couldn’t sleep at all. Just cat naps, that’s it. I look back on it now and feel that she was definitely an abused child. She must have been. To be removed from the home. She banged her head against the wall. She did stuff that I never dealt with. I didn’t know how to deal with. It was hard and it was a hard adjustment. In fact, Bill said, after the first week, to bring her back because it was just wearing on us but we continued and continued and you know.....tried the best we could....(Adoptive mother, Bonnie)

It became evident in Bill and Bonnie’s interview that they loved their child very much. She did however, test their very limits of parenting and all of the knowledge and experience that they felt they had because of their firstborn son? It did not apply to Allison because of her special needs. They found themselves having to ‘re-learn’ parenting techniques that would work with Allison’s limited cognitive abilities. The following quotes from Bill and Bonnie’s interview display the power of resiliency in parenthood:

We didn’t know a whole lot about adoption or how the process went but we did what the social worker told us to do and we brought her

home and if we loved her, everything would be wonderful. (Adoptive mother, Bonnie)

See, we are people of faith and your faith will determine to a large degree how you're going to handle things. Yeah, it's difficult right now but if we persist and do the right thing, things are going to work out. And that's how you go from day to day. And there's been some very difficult days, right from the outset. And there was some good days too. It wasn't all bad so we persisted and we continued on and here we are today. (Adoptive father, Bill)

Shannon's adoptive son, John began struggling emotionally and socially during his adolescent years as stated in the narrative overview. John was devastated by his adoptive parents' divorce and further traumatized by a murder that profoundly affected his adolescent years; a friend killing another friend over a drug dispute. John struggles with drug and alcohol abuse, has been in jail, and is not allowed to see his children due to domestic violence in the past relationship he had with their mother. Shannon is continually supportive of her son, even when it exhausts her. She has learned to place down some boundaries with him so that he knows not to come around her or contact her when he is under the influence of drugs or alcohol. And she has learned how to watch him make mistakes without intervening or 'rescuing' him first. It is apparent when speaking to Shannon that raising John took a great deal of love and perseverance and for the most part, she did it on her own with very little support.

Ned and Nancy continued to support their adopted daughter Anne through her difficult adolescence, despite the anguish that it brought them at times. It appeared that they were not willing to give up on their daughter

which speaks to resiliency in adoptive parenting in profound and significant ways:

All those late nights and stuff. What's happening?? (Adoptive Father, Ned) *She was swearing and she'd get mad and break the cupboard.* (Adoptive Mother, Nancy) *She was swearing! She'd say 'I'll go be a prostitute!'* And I said, 'Anne, I hope you don't. I mean, I can't control it at this age if you do. If that's what happens. But just know, that we love you OK? But you cannot keep doing this.' (Adoptive Father, Ned)

Dan and Charlotte have also been quite resilient in parenting Stephen who has Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Stephen has made and continues to make some poor decisions for himself but their philosophy has always been to support him unconditionally. Stephen will sometimes take advantage of his parents, especially when it comes to borrowing money but they keep him in line and let him know that he is not fooling them. Stephen is respectful enough towards his parents that he eventually does what is expected of him but it just takes him a little longer. When asked to reflect upon the adoption of Stephen, Dan had this to say:

But for me, I don't know if it's a good idea for White people to adopt Indian kids, I don't know that. But those kids need someone to love them. And I think someone to love you trumps everything else. (Adoptive Father, Dan)

Resiliency was demonstrated by all eight of these adoptive parents continually throughout these adoptions. As a result, resiliency emerged as a significant theme to this study and one that should not be overlooked in the arena of adoptive parenting.

Theme 3: Culture and Child Placement

As reviewed in the Literature Review, the concept of *Culture and Child Placement* is prominent in this study and was a major theme that emerged in the data. As were the issues of bonding, attachment and loyalty as it pertains to adoptive children/adoptive parents. This section will review both of these concepts and discuss the results of this study.

i. Placement in a Non-Native Home

One of the issues that was proposed to be determined in this study is the location of these Native children in their non-Native adoptive homes and what, if any, were the ramifications of these placements as experienced by the non-Native adoptive parents.

The data collected from these eight adoptive parents speaks of unfathomable commitment and as mentioned earlier, true resiliency in parenting. There appeared to be a real effort given to the acceptance of their adopted children being from another culture and trying to respect that culture and/or integrate that culture into the child's life. When asked if they thought that adopting a child from another culture would have ramifications, all of the adoptive parents said no, they believed that their families would persevere and would not be hindered or affected by the difference in cultures. However, due to the lack of support and information from the adopting agencies, these adoptive parents had very little idea on how to conceptualize their efforts to

incorporate some Native culture into their adopted child's life. Also, when they attempted to integrate their child's culture into their lives, interestingly, it was often their adoptive child that rejected the idea.

Bill and Bonnie reported that they tried to integrate Allison's culture into her life at times but it never turned out as planned, as most things with Allison. Ally seemed rejecting of the idea and would not discuss her being Native or what it was to be Native. As Bonnie recalls:

We tried to get her into some Native stuff but it was never a good experience, not for her or me. Did she want to be Native? I don't know. (Adoptive Mother, Bonnie)

But in her teenage years, Allison did reach out to a Native liaison at school and that turned out to be a positive experience for her. She also had a curiosity about meeting her biological parents/family so one could deduce that she was, in her own way, trying to 'fill in the blanks' of who she was. Bill and Bonnie, from their peripheral position, saw Allison's experience with her biological family as somewhat negative and one will not know Allison's experience without interviewing her. But Bill and Bonnie did concede that their daughter was searching for pieces of herself:

Well, I think she probably thought about what it was [to be Native] because she was curious about her background. (Adoptive Father, Bill)

Yes, she was curious about her background. (Adoptive Mother, Bonnie)

As discussed in the section about reunifications, Bill and Bonnie did not stand in Allison's way when it came to her finding her biological family. They were not overly happy with how her biological family was treating Allison at times but they only interfered if she requested their assistance.

More crucial to the theme of *Culture and Child Placement* is Bill and Bonnie's reactions to being the adoptive parents of a Native child. Their input was quite aligned with many adoptive parents' views: they saw no difference. They loved Allison as much as if she was their biological child:

If people would mention that she was Native, I had a problem with that because I was thinking, "To me, she's my daughter and I don't see that in her. I don't see that she looks like a Native. I see Allison. I see my daughter." And I love her. (Adoptive Mother, Bonnie)

Some could view this statement as detrimental in nature, it has the implication that Allison's ethnicity was not being acknowledged by her adoptive parents. As the interviewer, I heard the inflections in their voices however, and I can assure that their daughter's ethnicity was not something being denied as much as it was something that completely inconsequential to them. They were quite direct in saying that they knew very little about Native people or their cultural, social or spiritual way of life. They were also quite direct in saying that they loved their child very much and her being adopted had no influence on that whatsoever:

*See? (showing researcher a childhood photo of Allison and Bonnie)
Here's one with Mom and daughter and we never thought of her as anything other than our own. (Adoptive Father, Bill)*

Where did the other adoptive parents fit in terms of *Culture and Child Placement*? What were their experiences as adoptive parents of a Native child? Many of the significant stories have been chronicled, for example, how Ned and Nancy witnessed their adoptive daughter, Anne struggle greatly at times with her identity as a Native person. They too, tried to integrate Anne's Aboriginal culture into her life in the only way they knew, by suggesting powwows and other cultural activities but it was Anne who was not overly interested:

I think to step into her world and you really have to project, you know, what that must feel like. We tried at different times, we wanted to.....there was some discussion when we adopted her about exposing her, you know, not separating her out of her culture and stuff. And we tried with Anne but she said no. She didn't really want the pow-wows, we went to some.....(Adoptive Father, Ned)

Yeah, she didn't want to take part in it and she didn't want to learn anything about her culture. And back then, there really wasn't a whole lot. Nowadays, there's so much of the Native culture. But back then, there really wasn't a whole lot of Native culture and she wasn't really interested. She'd say, 'So and so says I'm Italian or they'd say I look Spanish and that was sort of her way. And the kids at school, I don't really think they thought of Anne as being Native. (Adoptive Mother, Nancy)

Shannon reported that her son John felt the same way as Anne, he did not seem interested in learning about his culture and she had been hoping that it was something that they could learn together. Shannon had grown up in a Metis community and was quite interested in the Native way of life. She made several attempts at the integration of culture for John but to no avail:

But we never really got involved in the Native culture as I would have liked. I'd ask, "do you want to go do this?" and I'd get, "no." or "do

you want to go do this?” and I’d get “no.” And I thought, well I can’t force him. If I force him, he may not want to do it later. (Adoptive Mother, Shannon)

This very common theme that came up during every interview (except Sarah’s) was interesting to this researcher: the adoptive child rejecting the idea of being from another culture. Dan and Charlotte wanted Stephen to know who he was a Native person but Stephen was also not overly interested:

*We went to Folklorama trying to get this kid.....we went to the powwow one time with Stephen. We wanted him to be proud of his heritage because.....this one summer, we went to Wyoming and of course, along the way there was Custer’s Last Stand. And I’ve wanted to see that for quite some time. I’ve always been interested in Native history and heritage.
(Adoptive Father, Dan)*

Sarah reported that she also tried to teach Larissa about being Native but their circumstances were a bit different in that Sarah was married to a Metis man (Larissa’s adoptive father) so Larissa grew up for the most part of her childhood immersed in the Metis way of life. But there was recognition that Larissa was actually a Native child so Sarah made some attempts to integrate that culture into her life but she concedes that she really did not know a lot about it:

*I never knew about those things in order to teach Larissa. I didn’t know about sweatlodges, I didn’t know... (Adoptive Mother, Sarah)
I think we already said that there weren’t many opportunities for Larissa. I remember taking her to a powwow, that was a huge thing.
(Adoptive Mother, Sarah)*

Larissa also was not rejecting of the idea of her culture as much as the other adoptees but as stated above, she was already immersed into the Metis way of life. Similar to the others, she was immersed in a culture other than her own.

This researcher cannot come to a definitive conclusion about why the Native adoptees rejected the idea of learning about their culture without interviewing them directly. But Locust's (1998) concept of the Split Feather Syndrome comes to mind, especially the third characteristic of "the experience of growing up being different." This may help pinpoint where some of the adoptees' ambiguity stemmed from: what child wants to be different from their peers? It may have been 'safer' for the adoptees to stay within the boundaries of the culture that they were adopted into, rather than learning about their own. There are also many negative societal stereotypes about Native people as a collective so one could deduce that shame played a role in why the adoptees were not keen on learning about the Native way of life. Again, without interviewing them directly, one can only speculate.

Regardless, the adoptive parents had interest in their child's culture, it appeared that there was no denying of the difference in culture and there was valiant effort shown in trying to bring some of that culture to the child's life in the most basic ways that they knew how. But without resources to their availability, these adoptive parents were left on their own to assimilate their

adoptive children into their Native culture and often fell short of their goal.

Discussion regarding this issue will take place in Chapter Five.

ii. Bonding, Attachment and Loyalty

An overview of the adoptive parents' preparatory period and their parenting struggles has been provided and discussed. Even though their waiting time on the adoption lists was long (average: one year), their actual preparatory time was very short (average: two days). But they all seemed to be able to bond with their adopted children quickly and without incident. Even Bill and Bonnie who struggled at times to bond with Allison due to her special needs, when asked about the initial bonding time, state:

No, a child is a child. And children will adapt. I just never thought about all the things that would come in the process. We were young parents. You have a baby and you take care of it and everything will be good. You don't really think of all of the things that it takes to raise children. If we had thought of all the things that it took to raise children, we probably wouldn't have had any! (Adoptive Mother, Bonnie)

Attachment can be defined as 'the affectional bond that characterizes many close relationships and that promotes a sense of comfort and security' (Feeney, Passmore and Petersen, 2007, p. 130). It is important to note that today, all of the adoptees in this study refer to their adoptive parents as "Mom and Dad". All of the adoptions are still intact with the exception of Sarah and Larissa, who have a strained mother/daughter relationship. But when Larissa does contact Sarah periodically, she still calls her "Mom". And Sarah's case is different in that her adoption of Larissa was challenged to a degree that the

other adoptive parents did not experience. She fought for her adoptive daughter in court because she believed at the time that she was the best placement for Larissa. Her mothering was scrutinized by opposing counsel who hired a psychologist to assess the bond between Sarah and Larissa:

Larissa and I went in on a bus. We had to go be together in front of a psychologist so he could testify that we had bonded. Oh, goodness sakes. So, he came to court and he testified that we were bonded. Now, we can see that in the perspective that things are brought out in. This white person, Native baby, did they bond?? It was absolute silliness, why wouldn't she have bonded with me? (Adoptive Mother, Sarah)

As stated in the narrative, Sarah became fearful of Larissa's behavior and could not parent her solo when Larissa was 13 years old and had to make the difficult decision to place her back into foster care. Larissa's outbursts and aggression were getting out of control and she was influencing her adoptive siblings in a negative manner. At that point, Sarah had undergone a painful divorce and could not manage to parent Larissa alone. Mother and daughter continued to see each other while Larissa was in foster care and Sarah worked with Larissa's social worker to help out in any way she could during those years. Larissa never let go of Sarah as her mother however and Sarah never let go of Larissa as her daughter. Today, Sarah has this to say about her adopted child:

And I'm able now to set that part of my life with Larissa, my adopted daughter in a special spot where she'll always be my daughter. I would be very upset at anyone even questioning that. Love is unconditional, it comes from just the family ties, that should never be questioned either. I don't ever question Larissa's love for me either. She is my daughter and I am her mother. We've always known that she has a birth mother but I

am her mother and I will always be that in her life. (Adoptive Mother, Sarah)

There also exists a great deal of loyalty on the part of the adoptees to their adoptive parents i.e. the case of adoptees Stephen and John refusing to have contact with their biological families out of the loyalty to Dan and Charlotte and Shannon. Ned and Nancy made mention that their adopted daughter Anne is the one of their children that always knows where they are or is able to track them down when she wants to. They joked that their natural children “couldn’t care less” but it is Anne who quite often binds the family together, even to this day. And Bill and Bonnie’s daughter, Allison: who stood up against members of her biological family when they were speaking negatively towards her adoptive parents. She risked having them turn on her or alienate her from their lives but she displayed loyalty to her adoptive parents when she felt it was necessary.

In a study by John Triseliotis, he found that all of the adoptees that he interviewed who had experienced reunions with their biological families clearly felt that their *true psychological parents* were their adoptive parents, even in those cases where the adoptive relationship failed (p. 161). This study is certainly quite cohesive with the Triseliotis study on that finding.

iii. Summary

The results of this study were interesting and diverse. The adoptive parents were quite candid in answering the interview questions and provided this study with an immense amount of data based on their experiences. But it

became quite evident that these non-Native adoptive parents, despite the challenges and struggles at times, had no regrets about their decision to adopt a Native child. All of the adoptions are still intact, some are in a better, healthier state than others but these families prevailed regardless of the differences in culture and the numerous challenges that they encountered.

CHAPTER FIVE – Discussion Points and Conclusion

Introduction

As demonstrated in Chapter Four, the adoptive families in this study are still intact which speaks to their resilience. However, it cannot be denied that there were tremendous struggles at times therefore, pathways to healthy adoptive parenting will be discussed throughout this chapter. Further, the most significant theme of this study remains to be *Culture and Child Placement* and many of the recommendations that have come as a result of this study are directly related to this theme. As Vidal de Haymes & Simon (2003) state, it is undeniable that the practice of racial and ethnic matching in foster care and adoption has been an issue of tremendous contention. Within the field of child welfare especially, support exists both for matching and for not making race and ethnicity a significant factor in placement decisions. Nevertheless, most relevant research support racial matching as a practice ideal, even though these writers note that there is literature that suggests the existence of positive outcomes in some transracial placements as well (p. 252).

It is important to note that there are some sensible, supportive and meaningful recommendations in this chapter made by the adoptive parents themselves during the interviews regarding what they think would have or

could have helped them through difficult times with their adopted child⁸. This chapter will also provide some further discussion regarding the outcomes of this study and a conclusion will be given.

Section I – Discussion Points Regarding Adoption

Discussion Point #1 – Ensuring That the Adoption Process, Timeframe and Post Adoption Services Are Adequate

The recognition that adoptive parents have special dynamics that they encounter when they adopt children needs to be prioritized by the adopting agency. Slowing the process down in order for adopting parents to be very committed is recommended. As Hughes (1999) states prospective adoptive parents also must understand a particular child's attachment problems and, in conjunction with adoption professionals, decide whether they have the ability and motivation to adopt such a child. Parents who make the decision to adopt must receive training in parenting the child so they can maintain the emotional stability of their home while slowly facilitating the child's ability to form an attachment with them. They and their child will need specialized treatment

⁸ It has to be noted that the practice of adopting Native children to non-Native homes is essentially obsolete, especially within the same assimilative confines of the Sixties Scoop. As Marie Adams (2002) states, 'the obscene marketing of Native children has stopped' (p. 186). The recommendations from this researcher will be provided with the objective that they could be extrapolated into the practice of placing Native children in long term non-Native foster homes. This practice is still quite common within today's child welfare context. As Palmer and Cooke (1996) note, 'In Canada, First Nations people make up only 2% of the population, but their children are overrepresented in state care: depending on geographic location, they are taken into custody four to five times as often as non-Native children (p. 709).

that facilitates this process and a range of post-adoption supportive services (p. 545).

As discussed thoroughly in Chapter Four, the majority of these adoptive parents did not feel that they were supported to the extent that they should have been from their adopting agency. They had no say regarding the pace of the adoption: some were so frustrated by the waiting period that they revised their adoption criteria in order to have a child placed with them faster ie. Bill and Bonnie, Shannon. They also had no say when it came to how much notice they were given by the agency when the agency had a child for them, as stated in Chapter Four, many of them only had notice of a few days.

With respect to a ‘range of post-adoption services’ that Hughes (1999) is recommending; these adoptive parents received a minimal amount to none. With the exception of Shannon, who needed to keep John’s legal status as a foster child in order to have the agency provide financial assistance, the files for these adoptive parents were closed quite quickly after they received their adoptive children. Hughes (1999) recommends In Home support services for these families be provided by skilled family support professionals for a few hours a week to ensure that these parents receive the respite that they need to continue providing an intense level of parenting during the remainder of the week. But for such services to be truly helpful however, these ‘parental assistants’ need to reinforce the parents’ judgments, rules and authority to the child (p. 558).

This type of ongoing support from the adopting/placing agency will benefit the adoptive family greatly, giving them much higher potential for success. Again, because the practice of adopting Native children to Native homes occurs very little in today's child welfare context, this recommendation would be given to long-term foster parents of Native foster children. The decision to have a foster child placed in one's foster home is no less important than if he/she was to be adopted. Child welfare workers still have to choose placements for children very carefully and with the intention that long term care or continued care for the time period that that child will be in foster care will be in his or her best interests.

Discussion Point #2 – Ensuring More Sensitivity and Cultural Competence Training for Social Workers

It has been determined through this study that the social worker's role is of the utmost importance in the adoption and long term foster care placement process. The potential adoptive/foster parents rely on the social worker for guidance and knowledge while entering the unknown territory of adoption/child welfare services. The potential adoptive/foster parents are in an extremely vulnerable position as they have already decided to expand their families with the addition of a new adopted/foster child and are now relying on the social worker and placing agency to fulfill that dream. And it is a dream. It has already been reviewed how the psychosocial needs to be a parent can be an overwhelming and powerful factor and how every individual has an

image in their mind about their prospective family and what that family will look like one day. Therefore, this researcher can conclude that the vulnerability level of potential adoptive/foster parents is extremely high.

To respond to this vulnerability, it is being suggested by this researcher that the assigned social worker should have a competent understanding of adoption/long term fostering and its very unique dynamics. It would be beneficial if the social worker were to view the adoptive/foster parents as the clients that they are, providing them with the same level of respect, mutuality, confidentiality and competence as they would with any other clients. As Dupre (2012) articulates, the assistance that social work practitioners provide to clients to increase their personal, interpersonal or political power, along with a focus on developing client strengths, is viewed as a significant strategy for helping people to reclaim greater control over their lives (p. 170).

Within the guiding principles of the field, social workers have a great responsibility to all that they work with. Value Four in the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Code of Ethics is *Integrity in Professional Practice* and one of its main principles is as follows:

'Social workers demonstrate and promote the qualities of honesty, reliability and impartiality and diligence in their professional practice'
(CASW, Code of Ethics, 2005)

It could also be stated that social workers who work with Native children in foster or adoptive care need to be very responsible in all aspects of their work, especially about their own self-biases, values and assumptions. As Shangreaux (2004) affirms, it is important that caseworkers that are assigned to Aboriginal children and families understand the issues of historical grief, colonization, the painful legacy of the residential school experience, and the debilitating effects of poverty and substance abuse. These are the primary issues that lead to family breakdown and result in children and youth being removed from their parents and placed in out-of-home care (p. 10).

It has been learned through this study that cultural sensitivity and cultural competence should be practiced by the social workers who are hired to practice child welfare today. And some agencies are taking this assertion quite seriously. Southeast Child and Family Services, a mandated First Nations child welfare agency in Manitoba has an extensive questionnaire that needs to be filled out by any interested applicant for a direct service or Management position (Personal Communication, Human Resources, 2012). The questionnaire covers pertinent topics to Aboriginal child welfare such as colonization, as well as general research questions that ensure that the applicant has strong working knowledge of the *Child and Family Services Act* and other significant literature. This not only allows the agency's Management team to discern the applicant's writing skills but more importantly to the topic, assess how culturally competent and culturally

sensitive the applicant is. This writer would recommend that other agencies examine this practice and explore incorporating it where at all possible.

*Discussion Point # 3 – Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)
Prevention, Diagnosis and Intervention Services to be Provided to
Adoptive/Foster Parents of Children with Special Needs*

The Surgeon General of the United States issued a warning on alcohol and pregnancy in 1981, recommending that women refrain from alcohol consumption when pregnant or planning a pregnancy (Streissguth, 1997). But the phenomenon of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is complex and can be full of controversy. It is not an issue that can be addressed simply or effortlessly.

In terms of this study, we need to remember that Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) as a medical condition and more specifically, a birth defect, was not formally discovered until 1973⁹. On a greater societal level, the general knowledge base about FAS was extremely minimal during this time period. This could be the reason that some of these adoptive parents were not told that the child they adopted was in fact, affected by prenatal alcohol exposure. Or this fact was unknown to the agency workers. Regardless, the diagnosis process for FAS was simply not formalized enough at this time, nor were there any resources to assist these families with these children.

⁹ The first reports identifying a pattern of birth defects appearing attributable to alcohol consumption during pregnancy emerged in the English language medical journals by Dr. David Smith, an eminent scholar of genetic and environmental birth defects. Smith referred to this condition as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). This was a major change in the medical perspective on alcohol use and pregnancy (Streissguth, p. 6).

The recommendation regarding FASD Prevention and Resources came primarily from Dan, the adoptive father of Stephen. He and Charlotte recognized that Stephen had cognitive delays and inabilities and they planned and supported him to the best of their abilities. Dan was not saying that Stephen was hopeless or defective in any way. He loves his son and applauds Stephen's tenacious personality and his ability to make any situation tenable. But he wondered at Stephen's potential had he not been affected by the prenatal exposure to alcohol. And he railed at limitations that were in fact given to his son due to the prenatal alcohol exposure. He felt that it was unfair and having had conversations with Stephen himself about it, knew that being FAS was something that Stephen was not happy about. According to Dan and Charlotte, Stephen made comments such as, "I wish my mother hadn't made me so stupid." Dan and Charlotte had explained to their son that he was affected by some special needs and when he asked where they came from, they explained it to him so he would know the truth. An excerpt from Dan and Charlotte's interview when the conversation turned to Stephen being affected by FAS follows:

*And back then, there was no information on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Just little bits. I think perhaps our social worker gave it to us. Their advice was that babies who were suspected in being affected should be aborted. And that wasn't my idea at all. But it was really sketchy.
(Adoptive Mother, Charlotte)*

The hardest thing about FAS is realizing that this guy may fall into a hole today and three days from now, he'll see another hole and fall into that one. Because he can't seem to move or see...well, I fell into that hole so I should probably go around this one. He can't seem to.....it

just does not. One experience does not work. If he has TEN experiences, well then maybe, "I won't do that again." And it's very frustrating.
(Adoptive Father, Dan)

And they don't tell you! Or at least they didn't tell us: This is one thing that you're going to have to deal with. (Adoptive Mother, Charlotte)

Well, I don't know if they really realized it themselves back then.
(Adoptive Father, Dan)

It has to be noted that today, much more is known about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) as it now called. There is much more support, knowledge and training regarding FASD for adoptive and foster parents today more than ever.

This does not diminish the importance of Dan's recommendation. He was quite insightful in stating that the adoptive parents of their time also needed those resources and information as well but unfortunately, it just was not available to them.

Discussion Point # 4 – Child Being Given Their Own Advocacy Lawyer

This recommendation was given by Sarah, the only adoptive parent in this study that had to endure a lengthy legal process regarding her adoptive child, Larissa. This recommendation stems from Sarah's experience with the legal system and her views on how Larissa could have benefitted from her own lawyer who could have advocated directly on her behalf. Naturally, Sarah felt that Larissa's best interests were being represented by herself, Larissa's adoptive father and the legal counsel that they had retained for the process.

However, Sarah also felt strongly about Larissa's right to be represented, as an individual. Sarah felt that Larissa should have been able to speak up, not only about where she should live but the conditions that were put forth about Larissa being able to have contact with her biological family after she turned 12 years of age. These conditions should have been explained quite clearly to Larissa by her own lawyer and it appeared that they never were. As a result, when Larissa turned 12 years old and her family did not come forward, she was caused great pain by this. The acting out, destructive behavior started shortly afterwards and it was downward spiral that Sarah could not control.

This is a powerful recommendation and one that stems from Sarah's experience with adoption. Today, children's rights are reviewed by a Judge or Master before a child protection hearing. Children under the age of 12 are often assessed and their voices are heard by way of this assessment/report by the Judge or Master, the results of the assessment are taken heavily into account during the decision-making process. Children over the age of 12 years have the right to speak their minds and be represented in family court by their own lawyer during a family court proceeding if the judge or Master deems the child has the capacity to effectively do so (Personal Communication, Sheree Walder, LLB, May 11, 2012).

In other words, Sarah's recommendation is already occurring in the family court system today. Children's best interests and the voices of children are being represented to a strong degree during family court proceedings.

Section II – Discussion Points Regarding Cross Cultural Adoption (Native Children to Non-Native Long Term Homes)

Discussion Point # 5 – More Support, Training and Resources to Adoptive/Foster Parents

What has been learned from this study is that Cultural Sensitivity and Cultural Teachings Training would have been helpful to these adoptive parents. To help with providing some context, the terms *cultural experience* and *cultural sensitivity* should be defined. Cultural experiences can be best explained as ‘an accumulation of social experiences that are maintained, accommodated or assimilated therefore culture ought to be viewed as having both stable and ever-changing aspects that may be revised as a consequence of interaction with others’ (Ortega and Coulborn, 2011, p. 29). Cultural sensitivity can be defined as ‘knowing that cultural differences as well as similarities exist, within assigning values (ie. better or worse, right or wrong) to those cultural differences (retrieved May 7, 2012 from www.bigsisters.bc.ca).

Gina Samuels (2009) conducted a study of 25 transracially adopted individuals and concluded with a set of adoption experiences that the participants themselves called, “Being Raised by White People.” Three aspects of this experience are: 1) the centrality yet absence of racial resemblance, 2) navigating discordant parent-child racial experiences, and 3) managing societal perceptions of transracial adoption. Most interestingly, this study found that its participants experienced ‘highly racialized worlds into

adulthood' (p. 80). Perhaps *Cultural Sensitivity and Cultural Teachings* Training would not have addressed all of the above issues that adoptees face, as they are noted in Samuels' study, but I believe it could make a significant impact, especially if this training starts before the prospective adoptive/foster parents receive their adopted/foster child and continues on through all of their child's developmental stages.

While speaking to the adoptive families in this study, it became evident that some of the adoptive parents recognized the importance of integrating their child's Native culture into their lives and felt that the child would have benefitted from it and further, the whole family would have benefitted from it. But often, they had no idea where to start. Ned and Nancy suggested attending pow-wows to Anne but she turned them down. Dan and Charlotte attended cultural events such as Folklarama with Stephen but he seemed uninterested. Bill and Bonnie were not successful with helping to teach Ally about her culture until they linked her up with someone neutral; a Native liaison at school that spent some time with her and taught her different aspects of being Native and what it means to be Native. And this researcher believes that this may be the key.

What would have happened if the adoptive parents had been linked up with some cultural teachings of their own through their agency and been able to make some healthy contacts with people, namely Native people, who could have taught their adoptive children about their culture by spending time with

them individually and/or with the family as a whole? And if this service had been provided to these adoptive families throughout the child's whole life, not just during the elementary school years or the difficult adolescent years?

According to the definition of *cultural experiences* as provided earlier, these social experiences have to be maintained, this writer is assuming, in order to be effectual and adequate.

Further, both advocates and strident critics of transracial adoption stress that these children have a "need" or "right" to a sense of ethnic identity and cultural heritage (Hayes, 1993, p. 303). In today's context of many Native children being placed in non-Native foster homes, it appears to be the placing agency who carries the responsibility of ensuring that this right is addressed. Regarding foster children, a Cultural Plan for that child could be part of their file, just as Education Plans or Family Visit Plans are. It would be beneficial to recognize that the integration of that child's culture should be a daily, weekly, monthly undertaking, not just an occasional outing or event. And acting/substitute "Grandmothers", "Grandfathers", "Uncles" and "Aunties" can be located by the agencies and paired up with a suitable foster child. These surrogate family members may never replace the importance of the foster child's biological family in their minds but they could act as a substitute, helping to maintain spiritual and familial connections for that child.

Today, the information regarding maintaining cultural connections for foster children, especially Native foster children, is general knowledge. It has

become quite obvious that child welfare as a realm has progressed considerably. Agencies are providing cultural training to their foster parents, along with workshops and interactive cultural events for the foster parents and foster children to attend together as a family. But how often are these events occurring? How often is the training for foster parents occurring? Once or twice a year may not be sufficient. Is attendance mandatory or do they have the ability to pass? Agencies could make the attendance mandatory and stress the importance of it right from the onset of the foster parent receiving a Native child in their home. This type of information would help the prospective foster parents decide if they are in fact suitable to fostering a Native child.

Both adoptive mother Sarah and adoptive parents Bill and Bonnie can attest to how different their direct experiences with child welfare agencies today is from the child welfare agencies of yesteryear regarding the contact that they have had because of their grandchildren. In fact, Adoptive Parents Ned and Nancy and Adoptive Mother Shannon are also both quite familiar with child welfare agencies because they are aware of someone who works there or they work there themselves. They are all quite astounded at the difference that three decades can make and also grateful that agencies have found more beneficial and open ways to working with families.

Agencies are also supporting continuous contact for foster children with their biological family to ensure that the child knows their origins;

another important aspect to adoption/long term fostering to be discussed in the following point.

Discussion Point # 6 – Why Do Adoptees Search? Consideration of the Benefits of Open Adoptions and/or Supportive Reunifications

Depp (1982) asserts that when an adoptee's quest for origins is viewed as an attempt to understand him or herself better, then agencies have the opportunity to work together toward better mental health for adoptee, with the significant spinoff effect of better adoptive family relationships (p. 119). In Depp's study, the adoptees that were interviewed indicated that being reunited with their birth parents played an important part of their efforts to establish a better sense of identity and tended to give them a greater appreciation of their adoptive parents.

What was learned in this study is that potential adoptive/foster parents to Native children might want to reflect about being open, responsive and supportive to their adopted/foster child's need to search one day for their biological family members. The families in this study where this openness existed seemed to have fared a bit better, especially on the overall familial adoption dynamic. As Fish and Speirs (1990) note, 'it is important that the adoptive parents have the capacity both for responsive, continuous parenting and for acknowledging the importance to their adoptive children of their other set of parents' (p. 138). Right from the onset of the adoption/placement, this researcher would recommend, based on the findings of this study, that the

adoptive/foster parents speak openly about the child's biological family and acknowledge that the child does in fact have another set of 'roots'. Even if the child never seeks their biological family unit, acknowledgement from the adoptive/foster parents that they would be supportive with this decision seems to be quite important. Not omitting the fact that the parents may struggle emotionally but being open with their feelings and most importantly, relaying the message that they support their adopted/foster child no matter what. This researcher notes that there may be a direct correlation between this type of unconditional support and acceptance from adoptive/foster parents and security for an adopted/foster child, providing them with a balance to their two worlds.

Open adoptions are also being put forth as a discussion point by this writer: if and when possible but as stated earlier, the adoption of Native children is not overly common practice today. As demonstrated in the case of Ned and Nancy, when the adopted child knows that not only can she rely on her adoptive parents to be supportive throughout the reunification process but that they would be open to meeting the biological mother/father, this can be liberating and beneficial to the adoptee. Openness agreements are outlined in *The Adoption Act of Manitoba* (version current since October 2008):

“For the purpose of facilitating communication or maintaining relationships, an openness agreement may be made in writing between an adoptive parent or prospective adoptive parent and any of the following: (a) a birth parent of the child;

- (b) if a child and family services agency has permanent guardianship of the child by court order, a member of the extended birth family of the child who is approved by that agency;*
- (c) any other person who has established a meaningful relationship with the child;*
- (d) a prospective adoptive parent or an adoptive parent of a minor sibling of the child;*
- (e) if the child is, or entitled to be a member of an Indian band as defined in The Indian Act (Canada) a member of that Indian band (Section 33 (1))*

This is the process for many foster children who live in out-of-home care with substitute parents but have regular visitation with their biological families. The discussion point of foster children having regular visits to maintain a connection with their family of origin is also being put forth. If their family is still experiencing difficulties or not living a healthy lifestyle, visits should be monitored carefully with agency workers providing supervision for the visits.

What was learned from this study is that adoptive children and their families benefit more if they know what the adopted child's roots are. This researcher can conclude from this study that when adopted children are not connected with their family of origin, this is seemingly where emotional discord can begin. This fact has been demonstrated through the families in this study and in the literature. In their study, Ivanova and Brown (2011) found that Aboriginal foster parents' responses indicated the importance of placing a value on building and supporting a relationship with the birth family, which

reflects a unique culturally specific strength of maintaining kinship ties (p. 283).

Discussion Point #7 – More Culturally Appropriate Placements for Native Children Waiting to be Adopted or Placed in Long Term Foster Care

There remains a strong need for culturally appropriate placements for Native children. As already stated, the practice of adopting Native children out to non-Native homes is generally obsolete but it does still occur from time to time, under exceptional circumstances. Definitions of foster care versus adoption can be provided for some clarity and because they are two distinct services: foster care is often temporary and adoption is often seen as permanent. Foster parents are contractual personnel who provide child care under agency supervision. Adoptive parents are those who assume full responsibility for children and have parental rights (Proch, 1982).

The responsibility for locating suitable culturally appropriate placements lies primarily with child welfare agencies and within those agencies, with their respective foster care departments. However, there is also an important responsibility amongst the Aboriginal community of any given province to put forth names of people that would be suitable, long term placements and to be encouraging appropriate families to be substitute caregivers for Native foster children. Agencies can play a role in this encouragement through positive public relations messages and active recurring recruitment drives.

Recruitment is a key process for locating these suitable placements and a suitable method of locating foster parents could be a recruitment drive. It could involve all of the members of any given foster care department in any given agency. The drive could be 1-2 days in length and occur in a very public, high traffic location such as university campus or community center. If the foster care department decides to have the recruitment drive at their agency office, they should ensure that it has been well advertised for weeks in advance. There should be refreshments and plenty of take home material for the potential foster parents. The boundaries of fostering and what the agency's expectations are should be made clear from the start. The relationship between the foster parent and the agency should be promoted as collaborative and cooperative. Foster parents deserve the same level of respect of any other parent. But the agency's role is to be clear and the priority should remain, at all times, on the child's needs.

What about having the prospective foster parents fill out a questionnaire? This questionnaire could resemble the one that Southeast Child and Family Services has their prospective social workers fill out: to expunge the prospective foster parents that are not aligned with the agency's beliefs and philosophies. This questionnaire would have pertinent questions that ask the prospective foster parents to discuss their parenting qualities and values on importance issues such as discipline and culture. The priority could be to remain focused on the children, the importance of continuity of care, the

ongoing training that will be expected from the foster parents and the open communication that should exist.

Conclusion

The research question has been asked: *What are the collective experiences of non-Native adoptive parents who adopted Native children during the decades of 1960s, 1970s and 1980s?* It is important that the non-Native adoptive parents' voices are heard, I believe their stories are as significant and profoundly telling as the adoptees'. Contextualizing their experiences within the time frame that the adoptions occurred has been important. It has to be recognized that these adoptive parents feel quite strongly that they are the parents to the Native children that they adopted years ago, regardless of how the adoptions turned out, the struggles that they endured or the fact that their adopted children are grown adults now. They are parents who love their children and have experienced the same spiral of joy and hardship that any other parent does and *family resiliency* can be identified as one of the most important themes that emerged from this study. Further, these adoptive parents are truly unique in their circumstances of adopting Native children and I hope to have explored the depth of their collective, lived experiences ethically and with honesty while having brought some clarity to an obscure and intriguing topic.

Appendices

Appendix I – Recruitment Poster for Study



**UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA**

FACULTY OF SOCIAL WORK/GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

****PARTICIPANTS NEEDED****

Title of Research Project: “Their Stories: The Experiences of Non-Native Adoptive Parents Who Adopted Native Children During the 1960s through 1980s”

I am looking for volunteers to take part in a study regarding Native adoption. As a participant of this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview that will last 1.5-2 hours. The interviews will be confidential and will take place at the William Norrie Center, 485 Selkirk Avenue, Winnipeg, MB.

To qualify for this study, you must be a non-Native adoptive parent who adopted a child (or children) of Aboriginal descent during the 1960s through to the end of the 1980s.

In appreciation of your time, you will receive a small gift.

For more information about this study or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

**Leona Huntinghawk, BSW, RSW
Principal Researcher, MSW Candidate
(Contact Information Removed)**

This study is being done under the supervision of:
Dr. Kathy Jones, Student Advisor
(Contact Information Removed)

Appendix II – Interview Questions

Domain – General Introductory Questions

Please tell me about your family and the children that you adopted.

How did you come to the decision to adopt children?

Domain- The Adoption Process

Please tell me about the adoption process itself. How long did it take?

Did you feel fully prepared to become parents when the decision was made that you would be receiving a child?

Did you receive any information that helped you feel more prepared for adopting a child from another race? Any training or resources that made adopting a Native child a bit easier to understand?

Domain – The Adoption of a Native Child

How did you come to the decision to adopt a Native child?

Did you think that there would be ramifications to this decision?

How did the political atmosphere of the times affect your decision, if at all?

If you thought that the difference in cultures would be an issue, how did you plan (and undertake) to deal with it as your adopted children grew?

Domain – The Aftermath

Please tell me about the relationship that you have with your adopted Native child today. How old are they now?

Appendix III – Informed Consent Form from Participants

Research Project Title:

Their Stories: The Experiences of Non-Native Adoptive Parents Who Adopted Native Children During the 1960s through 1980s

Researcher:

Leona Huntinghawk, BSW, RSW
MSW Candidate, Faculty of Social Work/Graduate Studies
University of Manitoba
(Contact Information Removed)

Student Advisor:

Dr. Kathy Jones
Faculty of Social Work
University of Manitoba
(Contact Information Removed)

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

***Participants must read this consent form and ask any questions that they may have about the study. The decision to participate in this study is reflected in your signature on this consent form.**

Summary of Project:

This qualitative study will examine the experiences of non-Native adoptive parents of Native children, who are now grown adults. The Native children in question were adopted primarily in the decades of the 1960s through to the end of the 1980s - this was an important period as it encompasses major changes in the field of Aboriginal adoption practices. The central focus of this study will be an examination of the experiences of the non-Native adoptive parent(s) because of the unique challenges of cross cultural adoption itself, as well as the fact that the children who were adopted are Native. This is a key factor due to the social and as this researcher would allege, the *emotional* implications of these adoptions. It is of interest to this researcher to find

out how these adoptions fared and how the adoptive families have progressed since the time of the adoptions.

Research Instruments:

The research instrument that will be implemented throughout this study will be recorded interviews. The interviews will take place in a private meeting room at the William Norrie Center (485 Selkirk Avenue) in Winnipeg. This location ensures your privacy and confidentiality as the participant. Only one interview will have to take place, however this researcher is not opposed to a supplementary interview if the need arises and if you agree to it. Please note that another consent form would have to be signed for the supplementary interview and the gift cards of appreciation will only be distributed at the initial signing of the consent form.

The interview process will allow for you to have open discussion/dialogue with the researcher while sharing your experiences as it relates to the topic of study: the adoption of your children. The interview will last approximately 1.5 – 2 hours. The interviews will be recorded and later transcribed for the final paper.

You will be given an option of having a summary of the research findings sent to you by the end of February 2012. You will also be granted an opportunity to review the final draft of the paper by the end of June 2012 and you may make any changes to your contributions if you wish. Please know that receiving a summary of the findings and reviewing the final draft is entirely optional, you are not obligated in any way.

The interviews will be recorded with a recording device that will be shown to you and visible throughout the interview. Journal notes will be taken after each interview, in which you will be assigned a number to identify you with. I will not be placing your real names on the interview notes in order to protect your privacy and maintain confidentiality. Please be assured that the audio tapes and journal notes will be kept in a locked cabinet in the home office of the researcher and the keys will be kept in my possession only. The audio tapes will be listened to by this researcher and a professional transcriber who will prepare the interviews for the final report. The Student Advisor and members of this researcher's Thesis Committee will also be privy to the interviews, as needed. The two members of the Thesis Committee are Corbin Shangreux, Adjunct Professor, University of Manitoba and Dr. Eveline Milliken, Associate Professor, University of Manitoba. The audio tapes and journal notes will be destroyed in December 2012. (This MSW candidate is due to graduate in October 2012).

*Please note that the interviews will be the only means of collecting data in this study. This researcher has no intention of reviewing your private adoption files. By law, your adoption files are closed and sealed and this researcher would not be granted access to them.

Study Subjects:

Adoptive parents, such as yourself, are the only study subjects for this study. It is recognized that you may not be married, or married to the same partner as at the time of the adoption(s). It is only important that you have taken an active role in parenting the adopted children and can speak truthfully from your perspective as an adoptive parent. You will be asked to provide an alias that this writer will use in the final paper in lieu of your real name. This ensures your privacy is protected and confidentiality is maintained.

Deception:

There is no deception that can be identified by this researcher for this research project. You will not be intentionally misled about the purpose of this study, your own performance or any other features of this study. All information will be shared with you before and after the provision of your consent. You retain the right to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to participate, please be assured that your answers to the interview questions will be regarded with the utmost confidentiality and you will not be identified by your real name in the final paper. As stated above, this researcher will ask you to provide an alias or false name for the final report to protect your privacy and maintain confidentiality.

Feedback/Debriefing:

Providing feedback and debriefing with the participants is an important part of the research process. I will meet with you before and after the interview as needed or as requested. I will have open communication about where the research process is at and you can expect a draft copy of the final report by the end of June 2012. I can provide a summary of the results of this study by the end of February 2012. Please fill in the space below if you wish to receive a summary and where/how I can send it to you.

I will make telephone contact, email contact or home visits with you as needed to share information regarding the findings of the study. You will have my contact information and will be encouraged to contact me at any time. You will be treated with the utmost respect and priority throughout the course of this study.

Benefits to being involved:

There is a gap in the literature regarding Native/non-Native adoptions and your participation in this study will be invaluable in addressing that gap. The information gathered may contribute to the changing of policies regarding Native/non-Native adoptions or long term foster care.

Possible risks to you:

The act of disclosing private, family-based information can be difficult at times. As a researcher, I wish to see no harm come to you as a result of participating in this study. Even though I am a trained social worker, I cannot be in the position of counselor at any time during this study as it would be conflict of interest. There is a traditional Native elder connected to this study that can speak to you, if you so desire. This researcher will determine the need for the elder based on your emotional state at the end of the interview. Or simply if you request time with the elder, it will be granted. I will also provide you with a list of appropriate community resources that may be helpful to you. Please know that at any time during the interview if you become upset, you may take a brief break, ask to continue at another time, or stop the interview entirely with no negative consequences to you.

Anonymity and Confidentiality:

Any identifying information will be held in the strictest confidence. This means that only the researcher, Student Advisor and Thesis Committee will have access to the audio tapes and transcripts. All of the information (audio tapes, transcripts of interviews, consent forms, journal notes) will be securely stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home office. The key to the locked cabinet will remain in the possession of the researcher at all times. Quotations or content resulting from the interview will be removed upon your request if you are not comfortable with it being in the transcript or final research report.

Compensation:

As a participant in this study, you will not benefit financially. However, you will be given, as an honorarium for your time, a small gift of appreciation immediately after signing the consent form. The small gift will be a \$50 gift card and will only be handed out after the signing of the initial consent form.

The information gathered during the interviews of this study will be included in a research paper called a thesis that will contribute to the researcher earning a Master of

Social Work degree. The findings of this study may also be used in the future for publication in academic journals. The research report will be accessible to the general public. It may also be used in university classes and other discussions. The information may be used to advocate for improved policy and/or supports for Native adoptees/foster children and their adoptive/foster families. You will NOT be identified by your real name in any of these possible future uses of the information nor will you receive any financial compensation.

Legal obligation regarding abuse:

The interviewer is obligated to report to the appropriate authorities, any incidents of abuse revealed as follows:

- a) Situations disclosed where it is indicated that a child is at risk of being abused.

*Please know that any suspicions of child abuse that are discovered through the course of this study will be reported to Child and Family Services. The exception to this will be the adult children being discussed.

Participants can agree or disagree with any of the following:

I have read and understood the information above or the researcher has read the information to me and I understand
No_____ Yes_____

I give my consent to participate in this project
No_____ Yes_____

I understand that I do not have to answer all the questions
No_____ Yes_____

I have received a copy of this consent form
No_____ Yes_____

I wish to receive a copy of a summary of results of this study as soon as it is available:

Yes_____ No_____

If yes, please provide how you would like to receive the summary of results:

Fax _____ Email _____ Regular Mail to this
address: _____

*Please note that participants who wish to receive a summary of results can expect it by the end of February 2012.

Would you like to review the final draft of the report? (This will be a much longer document than the summary of results): Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please provide contact information of how this writer can send you a copy: (fax, email, regular mail)

*Those interested in receiving a copy of the final report can expect to receive it by the end of June 2012.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions that you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. You will remain fully informed throughout the interview and are encouraged to ask for clarification or new information throughout the process as needed.

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board. Participants who have any concerns or complaints about this project may contact Leona Huntinghawk, Researcher, Dr. Kathy Jones, Student Advisor, or Margaret Bowman, University of Manitoba Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122 or email margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca.

Appendix IV-Available Resources for Participants

Here is a list of available resources if you feel that counseling may benefit you:

Klinic Community Health Center offers free Drop In Counseling at the following sites

Central/Downtown

545 Broadway R3C 0W3

Monday and Wednesday – Noon to 7 pm

Tuesday, Friday and Saturday – Noon to 4 pm

Transcona/River East/Elmwood

845 Regent Avenue West R2C 3A9

(Access Transcona)

Tuesday – Noon to 7 pm

Call 784-4067 or email: dropin@klinik.mb.ca for Drop In information

If you are in crisis, please call the Klinic Crisis Line @ 786-8686

Aurora Counselling Center provides free or low cost counseling – contact: 786-9251

University of Winnipeg

Sparling Hall (2nd floor)

515 Portage Avenue

Winnipeg, MB. R3B 2E9

Aulneau Renewal Center provides counseling services for individuals, couples, children and families

228 Hamel Avenue

Winnipeg, MB.

R2H 2W1

Contact: 987-7090

Riverbend Counselling provides life coaching, counseling, seminars for individuals and couples

18-1110 Henderson Hwy

Winnipeg, MB.

R2G 1L1

Contact: 334-4801

Bergen & Associates Counselling provides individual, couple, family counseling

105-1483 Pembina Hwy
Winnipeg, MB.
Contact: 275-1045

The Family Center provides counseling and community services
401-393 Portage Ave.
Winnipeg, MB.
R3B 3H6
Contact: 947-1401

Women's Health Clinic provides free and low cost counseling for women
419 Graham Ave.
Winnipeg, MB.
R3C 0M3
Contact: 947-1517

Fort Garry Women's Resource Center provides counseling for individuals and families
1150-A Waverley Street
Winnipeg, MB.
R3T 0P4
Contact: 477-1123

References

Absolon, K. & Herbert, E. (1997). *Community action as a practice of freedom: A First Nations perspective*. In B. Wharf and M. Clague (Eds.). *Community organizing: Canadian experiences* (p. 205-225). Toronto: Oxford University Press.

Absolon, K. & Willett, C. (2005). *Putting ourselves forward: Location in Aboriginal research*. In L. Brown and S. Strega (Eds.). *Research as resistance: Critical, indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches* (p. 97-126). Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Adams, M. (2002). *Our son, a stranger: Adoption breakdown and its effects on parents*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Adoption Act, The. (2008). The Province of Manitoba. Retrieved August 16, 2012 from www.gov.mb.ca

Anafara, V. & Mertz, N. (Eds.).(2006). *Theoretical frameworks in qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Bacchetta, S. (2009). Excerpt from *What I want my adopted child to know: An adoptive parents' perspective*. Retrieved August 28, 2009 from www.theadoptiveparent.com

Ben-Ari, A. & Weinberg-Kurnik, G. (2007). *The dialectics between the personal and the interpersonal in the experiences of adoptive single mothers by choice*. *Sex Roles*, Volume 56 (11/12), p. 823-833.

Bennett, M. & Blackstock, C. (2002). *A literature review and annotated bibliography on aspects of aboriginal child welfare in Canada*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada.

Bhargava, V. (2005). *Alternative Parenting: A child development perspective*. Retrieved January 19, 2009 from Catalysts for Social Action website: <http://csa.org.in/articles.html>.

Bein, A. & Allen, K. (1999). *Hand in glove? It fits better than you think*. *Social Work*, Volume 44 (3), p. 274-277.

Bracken, D. (2005). *Qualitative research class lectures*. Faculty of Social Work: University of Manitoba.

Callum, B. (1999). *A question of stigmatization? Socially constructed perceptions of adoption*. An unpublished thesis: University of Manitoba.

Canada. *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. (1996). Retrieved November 2, 2009 from http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/ci2_e.pdf.

Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) (2005). *Code of Ethics*.

Carriere, J. (2007). *Promising practice for maintaining identities in First Nations adoption*. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, Volume 3 (1), p. 46-64.

Corrigan, S. (1991). *Underground policy: An essay on identity and the Aboriginal victims of non-Aboriginal structures*. In J. Sawchuk (Ed.). *Readings in Aboriginal studies: Identities and state structures*. Brandon, Canada: Bearpaw Publishing.

Creswell, J. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Depp, C. (1982). *After reunion: Perceptions of adult adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth parents*. *Child Welfare*, Volume 61 (2), p. 115-119.

Dictionary. (2012). Definition of 'culture'. Retrieved August 14, 2012 from www.dictionary.reference.com.

Dupres, M. (2012). *Disability culture and cultural competency in social work*. *Social Work Education*, Volume 31 (2), p. 168-183.

Fanshel, D. (1972). *Far from the reservation: The transracial adoption of American Indian Children*. NJ: Scarecrow Press.

Farber, M., Timberlake, E., Mudd, H., & L. Cullen. (2003). *Preparing parents for adoption: An agency experience*. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, Volume 20 (3), p. 175-196.

Feeney, J., Passmore, N. & C. Peterson (2007). *Adoption, attachment and relationship concerns: a study of adult adoptees*. *Personal Relationships*, Volume 14 (1), p. 129-147.

Fournier, S. and Crey, E. (1997). *Stolen from our embrace: The abduction of First Nations children and the restoration of Aboriginal communities*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre.

Frideres, J. (1993). *Native people in Canada and contemporary conflicts*. Scarborough-Prentice Hall, Canada.

Gall, M. D., Borg., W. R., & Gall, J. P. (1996). *Educational research: An introduction* (6th ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.

Gerdes, K. & Segal, E. (2011). *Importance of empathy for social work practice: Integrating new science*. *Social Work*, Volume 56 (2), p. 141-148.

Grounded Theory Institute (2009). *What is grounded theory?* Editor: Jillian Rhine. Retrieved April 5, 2009 from: <http://www.groundedtheory.com/what-is-gt.aspx>

Hart, M. (2002) *Seeking Mino-pimatisiwin: An Aboriginal approach to helping*. Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.

Hawley, D. (2000). *Clinical implications of family resilience*. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, Volume 28, p. 101-116.

Hayes, P. (1993). *Transracial adoption: Politics and ideology*. *Child Welfare*, Volume 72 (3). p. 301-310.

Herman, E. (2007). *Adoption studies/adoption science*. Retrieved March 6, 2009 from University of Oregon website: <http://www.uoregon.edu/~adoption/index.html>

Hughes, D. (1999). *Adopting children with attachment problems*. *Child Welfare*, Volume 78 (5) p. 541-560.

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. *Child welfare in Canada 2000*. Retrieved March 2, 2009 from: <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca>

Irvine, K. (2009). *Supporting Aboriginal parents: Teachings for the future*. National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health.

Ivanova, V. & Brown, J. (2011). *Strengths of Aboriginal foster parents*. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, Volume 20, p. 279-285.

Johnson, P. (1983). *Native children and child welfare system*. Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, p. 43-44.

Kellough, G. (1980). *From colonialism to economic imperialism: the experience of the Canadian Indian*. In Harp, J., & Hofley, J., (Eds.). *Structural inequality in Canada*. (1980) p. 343-77. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall.

Kimelman, Justice E. (1985). *No quiet place: Review committee on Indian and Metis adoptions and placements*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: Review Committee on Indian and Metis Adoptions and Placements, Manitoba Community Services.

Kimelman, Edwin (2009) (General Information). Retrieved August 10, 2009 from the Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia website:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edwin_Kimelman.

Kreisher, K. (2002). *Coming home: The lingering effects of the Indian adoption project*. Retrieved November 24, 2008 from the Child Welfare League of America website: <http://www.cwla.org/articles/cv0203indianadopt.htm>.

Leatherman, A. (1957). *Placing the older child in adoption*. *Children*, Volume 4 (May/June), p. 107-112.

Levy-Shiff, R., Bar, O. & Har-Even, D. (1990). *Psychological adjustment of adoptive parents to be*. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. Volume 60 (2). p. 258-267.

Little Bear, L. (2000). *Jagged worldviews colliding*. In M. Battiste (Ed.). *Reclaiming indigenous voice and vision*. p. 77-85. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Lyons, T. (2000). *Stolen nation*. Retrieved February 15, 2009 from West Region Child and Family Services/Southern Manitoba First Nations Repatriation Program website: <http://www.wrcfs.org/repatriation/stolennation.htm>

Maiter, S. (2009). *Race matters: social justice not assimilation or cultural competence*. In Strega, S. & Carriere, J., (Eds.). *Walking this path together: Anti-racist and anti-oppressive child welfare practice*. p. 62-77. Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.

Mawhiney, A.M. (1995). *The First Nations in Canada*. In J. Turner and F. Turner (Eds.). *Canadian Social Welfare*. Scarborough: Allyn and Bacon, p. 213-230.

McCoyd, J. & Shdaimah, C. (2007). *Revisiting the benefits debate: Does qualitative social work research produce salubrious effects?* *Social Work*. Volume 52 (4), p. 340-349.

McCubbin, H. & McCubbin, M. (1988). *Typologies of resilient families: Emerging roles of social class and ethnicity*. *Family Relations*. Volume 37, p. 247-254.

Milner, A. (2001). *The sixties scoop thirty years later: Inroads roundtable*. *Inroads: The Canadian Journal of Opinion*, Volume 10, p. 154-165.

Noy-Sharav, D. (2002). *Good enough adoptive parenting – The adopted child and self-object relations*. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, Volume 30 (1), p. 57-76.

Ortega, R. & Coulborn, K. (2011). *Training child welfare workers from an intersectional cultural humility perspective: A paradigm shift*. *Child Welfare*, Volume 90 (5), p. 27-49.

Padgett, D. (1998). *Does the glove really fit? Qualitative research and clinical social work practice*. *Social Work*, Volume 43 (4), p. 373-381.

Palmer, S. & Cooke, W. (1996). *Understanding and countering racism with first nations children in out-of-home care*. *Child Welfare*, Volume 75 (6), p. 709-725.

Patel, T. (2005). *The usefulness of oral life (hi)story to understand and empower: The case of trans-racial adoption*. *Qualitative Social Work*, Volume 4 (3), p. 327-345. Retrieved January 19, 2009 from University of Manitoba Libraries website: <http://qsw.sagepub.com>

Perry, B. (2004). *Maltreatment and the developing child: How early childhood experience shapes child and culture*. Inaugural Lecture: Margaret McCain Lecture Series, September 23, 2004.

Personal Communication. (2012). Lynda Flett, Director of Human Resources for Southeast Child and Family Services on May 18, 2012.

Personal Communication. (2012). Rhonda Kelly, Director of Services for Southeast Child and Family Services on January 22, 2012.

Personal Communication. (2010). Rose McIvor-Girouard, Policy Analyst and Child Welfare Advisor for West Region Child and Family Services on May 4, 2010.

Personal Communication. (2012). Sheree I. Walder, LLB, Law Partner for Myers Weinberg on May 10, 2012.

Philp, M. (1999). *The battle of native adoption*. Retrieved January 19, 2009 from the Globe and Mail website: <http://www.fact.on.ca/newspaper/gm990223.htm>

Proch, K. (1982). *Differences between foster care and adoption: Perceptions of adopted foster children and adoptive foster parents*. *Child Welfare*, Volume 61 (5), p. 259-268.

- Richard, K. (2004). *A commentary against Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal adoption*. First Peoples Child & Family Review, Volume 1 (1), p. 101-109.
- Samuels, G. (2009). *Being raised by white people: Navigating racial difference among adopted multiracial adults*. Journal of Marriage and Family, Volume 71 (1), p. 80-94.
- Shangreaux, C. (2004). *Staying at home: Examining the implications of least disruptive measures in First Nations child and family services agencies*. First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada: Ottawa.
- Silverman, D. (2001) *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analyzing talk, text and interaction*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc.
- Silverman, P., Campbell, L., Patti, P., & C. Briggs Style. (1988). *Reunions between adoptees and birth parents: The birth parents' experience*. Social Work, November/December 1988, p. 523-528.
- Simon, R. (2000). *In their own voices: Transracial adoptees tell their stories*. Columbia University Press.
- Simon, R. & Hernandez, S. (2008). *Native American transracial adoptees tell their stories*. Maryland: Lexington Books.
- Simon, R. J., & Roorda, R. M. (2007). *In their parents' voices: Reflections on raising transracial adoptees*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sinclair, R. (2004). *Aboriginal social work education in Canada: Decolonizing pedagogy for the seventh generation*. First Peoples Child & Family Review, Volume 1 (1), p. 49-61.
- Sinclair, R. (2007). *Identity lost and found: Lessons from the sixties scoop*. First Peoples Child & Family Review, Volume 3 (1), p. 65-82.
- Smith, L. (2010). *Bonding and attachment: When it goes right*. Retrieved February 2, 2010 from: <http://www.attachment.adoption.com/bonding/what-is-attachment.html>
- Spears, S. (2003). *Strong spirit, fractured identity*. In Anderson, K. & Lawrence, B. (Eds.). *Strong Women Stories*. Sumach Press, p. 81-94.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (2008). *Phenomenology*. Retrieved January 24, 2010 from Stanford University website (Principal Editor: E. Zalta): <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology>

Strega, S. (2006). *Networks and Communities Class Lectures*. Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba.

Streissguth, A. (1997). *Fetal alcohol syndrome: A guide for families and communities*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brooks Publishing Ltd.

Tobias, J. (1991). *Protection, civilization and assimilation: An outline history of Canada's Indian Policy*. In J.R. Miller (Ed.). *Sweet Promises: A reader on Indian-White relations in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 127-144.

Triseliotis, J. (1973). *In search of origins*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Trocme, N. Knoke, D. & C. Blackstock. (2004). *Pathways to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in Canada's child welfare system*. *Social Service Review*, Volume 78, p. 577-599.

Van den Dries, L., F. Juffer, van Ijzendoorn, M. & M. Bakermans-Kranenburg (2008). *Fostering insecurity? A meta-analysis of attachment in adopted children*. *Children and Youth Services Review*, Volume 31, p. 410-421.

Vonk, M. E. (2001). *Cultural competence for transracial adoptive parents*. *Social Work*, Volume 46 (3), p. 246-255.

Vroegh, K. (1997). *Transracial adoptees: Developmental status after 17 years*. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 67(4) p. 568-575.

Warry, W. (1998). *Unfinished dreams: Community healing and the reality of Aboriginal self-government*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.